

KAUPAPA KĀINGA:

Understanding traction in a project to improve housing outcomes for Māori



> *Brennan Rigby considers notions of traction and how they can be used to ensure better outcomes in Māori housing; outcomes that stick.*

Kaupapa: a grounding or context to raise significant issues

Kāinga: homes, traditional or contemporary, whanau-centred

Kāinga Strategic Action Plan (2018): a plan to improve housing outcomes for Māori in Tāmaki Makaurau

Traction: e kore e piri te uku ki te rino – clay will not bind to iron

Māori make up around 18 percent of Auckland's population and around 50 percent of Māori are under the age of 25. Māori incomes sit well below average, with such statistics both reflecting and contributing to the nose-dive in Māori homeownership.

Auckland's rental stock is characterised as dated and poorly insulated – not conducive in promoting wellbeing – and the legal framework does not support secure tenure with one-year tenancies being commonplace. The housing market and system feature limited exposure or investment in long-term rental as a segment. Auckland's recent history of vigorous market uplift has only proven a case for buying as investment.

“ The legal framework does not support secure tenure with one-year tenancies being commonplace ”

Since 1991, neo-liberalism has reduced Crown investment in state housing, and that market is now characterised by overcrowding and under supply, demonstrated by a waiting list of over 15 percent (over 10,000) of total capacity (around 65,000 homes).

The call for an action plan to improve housing outcomes for Māori in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) emerged at the Auckland Māori Housing Summit (2018), raised by government ministers and confirmed by attendees. No one was interested in long processes or concentrating on *bureaucratic* issues.

*[*Bureaucratic:* decisions made by officials rather than elected representatives/community]

Attendees said the plan should *strategically* identify opportunities and be ready to solicit responses from ministers at the National Māori Housing Conference (November 2018).

*[*Strategic:* identification of long-term, overall aims and how to achieve them]

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The Kāinga Strategic Action Plan puts the Treaty of Waitangi into context in the housing realm, and illustrates ways in which Treaty principles can be applied. In 2019, the Kāinga Plan's implementation is being actively pursued, leveraging a position of traction among Māori, the sector and government.

Meanings of traction

E kore e piri te uku ki te rino – clay will not bind to iron

Let's explore notions of traction; a sense of the project 'being somewhere.'

The colonial-era proverb (see above) from Aotea waka illustrates traction as something fleeting, that comes and goes. The iron represents Māori identity, while the clay represents *Pākehā*, things 'attaching' to Māori through colonisation. It suggests, while wet clay might stick to iron, once dry, it falls away, which is a caution to Māori to maintain their Māori identity when taking on *Pākehā* practices.

“ While wet clay might stick to iron, once dry, it falls away ”

The fleeting nature of traction is familiar to Māori advocates. Many projects promoting Māori outcomes reflect implicitly on underlying Māori identities being compromised under *Pākehā* clay but the projects themselves also face a constant risk of falling away, if not sustained.

Between community and government, it is often possible to create something new out of a high-priority issue – a project (wet clay) thrown onto iron (the public sector/public realm). But the challenge is maintaining traction, protecting the clay from drying and slipping away, and the project becoming obsolete.



Hon Phil Twyford, former Minister of Housing and Urban Development, addresses the Auckland Māori Housing Summit including supporting the launch of the Kāinga Strategic Action Plan (May 2019)

Building traction between community and public sector

The Kāinga Plan currently has traction, creating a sense of potential to create change and shape future outcomes, partly because success helps us see the future more clearly.

But what does the Kāinga Plan's traction* look and feel like?

**[Traction (ii): strong contact with the ground so you can move or friction against something so it moves. The opposite 'to slip']*

In developing a project on a political issue, development must operate in two spheres – community and political. Operating in these two spheres means having traction and, where there is traction, there are constant opportunities – ever-present risks – of slipping; slipping out of view, beyond the community mandate and slipping up on a political risk.

The tension between traction and slipping can drive performance – so traction has become shorthand for success. But traction needs definition beyond simply 'landing somewhere useful'.

Characteristics of the current traction of the Kāinga Plan include:

- Māori being strongly engaged;
- The Plan meaningfully filling an identified gap;
- The project creating a new cross-sector community of interest in an innovative way;
- Project leaders remaining strongly involved;
- Community groups endorsing the Plan;
- Government agencies engaging with, referring to, the Plan;
- The project creating a robust relationship between the organisation and ministers .

Traction in the Kāinga project has primarily evolved through direct communications and relationships, protecting the project from message breakdown and silence.

It is worth noting that this project has not used media coverage widely. Media coverage can feel rewarding in growing an audience or promoting an idea but that is often the opposite of communicating directly with a project's real community of interest, the overall progression of a project or reaching decision-makers.

Common media characteristics (24 hour turn-around, controversialising, issue specificity, ideas of 'newsworthiness') have not been seen as critical in progressing project management or influencing others. Coverage may, in fact, create political risk, especially if precise control of messaging is relinquished.

The opposite of traction is 'to slip', and nothing is easier than for an advocacy project with apparent traction to slip off the radar. Two key principles used to build and maintain traction in the Kāinga project are:

(1) The inter-relationship between community and public sector

The Kāinga Plan has traction at the community and public sector level. These are strongly inter-related and deliberately leveraged through project management and communications.

This traction is demonstrated by:

- (a) The astute sense of politics Māori have, recognising the need to influence decision-makers. Building a position from which to invite ministers (for example) or provide feedback from politicians generates and regenerates community voice and mandate;



Board member Tony Kake (podium) facilitates Q+A session with Hon. Phil Twyford, former Minister of Housing and Urban Development, responding; Hon Nanaia Mahuta, Associate Minister, and Rau Hoskins, Chair Te Matapihi he Tirohanga ki te Iwi Trust, looking on. Auckland Māori Housing Summit 2019 (May 2019).

- (b) Politicians and officials comprehending a special meaning in community-generated projects, and the weight of community voice shifting the dial on engagement.

The Board was both a liaison and facilitator in this project, leveraging off (a) and (b) above. But both spheres were actively nurtured and continually reminded of the other. Put another way, buy-in from one can be used to ratchet up the other.

“ Communities want to hear what the political sphere has to say, and the political sphere wants certainty that a project remains live in the community ”

This is not disingenuous, however. Communities want to hear what the political sphere has to say, and the political sphere wants certainty that a project remains live in the community. In between, there is traction where words and acts stick to iron.

(2) Mauri – project life-force

The two spheres above neither exist in a vacuum nor survive without sustenance. This is reinforced by the proverb: *If the clay dries, it simply slips away.* Or, alternatively, if the clay is tendered, the connection can be sustained.

Mauri is a characteristic and principle of te Āo Māori, expressing the unique life-force of living things. In project work, it enables exploration of what sustains a project as a unique independent entity.

“ *Mauri* is a characteristic and principle of te Āo Māori, expressing the unique life-force of living things ”

Community voice is a part of the *mauri* of community-generated projects, which are in turn sustained by the integrity with which that voice is reflected through communications and documentation. Similarly, the *mauri* of a project generated from community engagement is sustained by that engagement, bearing fruit through accurate reflection of views or in changed outcomes. *Mauri* is compromised by a failure to sustain the voice or match engagement to action.

The *mauri* principle helps prioritise the need to sustain fleeting public sector interest, enlivening engagement practices that, at their worst, are circular or self-serving. In the Kāinga Plan, consistent messaging, respect for the boundaries of officials, and deliberate shared language around content and expectations, has created a shared *kaupapa*. It created responsibility on behalf of community and ministers to protect the *mauri* and respect the inter-relationship between community and public sector interests.

Creating change – Summit 2018 goals

The Kāinga Plan proposes multi-faceted change. It establishes a language for specific change-making, and the actions remain live, regardless of government endorsement. It was created by the community first and foremost, and now we need to make it stick.

“ The Kāinga Plan proposes multi-faceted change ”

The Plan’s foregrounding of the Treaty of Waitangi and its principles lay a foundation for debating government decisions and direction on the basis of lean but strong legal standards accepted by New Zealand courts. The Plan’s existence as a product of community voice (part of its traction) is itself a change in the strategic landscape and an example of change generated through a Māori voice.

Finally, the Auckland Māori Housing Summit – as a *kaupapa* – now exists, and this is change. It brings Māori face-to-face with ministers on the *kaupapa* of *kāinga* in Tāmaki Makaurau, not Wellington, providing a context for *kōrero* (to have discussion rather than speak) and sustaining the *mauri* – tethering clay to iron.

Note: *this paper is not the policy of the Independent Māori Board.*

- For more information on the Kāinga Strategic Action plan visit: www.imsb.maori.nz

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Heeni Hoterene, Rueben Taipari and whānau outside their *whare uku*, Ahipara, 2018



Mad Ave Street pōwhiri (Home Fires 2019)