

# TEN TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR ENGAGEMENT WITH MĀORI



*Te ao Māori has the unique potential to drive the future prosperity of Aotearoa.*

## Organisations and workplaces should always be striving for better engagement with Māori and honouring Te Tiriti.

However, improving engagement with tangata whenua can be a difficult task if you don't know where to start. This guide contains our top ten tips to improve your engagement with Māori, so that you and your workplace can develop better partnerships, strong collaboration, and drive effective change.

### 1. Awareness of Te Tiriti

A key foundation to ground your engagement is an awareness of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its significance to our past, present, and future. Te ao Māori has the unique potential to drive the future prosperity of Aotearoa, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi provides the legislative foundation for this to happen.

If you haven't already, participate in Te Tiriti training and get a cohort around you to learn and reflect with. Think about what our country would look like if Te Tiriti had been consistently honoured in the context of your workplace, your family, and your community. Consider how decision-making about resources, systems, and relationships with Māori would be different.

Understand what Māori have faced and are continuing to face today. Understanding Te Tiriti is about acknowledging what has occurred in the past and appreciating the opportunities we have, personally and within organisations, going forward into the future.

### 2. Understand that Māori are diverse

Māori come from a diverse range of backgrounds and hold many beliefs. Māori have had different levels of exposure to, and experiences of, mātauranga Māori, tikanga, and te reo, and come from a variety of religious backgrounds, educational experiences, family backgrounds and political perspectives. It is crucial to remember that the perspective of one Māori person is not always held by all Māori people, and engagement needs to happen with a range of stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds.



### 3. Relationships are key in te ao Māori

Relationships are vital in te ao Māori and can transcend every barrier and border, including time. The success of projects, initiatives, and leaders often depend on the strength of the relationships behind it.

Keep in mind that some Māori may be more interested in where you come from and who you're connected to before they will want to talk to you about your plan, kaupapa, or project. It is also important to keep in mind that relationships are usually long-term, and once you have established a relationship with Māori stakeholders, it is critical to nurture it. Part of this involves recognising that your short project deadline may only be a tiny part of how Māori think around that particular kaupapa. They may want to share with you what happened far in the past to understand how we got to this current point, and they may also be thinking far into the future to how this will impact future generations.

### 4. Don't presume what Māori need

Stop telling Māori what your plan is for them. Instead, start now to develop multiple relationships, and reach out to them as soon as possible – though remember that engagement may not happen as quickly as you'd like it to, and may not fit into your usual schedule.

When engaging with Māori, get their opinion and response first before drawing conclusions and deciding what happens next. Be upfront with your challenges and invite their suggestions for solutions: don't go in with a predetermined outcome of how you will resolve any challenges.

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### 5. Don't minimise Māori knowledge and expertise

Mātauranga Māori is just as valuable as the knowledge provided by your most trusted commercial, scientific, or strategic advisors – treat it as such. Consultation needs to happen early, and not as an afterthought. Place a premium on the time and contributions of your Māori stakeholders, and think carefully about how you will provide consideration for those contributions.

Koha is a minimal acknowledgement. There can be unintended consequences with cash payments; for some, this can leave them worse off than before. Think about all of this and consult with your stakeholders on what would be the best way to show them that you value their time and expertise.

## Other Resources

***Groundwork*** – Providers in Te Tiriti training workshops for both organisations and individuals.

***Cultureflow*** – Māori language and culture courses.

***Kathie Irwin & Associates*** – Consultancy firm that specialises in education, research, and training rooted in te ao Māori.

***Project Implicit*** – Harvard University's implicit association test.

## 6. Identify historical disablement

Identifying the historical disablement of Māori is connected to the first step of understanding Te Tiriti and what legislative systems and processes have had a disabling effect on Māori voices in decision-making, particularly within your working area.

***Understanding historical disablement will help you build understanding, acknowledgement, appreciation, and empathy.***

When working on a particular project, research how Māori have been historically affected – for example, if your work involves an area of land that was forcibly taken by imposed laws, add that factor into your perspective and your interactions with Māori stakeholders.

## 7. Understand bias

The best thing you can do as a non-Māori is to be an ally to Māori. Whether consciously or not, you may be holding onto assumptions that are influencing your decisions. Self-reviewing and peer-reviewing to identify and reflect on these assumptions is a critical first step to mitigating bias. Implicit Association Tests (IATs) are easily accessible online and can make you aware of any subconscious biases you may have.

Another way to mitigate bias is to actively and continually challenge your own stereotypes and assumptions: read Māori authors and histories of the area you work or live in, and learn and engage with Māori organisations. Remember to see Māori as individuals, and keep in mind that a diversity of perspectives, beliefs, and values are inherent in any group or community. Additionally, think about your own colonisation story and how you may have benefited from the disenfranchisement of Māori; consider what advantages you have been afforded through access to resources and systems that have legitimised the structures we have today.

## 8. Pātai Pai – 3 key questions to ask in your engagement

Pātai Pai are three good questions to ask in your engagement with Māori, connected to the idea of valuing expertise and knowledge.

**No matter the kaupapa of the project, you should be asking your stakeholders:**

- 1) *What does this kaupapa mean to you?*
- 2) *What do you think needs to happen here?*
- 3) *How do you want to be involved?*

If you go into engagement with these questions and listen to the answers, you will gain valuable insights about Māori related to your kaupapa.

For advice on conducting public consultation in general, check out our *Effective Public Consultation* webinar.



Click here to see the video



## 9. Collaborate

Collaboration is particularly pertinent with Crown agencies, but it is a principle that applies to all organisations. True collaboration means working towards a partnership model that acknowledges that Māori are the best people to determine outcomes and solve problems that relate to Māori, and collaboration should be facilitated so that Māori can guide the way. Look at examples of working partnerships to discover strengths, lessons, and what good collaboration can look like.

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## 10. Beware of tokenism

Beware of reducing Māori to one of a number of 'stakeholders' in any given project. A Te Tiriti relationship is not about diversity – it is about a unique partnership in Aotearoa between tangata whenua and tangata tiriti.

In terms of diversity, there is a lot of diversity amongst Māori (tangata whenua) which Māori themselves consider in terms of different perspectives, interests, and decision-making authority.

Diversity amongst tangata tiriti becomes tokenism when you are simply trying to tick a box. Valuing diversity means having different perspectives and involvement at a decision-making level so that things work better.

# Quickfire Questions

## 1 How do I increase the use of te reo in my workplace?

The use of te reo should be normalised, but you should also think carefully about your purpose for using it, your audience, and your sources. It is critical to have a good source – online translators are not always an appropriate nor accurate way for learning and using te reo.

Integrating te reo into the workplace is not a transactional, word-by-word direct translation exercise from one language to another; it comes from a deep history connected to the natural environment and many generations of human activity and endeavour. Additionally, keep in mind that there are spiritual unseen elements in te ao Māori that are reflected in te reo Māori.

Organisational resources around te reo should be primarily targeted towards Māori staff as the natural intergenerational transmission of te reo has been lost for many Māori families through colonisation. Find a safe space to practice your reo.

## 2 How do I improve my engagement when I'm afraid of offending people?

Feel the fear and do it anyway, but also hold on to humility – you don't need to know or understand everything. Immerse yourself by attending more hui and events to deepen your understanding of protocols and what is and is not appropriate. Ultimately, honouring the space you are in and the people you are with is more important than the desire to prove you know te reo.

## 3 Relationship building takes time, so how can I effectively engage short-term?

While there often cannot be much done about timeframes, this comes with accepting that you may not be able to gain the results and level of insight you are looking for. Begin to broaden your network now so that you already have strong existing relationships to leverage. Be flexible about how, when, and where you engage with stakeholders – this might happen outside your regular 9 to 5, Monday to Friday work schedule.

## 4 How do I get my team or organisation to change with me?

Begin by learning everything you can – focus on changing yourself first. Ask for opportunities within your organisation to share your learnings with your team and others. Know who you need to influence, and offer to help make change happen.

## 5 How can Tauwiwi be good allies and respond to harmful or negative behaviour without inadvertently giving more visibility to those harmful voices, and without being an unnecessary or unwanted saviour?

Seek support from Māori on how to be an ally, and ask how they would like this support to be given. It never hurts to stand up for what you think is right, but stay close with Māori and other allies so that you don't feel like you're on your own. Keep your relationships and network strong."