

KAI ORA FUND

The Kai Ora Fund is a small community grants process to support innovative projects that address food security, increase community resilience and encourage employment and economic development in Te Tai Tokerau.

The fund enables communities to have an accessible, affordable and safe food supply for current and future generations, and to be resilient to future disruption or unavailability of food due to various risk factors including droughts, fuel shortages and economic instability.

The Kai Ora Fund established in 2015 is a partnership between Mahitahi Hauora, The Far North District Council, Healthy Families Far North, Te Puni Kōkiri, Kaipara District Council, The Ministry of Social Development, Department of Internal Affairs, Whangārei District Council and Kāinga Ora - Homes and Communities.

“He whenua taurikura,
he whānau houkura
Abundant whenua,
prosperous whānau”

Projects funded through the Kai Ora Fund should encourage one or more of our vision statements:

- **Oranga** – Increased availability, promotion, or utilisation of local healthy food to increase health and wellbeing
- **Rangatiratanga** – Increased self-sufficiency and community resilience
- **Kaitiakitanga and Mātauranga** – The sharing of food and gardening knowledge, including customary techniques
- **Whanaungatanga** – Community cooperation and connection and benefits for the wider community
- **Kaitiakitanga** – Environmental sustainability and stewardship
- **Economic Development** – Increased regional economic development and local employment opportunities

OVERVIEW

In 2024, the Kai Ora fund received 62 applications, seeking just over \$270,000 in funding support.



In 2024, a total of \$132,500 to 30 applicants was granted. Applicants received up to \$5000 per project.

14 Far North
14 Whangārei
2 Kaipara

5 Whenua Māori and Marae
15 Community and Māra kai
5 Education and capacity building
3 Business and Social Enterprise
2 Other

IMPACT

Increased access to kai

“There has grown a passion for working together as a community to develop resilience, food security and connection.”
- Onerahi Manaia

Increased understanding and practicing mātauranga Māori

“Reclaiming and practicing ancestral knowledge reminds us today of the genius of our tupuna. That is who we are.”
- Nga Kaitiaki o te Ahi Trust

Increased knowledge around living sustainably

“Through these wānanga we have learnt how to work with clay soils, propagate plants, raise seedlings, regional plant varieties, food forests, permaculture, food storage and much more. These wānanga have provided such inspiration as we continue our journey of giving and living lightly on the earth.”
- Letter of support for ōNuku Aotearoa (Hokianga)

Increased collaboration and community passion

“It is also reassuring to hear whānau united on areas we as Māori needed to think about as kaitiaki. The pūtea has been a great assistance and motivation in actioning these aspirations.”
- Taemaro Marae Committee

TYPES OF PROJECTS KAI ORA CAN FUND



Supporting Mana Motuhake



Education, wānanga, community workshops



Seed saving and food preservation



Māra kai, community gardens, public kai



Increase self-sufficiency and access to food

PARTNERS



INSIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In 2024, the Kai Ora partners decided to take a deeper dive into the Kai Ora Fund and learn more about the way it works and the impact it has for our communities. We wanted to better understand the wider opportunities of the fund, what's working well and what's not working so well and to learn more about what it takes to create a well-connected system of kai resiliency for Te Tai Tokerau.

To help us learn this, we interviewed recent applicants of the 2024 Kai Ora Fund, including those who were both successful and unsuccessful in receiving funds. We also hosted two workshops with successful applicants where we focused on learning more about people's strengths and challenges and what they would like more support around.

Partner organisations also participated in a workshop to learn how they might improve the reviewing and application process and to understand what their future aspirations are for the fund.

Six high level insights were identified. These will help us inform our strategic decision making not only for the Kai Ora Fund and can also be used by others across the wider food system.

The Kai Ora Fund is a small and humble grants process, by shifting resources it functions as one part of a solution towards a thriving localised food system. We acknowledge that the Kai Ora Fund is just one player inside of that food system and that it will require a whole of community approach to build a strong, secure and resilient food system in Te Tai Tokerau.

These insights and opportunities can help to provide some way to navigate the complexities for us all. Which one of these insights could be applicable to your group? As a council, not-for-profit group, business or as a member of our community? What role can we all play to create a stronger food network and increase food security in our local places and spaces?

1. Keeping it simple, small and flexible

We heard that there are three key attributes to the Kai Ora Fund that the community value – the simplicity of the application process, the flexibility of the fund, and the size of the funds. Supporting grass roots initiatives allows small ideas to hit the ground running. The Kai Ora Fund enables ideas and initiatives to come to life that wouldn't get funding from larger organisations such as Foundation North.

“Our fund is unique in the way that we support smaller projects to get off the ground.”

The fund operates within a high trust environment. It allows projects the flexibility to pivot their funding allocation if needed, while maintaining ownership of their initiatives.

“We acknowledge that community have the answers, and the Kai Ora Fund supports them to do the things they do best.”

We heard really clearly that the application process is straightforward and easy to use, minimising unnecessary bureaucracy and ensuring accessibility for all applicants. However, we also learnt that there are some pockets of the north that are not being reached – with no applications coming from Te Hiku.

Opportunities

How might we cater learning opportunities and workshops based on need of each district?

How might we better reach people across the North?

4. Networking support is equally as valuable as financial support

We heard that there is a strong desire for people to connect, share knowledge and resources. The Kai Ora workshops in particular provide a space for networking and connection. Through the networking events, applicants shared similar challenges and goals.

“It feels like you're part of a bigger community and to make connections through the workshop is invaluable.”

While the networking events are useful in the moment, it highlights the need to find ways for these connections to extend beyond the events. This might be to support collective ideas amongst the group, tackle entrenched problems or just for people to continue to share. People also pointed out that these should be led by the community.

“We would like a platform to have us all connect and share.”

Opportunities

How might we support solutions that meet a collective need come to life?

How might we be more responsive to our community and their needs, and support locally led needs and solutions?

How might we create a kai collective to connect wider kai initiatives with Kai Ora recipients?

How might we find the natural leaders in the community and support them?

2. Beyond māra kai

The fund was originally designed to fund projects that tackle and improve food security. However, we are now seeing a heavy focus on māra kai and gardening, with 100% of 2023 and 2024 applicants being gardening related.

“Putting all your eggs in one basket, it doesn't work. It wasn't meant to be just around māra kai.”

While the information on the Kai Ora website describes the vision of the fund to extend beyond the māra, the imagery and content do lean heavily towards gardening. There is an opportunity to be more intentional about solutions outside of the garden bed.

For example, many people expressed a desire for more knowledge and support in areas of mātauranga Māori – especially - maramataka. This was not just in relation to gardening practices, but in aspects of the food system – techniques around foraging and harvesting, ideas around how we eat and when and wider knowledge gained through mātauranga.

Opportunities

How might we ensure funding reaches projects across the spectrum of our food system?

How might we ensure that all kai projects can see themselves in the Kai Ora Fund?

How might we reach out to community members to share the intent of the fund?

5. More to grow in a cross-agency approach

There are nine different partner organisations that participate in the Kai Ora review process. This means that each of those organisations hear first-hand what is happening on the ground.

This offers a unique platform for those partner organisations to learn more about their communities, identify ways that it connects to their own organisational outcomes and find ways to collaborate across shared community needs.

“We hear so many cool ideas and community aspiration. I wonder if we can find ways to share, connect or support even those that weren't successful in their funding.”

However, we learnt that this doesn't always occur naturally and that it often sits outside the scope of the partner representatives. There is a unique opportunity to harness the collective power and strength of the partner rōpū to drive the strategic learnings and enable meaningful change at scale.

Opportunities

How might we better harness the collective power of the Kai Ora partner rōpū?

How might we connect in with others to enable meaningful change at scale?

How might our partners meaningfully share back to their own organisations?

3. The infrastructure that sits behind an initiative makes a big difference.

Initiatives that sit within a strong organisation or that have good infrastructure are often more successful. This often means that people who are coordinating projects are already supported with wages, and the funds can go directly to the project. Having a good team of support, volunteers and collaboration can be people's biggest strengths. Marae also provide excellent infrastructure for projects – particularly when the haukainga are involved in the design and delivery of projects.

“We're really lucky that marae backs the kaupapa. This is being done in partnership with iwi and hapū.”

However, when projects don't have support or have volunteer struggles, they can experience burn-out and have challenges completing the projects.

The wider infrastructure also plays a role – we heard that many applicants have a desire to work with local councils to utilise parcels of council land. However, the process to gain approval and support is particularly challenging and is usually only successful when accessing personal relationships.

Opportunities

How might we foster the places that provide key infrastructure for kai initiatives?

How might we leverage the resources and energy of community groups and public infrastructure to enable access to healthy kai for communities?

6. A growing need, needs a growing fund

In 2024, the number of Kai Ora fund applicants increased by 51% from the year before. However, this meant that only half of those that applied could be funded. Many great applications missed out only because of the limited funding available. This highlights a growing need and desire for people to increase access to healthy kai for their communities.

There is also a growing number of applicants who have previously received Kai Ora funding, with one third of all applicants having received funding in 2023. Those applicants are often moving into the next phase of their initiative and growing or scaling their impact.

Whilst we heard that the \$5000 can make a big impact for small projects, we are also learning that this size fund is also enabling incremental growth and scale. However, there isn't yet a mechanism to identify those projects that could initiate a step-change in their growth or a mechanism to support those groups to access larger funds.

Opportunities

How might we support projects beyond the Kai Ora Fund who are showing sustainable growth?

How might we source more funding to match the increase of applications per year?

How might we connect/educate around next steps and other funding pathways beyond the Kai Ora Fund?