



Rātā  
Foundation



# PARTICIPATE FUNDING AREA REVIEW

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**EMPOWERED TO THRIVE**

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Judy Oakden, Kellie Spee and Alicia Crocket

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Ngā mihi mahana ki a koutou.

Wendy Boyce

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# About this document

This document combines two streams of research undertaken by two research teams. One stream shares the findings of a literature review and data review; the other stream shares findings from a small qualitative study with some Rātā Foundation Participate grantees.

The report has the following sections:

- Executive Summary – covers both streams of work
- Introduction – shares the background to the Participate Funding Area (Participate) and this review
- Part A: Literature review and data review – shares findings from the literature review, as well as a review of current Rātā data to assess how it aligns with the findings of the literature review
- Part B: Voices from the field – describes findings from a qualitative study of six Rātā Participate grantees
- Conclusions and recommendations – based on the findings from both streams of work.



# Executive summary

Rātā Foundation (Rātā) is one of twelve Community Trusts nationwide and the South Island's largest philanthropic funder. Each year, it grants around \$20 million and invests in community organisations throughout Canterbury (Christchurch, Waimakariri, Selwyn and Hurunui districts), Nelson (Nelson and Tasman districts), Marlborough (Marlborough and Kaikōura districts) and the Chatham Islands.

Rātā strives to support those in need, helping to build an equitable and sustainable society. Te Tiriti o Waitangi underpins the work of the Rātā Foundation. Rātā draws on tikanga Māori values of manaakitanga, kotahitanga, kaitiakitanga and whanaungatanga. In line with its goals, Rātā funds five key areas: Learn (Ako), Support (Tautoko), Connect (Tūhono), Participate (Whai wāhi mai) and Sustain (Tautoko).

This review focuses on the Participate | Whai wāhi mai Funding Area, which intends to enhance positive health and wellbeing outcomes through participation in arts, heritage, culture, and active recreation and sport. Through Participate funding, Rātā wants:

***... more people participating in sport, active recreation and cultural activities as a means of enhancing health and wellbeing. Reducing barriers to participation can help people lead fulfilling lives.*** (Rātā website)

The three priority areas for Participate funding are:

- improving wellbeing by removing barriers to participation in active recreation and sports
- improving wellbeing by removing barriers to participation in creative activities, heritage, culture and traditions
- enabling a deeper understanding of tikanga Māori in arts, heritage and traditional tākarō.

This review explores how Rātā Participate funding and support can best enhance positive health and wellbeing outcomes for those experiencing barriers.

The review took a collaborative approach to the two strands of the mahi: the literature and data reviews were undertaken by one team while an independent researcher conducted in-depth interviews with six recipients of recent Participate funding, and sense-making sessions with Rātā staff to share themes.

## How participation contributes to positive health and wellbeing outcomes

The literature highlights that sports, active recreation, arts, culture and heritage are effective and inclusive pathways for supporting positive health and wellbeing outcomes, promoting community connectedness and enhancing lives. Participation in sports, active recreation, arts, culture and



heritage can also help to build positive outcomes in identity and culture at the individual, community and national levels (Creative NZ, 2023; Mullen et al., 2021).

Participation in active recreation and sport, arts, culture and heritage has long been understood to contribute to positive health and wellbeing outcomes (both physical and psychological). In addition, participation, particularly in group activities, contributes to community connectedness by increasing social capital.

The most significant benefits of participation are experienced when activities enable connection to culture and identity. In these instances, purely physical benefits are complemented by a raft of psychological and social benefits that enable a person to flourish – particularly if they come from a societal group that experiences persistent barriers and cumulative disadvantages. For example, sports can facilitate a connection to culture by providing individuals with a safe social place to participate in cultural activities (Mansell et al., 2023). A deeper understanding of context and culture allows for tailored initiatives and approaches that support everybody's access and engagement with sports, active recreation, arts, culture and heritage. Targeted approaches can also protect and promote unique cultural expressions and align with the values of communities.

## **Drivers influencing an equity approach to remove barriers to participation**

Several key drivers currently influence an equity approach to remove barriers to participation resulting from societal, technological, economic and environmental factors.

Changing demographics (ageing population, ethnicity of younger population, biculturalism and multiculturalism) increase the necessity for tailored approaches that meet specific population requirements to ensure that those most in need benefit. There is increasing recognition of the role of culturally grounded sports and physical activity programmes in responding to the needs of Indigenous communities to support positive outcomes. Similarly, there is raised emphasis on sports as a way of enabling health and wellbeing in an ageing society experiencing significant increases in illness caused by physical inactivity and mental health challenges.

Increasing inequities and community disconnection raise the importance of participation in supporting community connectedness. In addition, the rising cost of living and widening economic inequality means that those most in need are more likely to miss out on the benefits of participating – contributing to widening health and social inequality. Over the next few years, the sports and creative activities sectors are likely to face a funding shortfall due to increased scrutiny of funding sources and a push for ethically funded activities. Additionally, local and regional councils will likely need more funding for programmes and venues in their areas.

Finally, climate change and extreme weather events are creating challenges for participation in sports and active recreation and pose a risk to preserving local taonga and places of significance.





## Populations that would benefit from an equity focus

The current approach of Rātā to defining need aligns well with the literature about the populations that would most benefit from an equity approach to reduce barriers to participation.

Rātā has defined the populations that are experiencing barriers to access and their need, based on the following:

- low socioeconomic status
- gender or sexual orientation
- living with disability/accessibility/chronic health conditions
- mental health challenges, including people with addiction
- culture or ethnicity
- rural or other isolation
- age – generally those under 25 or over 65
- any other specific vulnerability or disadvantage where there is evidence of need.

## An equity focus can remove barriers

In practice equity can be expressed in many ways. For example, equity in power, equity of design, organisational equity, equity of resourcing, equity of access, equity of delivery, and equity of outcomes and impact.<sup>1</sup>

An equity focus requires responding to the specific needs or barriers that populations face at a system and operational level. At a system level, supporting those most in need to participate in active recreation, sports, arts, culture and heritage requires multifaceted approaches, deeply informed by community context and culturally grounded. The literature outlines the need to address structural determinants and change to support communities in culturally appropriate and safe ways (Graham & Masters-Awatere, 2020). Partnering with groups from the target population, or with those who have existing relationships with them, in a way that allows them to lead and design approaches, is critical for breaking down the systemic and structural barriers to participation.

Responding to the specific barriers that different groups experience at a more operational level will also encourage participation. Reducing barriers to participation is not just about targeting specific population groups to enable participation in generic and mainstream programmes. Rather, the most value is gained by creating opportunities for the highest need groups to participate in strengths-based activities, affirm their identity and experiences, and create connections to a community where they can belong and thrive. For example, addressing cost, location, timing and

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<sup>1</sup> King, J. (2024, October 13). The 5Es: Equity. Evaluation and Value for Investment <https://juliankingnz.substack.com/p/the-5es-equity>



transport barriers, and encouraging group activities are all vital to supporting participation and thus positive health and wellbeing outcomes.

## **Alignment between Rātā funding practices and the literature about barriers to participation**

In general, there is a clear alignment of Rātā priorities and current funding with practices identified in the literature that support targeting those who are or may be experiencing barriers to access, or who are in need. Data analysis shows Rātā is performing well in funding organisations to remove barriers and support those in need to participate. Since the introduction of the equity focus, Participate funding has had a more intense focus on removing barriers for those who experience them and supporting inclusion. Specific examples are:

- more community outreach to allow opportunities in areas of higher deprivation, particularly for children and young people
- greater focus on activities for young people, Māori and Pacific peoples
- supporting inclusion and accessibility for people living with disabilities

Interviews identified that grantees designed thoughtful programmes to overcome barriers to participation in arts, culture, heritage and recreation, and increase health and wellbeing outcomes. They did this by:

- tailoring their programmes to meet the needs of their people, addressing many barriers to participation
- adopting a broad definition of recreation and physical activity, which includes traditional activities such as kapa haka, performance and dance
- increasing their understanding of te ao Māori and building respectful relationships with tangata whenua
- identifying gaps and creating innovative programmes to fill these gaps
- being strategic about who they work with, and taking time with collaborations to increase outcomes
- using reflective practices to make changes to the way their programmes are delivered.

## **Recommendations**

In general, our conclusions are that Rātā is doing a good job through the Participate Funding Area to support positive health and wellbeing outcomes by focusing participation initiatives on population groups that are experiencing barriers or are in need. The following recommendations reflect the key findings from our review to be mindful of in the coming four years. Some of these are practices for Rātā to continue, whereas others are aspects to consider.





## Recommendations for practices to continue

- Continue to fund a range of activities from sports, active recreation, creative activities, culture, heritage and traditions.
- Continue to fund premised on reducing barriers to participation and for population groups more likely to be experiencing need.
- Continue to review funding criteria and assessment practice to create deeper change through the equity focus. For example, continue being more intentional with practice around design and cultural responsiveness.
- Continue to enable a greater understanding of the power of sports, active recreation, creative activities, culture and traditions by reviewing them together to share learnings and advocate for the importance of all these practices for wellbeing.
- Continue funding programmes and organisations that tailor their approaches to promote participation in ways that meet the specific needs and contexts of those they are seeking to serve.
- Continue to focus funding on programmes that work holistically to influence a range of positive health and wellbeing outcomes for those who need it most.
- Continue to support group programmes that enable bonding and bridging within and between communities.

## Recommendations for practices to consider

- Consider partnering with groups from the target population, or with those who have existing relationships with them, in a way that allows them to lead and design approaches,
- Consider opportunities to fund in emerging areas such as digital technology and esports, to help enable positive benefits for those involved.
- Consider keeping a watching brief on changes to broader community context that may influence who experiences need and the barriers they face.



# Introduction

## Background

Rātā is one of 12 Community Trusts nationwide and the South Island's largest philanthropic funder. Each year, it grants around \$20 million and invests in community organisations throughout Canterbury (Christchurch, Waimakariri, Selwyn and Hurunui districts), Nelson (Nelson and Tasman districts), Marlborough (Marlborough and Kaikōura districts), and the Chatham Islands.

Rātā strives to support those in need, helping to build an equitable and sustainable society. Te Tiriti o Waitangi underpins the work of Rātā, and they draw on tikanga Māori values of manaakitanga, kotahitanga, kaitiakitanga and whanaungatanga.

To strengthen its funding focus towards building an equitable and sustainable society, Rātā funding supports removing barriers to access or supporting people in need based on the following:

- low socioeconomic status
- gender or sexual orientation
- disability/accessibility/chronic health conditions
- mental health challenges, including people with addiction
- culture or ethnicity
- rural or other isolation
- age – generally those under 25 or over 65
- any other specific vulnerability or disadvantage where there is evidence of need.

In line with its goals, Rātā funds five key areas: Learn (Ako), Support (Tautoko), Connect (Tūhono), Participate (Whai wāhi mai), and Sustain (Tautoko). This review focuses on the Participate | Whai wāhi mai funding area.

Participate funding covers arts, heritage and culture, and active recreation and sports. The theory of change for the Participate Funding Area premises that participation enhances health and wellbeing. Through Participate funding, Rātā wants:

***... more people participating in sport, active recreation and cultural activities as a means of enhancing health and wellbeing. Reducing barriers to participation can help people lead fulfilling lives.*** (Rātā website)

“Sport and active recreation” covers participation in anything active. This can include organised sport as well as other activities such as play or tramping (Sport New Zealand, 2023).



Cultural activities include participation in performing arts, music/radio, festivals and commemorations, visual arts, screen (TV and film), gaming, literary arts, and education (reading and archives) (Manatū Taonga, 2023a).

Enabling participation in these activities is one way that Rātā can support the health and wellbeing of people living in its takiwā. Evidence for this is shown through the literature review and includes benefits to physical and mental health, and psychosocial benefits such as community connections and enhanced understanding of self and others.

In 2022, Rātā moved to funding with an equity lens. The Participate Funding Area priorities changed to reflect the move from increased participation more generally to funding organisations that are specifically working with populations that are or may be experiencing barriers to access, and/or supporting people in need.

The three priority areas under the Participate Funding area:

- improving wellbeing by removing barriers to participation in active recreation and sports
- improving wellbeing by removing barriers to participation in creative activities, heritage, culture and traditions
- enabling a deeper understanding of tikanga Māori in arts, heritage and traditional tākarō.

## **The review**

This review is part of the regular cycle of Funding Area reviews undertaken by Rātā, with previous reviews completed in 2016 (arts and heritage) and 2020 (sports and recreation). In contrast, this review combines arts, heritage and culture with active recreation and sports to reflect a broader recognition of the value of participation in both these areas.

This review is timely for two reasons. Firstly, with the changes to the priority areas in 2022, it is important to understand whether the objectives are being met and if any improvements are needed. Secondly, the major changes of the past four years with COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis are likely to have affected participation patterns as well as health and wellbeing outcomes.



## Part A: Literature review and data review

Part A covers the literature review, which drew on a broad range of literature, with initial findings shared with Rātā and the consultant who conducted the qualitative study to make sense of the critical messages together. Part A also covers a review of the Rātā administrative data to identify how it reflects the equity focus of Rātā and provide details about where Rātā invested.

### Methods

#### Literature review design

An external research team engaged in online whakawhanaungatanga hui to plan and design the review with Rātā. These meetings enabled clarification of the review's purpose. The external research team worked collaboratively with Rātā throughout the process, from confirming the research questions to making sense of the key themes.

#### Key review questions

The following key questions guided the literature review:

1. In what ways does participating in active recreation and sports, arts, culture, and heritage contribute to wellbeing, including from a te ao Māori perspective?
2. What are the key national and international drivers that influence and impact on taking an equity approach to remove barriers to participation in active recreation and sports, arts, culture and heritage?
3. Who are the populations experiencing barriers that would most benefit from an equity approach to support greater participation in active recreation and sports, arts, culture and heritage to enhance wellbeing?
4. What support do those with barriers to participation in active recreation, sports, arts, culture and heritage need to achieve an equity approach, thereby enhancing wellbeing?
5. To what extent do the Rātā Foundation's equity approach and current funding priorities align with the evidence about removing barriers to participation in active recreation and sports, arts, culture and heritage for those experiencing inequities?

The review drew on a broad range of data sources, including:

- documentation received from Rātā Foundation
- peer-reviewed journals
- grey literature, such as government papers and reports
- other relevant literature.



## Data review

The researchers reviewed internal administrative data of the current Rātā Participate funding to identify how it reflects the equity focus. The analysis of data in Excel allowed us to identify patterns and provide details about where Rātā invested.

## Analysis and reporting

Collated documentation from Rātā and the literature searches was reviewed and analysed for trends and themes.

The interview and external review teams presented synthesised information in a sense-making session with Rātā to explain the findings and further develop the ideas. Agreed findings formed the basis of the draft summary report, which Rātā reviewed before making final changes.

## Literature review: setting the scene

In early industrial Britain, active recreation, sports and the arts were mainly available to the privileged and their design was not intended to be productive (Veblen, 1918). As a result, some people still perceive active recreation, sports, and the arts as “nice to have”. However, based on the literature described in this report, we found that participation in active recreation and sports, arts, culture and heritage can produce essential outcomes for people in need.

While the information in this literature shares many common views, Aotearoa New Zealand’s population is becoming more diverse. While we all think similarly in some places, cultural nuances exist – which, when understood, help us better serve a range of people, especially those in need.

## The social value of participation

There are many ways to understand the value of participation in sports and creative activities. From a Social Return on Investment (SROI) approach, it is possible to explore the individual and community benefits of being involved, and the monetary value of these benefits to society. Based on several notable SROI studies, the value of participation in sports and arts is clear, and a positive SROI in participation was demonstrated (Davies et al., 2019; Helium Arts Creative Health Hub Programme, 2021; Sport NZ, 2024a).

Sport NZ SROI (Sport NZ, 2024a) identified that every dollar invested in community sport and physical activity (physical and non-physical) in Aotearoa New Zealand, created \$2.12 worth of social impact for individuals and society in 2019. This return is a conservative figure and the actual amount, especially for those currently missing out on opportunities to be active, is likely to be higher. Community sport and physical activity generated a value of \$20.8 billion, with the biggest



proportion resulting from the value of physical health benefits of \$9.02 billion. The third-highest area of value was for subjective wellbeing, providing \$3.32 billion.

While a social return figure wasn't assigned, a previous version of this SROI found that sport and recreation clearly contribute to positive outcomes for Māori when there are opportunities to:

- reinforce and practice tikanga and Māori ways of life
- reclaim and protect mātauranga Māori
- strengthen whakawhanaungatanga (kinship)
- connect to whenua “as Māori”
- experience leadership
- engage in cultural identity (Sport NZ, 2022).

A positive SROI was also identified in England (Davies et al., 2019). In 2017/2018, sport and physical activity generated £71.61bn of value from £21.85bn of inputs. Every £1 invested in sports and physical activity (financial and non-financial) created £3.28 of social impact for individuals and society.

The SROI for creative, culture and heritage typically focused on the ROI for programmes working with people experiencing mental health challenges rather than the general population. Although this review found no creative, cultural and heritage SROI studies for Aotearoa New Zealand, we did find several overseas SROI studies for individual programmes and a systematic review of evidence of the value of participation in arts. All the studies reviewed demonstrated a positive SROI for participation in creative activities. For example, an evidence summary for policy completed by Fancourt et al. (2020) for the UK government, identified that all the SROI studies they reviewed showed positive SROI in terms of suicide prevention, improved wellbeing, return to work, volunteering and enhanced community capacity.

Another review of an arts programme in Ireland for children with chronic illnesses (Helium Arts Creative Health Hub Programme, 2021) identified that every €1 invested generated social value of €1.98.

## Contributions to health and wellbeing

Three key findings emerged from the literature about the benefits of participation:

1. Participation in active recreation and sport, arts, culture and heritage clearly contributes to positive health and wellbeing outcomes (both physical and psychological).
2. Participation, particularly in group activities, contributes to community connectedness by increasing social capital. For example, it can help to build identity and culture at individual, community and national levels.
3. The greatest benefits of participation are realised when activities enable connection to culture and identity. In these instances, purely physical benefits are complemented by a raft of



psychological and social benefits that enable a person to flourish, particularly if they come from a societal group that experiences persistent barriers and cumulative disadvantages.

## Evidence for health and wellbeing outcomes

Individuals and communities realise significant positive health and wellbeing outcomes from participation in active recreation and sports (Davies et al., 2019; Reiner, 2013; Warburton & Bredin, 2017) as well as creative activities, culture and heritage (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; Fancourt et al., 2020; Thornton et al., 2024). Physical outcomes of participation are well established, such as reduced risk of chronic disease (cardiovascular disease, some cancers, Type 2 diabetes), and improvements in general health and existing back injuries. However, more recently, there has been significant interest in psychological and social benefits for individuals (Daykin et al., 2020; Heckel et al., 2024; Sheppard & Broughton, 2020; Tomlinson, 2016).

The positive psychological health and wellbeing outcomes of participation in sport, recreation, arts, culture and heritage are also widely explored and accepted in the literature. Being physically active generates positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes such as reduced dementia, social isolation, anxiety, depression and feelings of stress, and increased memory, subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction (Davies et al., 2019; Griffiths et al., 2023; Heckel et al., 2024; Reiner, 2013; Street & James, 2019).

Leading international health agencies such as the World Health Organisation and the Centres for Disease Control, and the New Zealand Ministry of Health all explicitly link being physically active with physical health benefits. An analysis of current systematic reviews (Warburton & Bredin, 2017) demonstrated a dose-response relationship between physical activity and premature mortality and the primary and secondary prevention of several chronic medical conditions (for example, cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, some cancers, anxiety and depression). Similarly, in the comprehensive SROI study of the value of sports and physical activity in England, Davies et al. (2019) identified key positive outcomes of being physically active as reduced risk of coronary heart disease and stroke, breast and colon cancer, Type 2 diabetes, dementia and clinical depression, as well as improved good health, improved back pain, reduced hip fractures. They also reported one negative outcome – increased sports injuries but this was outweighed by the positive outcomes.

In response to this evidence of the impact on health and wellbeing, the World Health Organisation has a global plan for physical activity (2018), with many countries also having strategies, policies and initiatives in place for increasing physical activity within their populations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For examples see: <https://www.cdc.gov/active-people-healthy-nation/php/about/index.html>



In Aotearoa New Zealand, a scoping for the Sport NZ SROI study (Griffiths et al., 2023) identified strong local evidence linking physical activity and positive physical health outcomes such as a reduction in chronic disease and illness (cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity-related disorders).

Participating in arts and culture provides similar positive psychological outcomes. Multiple comprehensive evidence summaries identify the strength of the research for positive psychological outcomes associated with participation in arts. Firstly, Fancourt (2020) identified strong evidence for engagement in arts with improved educational achievement for children, and increased life satisfaction and better mobility in older adults. They identified promising evidence for participation in arts supporting cognition in older adults.

A systematic review of participation in music and dance activities identified participants experiencing several positive outcomes, including improved cognitive health and reduced social isolation. Social isolation and loneliness were linked to a wide range of conditions, including hypertension, cardiovascular disease, cerebrovascular disease, Alzheimer's disease, depression and insomnia (Leitch et al., 2018). Increased engagement with others also helped challenge participants' assumptions and perspectives of other cultures (Sheppard & Broughton, 2020).

Both international literature (Tomlinson et al., 2016) and a New Zealand study (Savage et al., 2017) highlight that participating in creative activities can help address mental health challenges and foster inclusion, acceptance and safety – significantly improving health and wellbeing outcomes. For example, an *Evaluation of the Ōtautahi Creative Spaces Trust* (Savage et al., 2017) highlighted the “profound” impact on people with mental health issues who were mentored in their creativity.

Similarly, a large cohort analysis of participation trends in young people in England in the Greater Manchester area (Thornton et al., 2024) identified that young people belonging to the rainbow community were more likely to participate in some sports as well as creative activities. These young people scored higher on a mental wellbeing score than the non-active ones in that same community. Similarly, a recent analysis of the *Growing up in New Zealand Study* (Evans et al., 2023) identified that “transgender and non-binary young people reported the highest participation in both music and arts, craft and technology” (p.26).

A comprehensive review in the United Kingdom (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016) noted the “powerful evidence in support” of the contribution of arts and culture to improving health and wellbeing. However, it said more qualitative research was needed to realise the extent of the benefits. The

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<https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/sport-nz-strategic-plan-2024-2028/> <https://www.health.gov.au/topics/physical-activity-and-exercise/what-were-doing-about-physical-activity-and-exercise>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-active-a-strategy-for-the-future-of-sport-and-physical-activity/get-active-a-strategy-for-the-future-of-sport-and-physical-activity>

review also identified that arts contribute to positive psychosocial outcomes such as a stronger sense of identity, including cultural identity and self, empathy for other perspectives, and an increased sense of belonging and pride of place, as did a recent New Zealand study (Oakden & Spee, 2024).

## **Participation, particularly in group activities, contributes to community connectedness by increasing social capital**

Positive health and wellbeing outcomes can arise from individual or group participation. However, engaging in group activities greatly enhances the psychological and social benefits for individuals and, importantly, fosters wider positive outcomes for communities.

Key positive outcomes from participating in group activities for both sport and art are reduced feelings of isolation and increased feelings of connection to the community (Davies et al., 2019; Daykin et al., 2020; Fancourt, 2020; Griffiths, 2023; Sheppard & Broughton, 2020). Furthermore, two of these studies (Davies et al., 2019; Fancourt et al., 2020) concluded that participation could influence a reduction in antisocial and criminal behaviour.

### ***The role of bridging and bonding***

The literature highlights that group activities play a crucial role in building social capital. Bridging and bonding are positive outcomes of group participation in active recreation, sports, the arts, culture and heritage. **Bonding** is strengthened connections with **people from similar groups** and backgrounds. **Bridging** is strengthened connections with **people from different groups** and backgrounds (Sport NZ, 2020).

The role of sport in community and social development in Aotearoa New Zealand has been well studied. Griffiths et al., in their 2023 scoping review, found a well-established link between sports and developing social connections for all age groups. They identified that for Māori there is a “strong impact on social and community development through building social capital and enhancing cultural identity” (p.1).

There is a similar story about participating in arts, culture and heritage. Participating in group activities positively contributes to community connections, particularly for older adults who may be more prone to isolation (Sheppard & Broughton, 2020). Bridging and bonding were also cross-cutting themes in a qualitative systematic review of the role of social capital in participatory arts for wellbeing (Daykin et al., 2020). Bonding occurred in all the reviewed studies through connection and emotional support, and fostering belonging and shared identity. Examples were sharing of information and resources, extending networks of trust and safety, addressing social division and reframing political engagement (p.14).

Participation in heritage activities also generates value and positive outcomes for the community. A 2018 review (Pennington et al.) found mixed evidence overall. However, there was some higher-



quality evidence about the consequences of participation in local heritage on social relationships, sense of belonging, pride of place, ownership and collective empowerment.

The most significant benefits of participation are when activities enable a connection to culture and identity. In these instances, purely physical benefits are complemented by a raft of psychological and social benefits that enable a person to flourish. This is particularly so if they come from a societal group that experiences persistent barriers and cumulative disadvantages.

Sports can facilitate a connection to culture by providing individuals with a safe social place to participate in cultural activities (Mansell et al., 2023). A deeper understanding of context and culture allows for tailored initiatives and approaches that support everybody's access and engagement with sports, active recreation, arts, culture and heritage. Targeted approaches can also protect and promote unique cultural expressions and align with the values of communities.

For many populations, traditional practices and activities play a central role in positive community identity and health (McLachlan et al., 2021). A study involving Indigenous peoples across Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada, United States of America and Australia, found community sport and recreation was a great vehicle to learn about one's culture and other cultures (Mansell et al., 2023). Community sport and recreation also provided opportunities for Indigenous communities to connect, engage and learn in non-threatening environments. When family, community and other Indigenous peoples were involved, cultural bonding and expressions of Indigenous identity developed (Mansell et al., 2023).

From a te ao Māori perspective sports, active recreation, arts, culture and heritage are woven together in Māori cultural infrastructure. Māori arts, culture and heritage are seen as a taonga, "the embodiment and expression of the depth and breadth of mātauranga Māori passed down from generation to generation – he taonga tuku iho nā ngā mātua tīpuna" (Aiko, 2024, p.13). Hence, participating in traditional activities helps to restore hauora and mauri ora, active states of wellbeing. Both these concepts represent potential wellbeing and are holistic in nature (Moewaka-Barners & McCreanor, 2019). They speak to survival, wellness, health and fitness (Heaton, 2018; Pohatu, 2015).

Similarly, an environmental scan by Hanara & Guttenbeil (2018) found that while organised sport constitutes a large component of play, active recreation and sport, for Māori and Pacific peoples active recreation is a fundamental aspect of ancestral and traditional lifestyles. Much time involves practices that produce, procure and protect a te ao Māori ecosystem (Phillips, 2015). Māori activity is often holistic: walking is not walking, without engaging te taiao (the environment), and swimming is not swimming without mahinga kai (gathering food). Activities such as diving for seafood, hunting, cultivation and waka ama, use and maintain the ecosystem, reinforcing the connection between Māori, whenua and ngā atua (the gods). Participation in these activities is a pathway to connect with Māori spiritual beliefs and practices, te taiao, mahi a toi (Māori expressive art forms), take pū whānau (Māori relational values), and whakapapa (intergenerational relationships) (McLachlan et al., 2021).

Integration of tikanga Māori, including manaakitanga, māramatanga, tino rangatiratanga and kotahitanga, help to create culturally safe and meaningful spaces that support positive outcomes for Māori (McLachlan et al., 2021). An example is *Rangatahi Tū Rangatira (R2R)* a national health promotion programme in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through taonga tākaro (traditional Māori sports like kī-o-rahi, horohopu, ti-uru), the programme aims to promote cultural and physical wellbeing for rangatahi and their whānau. Through the programme, rangatahi and their whānau live healthier lifestyles by being physically active, feeling more positive and participating more in education and extra-curricular activities. They also were more connected to their community and te ao Māori. This programme demonstrates the importance of incorporating cultural elements to support improved lifestyle changes for rangatahi and their whānau, and the connection between enhanced cultural identity and good health (Severinsen & Reweti, 2019).

Kapa haka is another excellent example of how participating in active recreation, sports, arts, culture and heritage contributes to positive outcomes in health, culture and social identity (Manatū Taonga, 2014). With the increased competitiveness of kapa haka, health and fitness have become key components of participating. Social benefits include engaging in positive, disciplined, strength-based environments to build self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of unity and belonging (Manatū Taonga, 2014; Evans et al., 2023). The whole whānau engagement supports nurturing and whanaungatanga, and emphasises the critical role whānau play in encouraging and maintaining participation in positive activities (Moon, 2012; Evans et al., 2023).

Kapa haka is also seen as a vehicle for building and strengthening Aotearoa New Zealand's nationhood and a platform for creating meaningful connections and a strong bicultural national identity (Pihama et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2017). It opens pathways for non-Māori to engage with Māori culture in an accessible way, and for the relationship-building that results from sharing that cultural experience (Evans et al., 2023). Indeed, within Aotearoa New Zealand there is increasing integration of Māori culture (including kapa haka) in public and government sectors. At the recent 2024 Paris Olympics, kapa haka supported and enriched our athletes and national identity on a global scale.<sup>3</sup>

The literature describes other te ao Māori-based activities and projects that contribute to positive outcomes for the whole community. For instance, experiences of waka ama have helped paddlers, whānau and wider community participants recognise the holistic health benefits of community connectedness, positive mental health and intergenerational involvement (Palmer et al., 2021).

When turning our attention to arts, culture and heritage, the literature also outlines how creating spaces for Māori ways of being and knowledge (mātauranga) supports positive outcomes in:

- improved health and wellbeing for rangatahi, whānau, hapū and kaumātua
- strengthened connections to cultural identity and pride

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<sup>3</sup> <https://olympic.org.nz/news/new-zealand-showcased-on-the-world-s-greatest-stage-success-on-and-off-the-field-at-paris-2024>



- reclamation of mātauranga
- building the capacity and capability of a new generation of ringatoi (artists)
- celebrating Indigenous brilliance and the depth and breadth of mātauranga (Aiko, 2024; Oakden & Spee, 2023).

For example, the *He Huarahi Tautoko* programme supported cultural connections between kaumatua (elders) and the younger generations. This programme preserved cultural heritage and encouraged physical activity through cultural practices such as walking to significant sites and traditional gardening. Involving kaumatua upheld respect for culture and continuity of knowledge (Oetzel et al., 2023). Evidence also affirms that rangatahi (young people) who connect with their culture through traditional practices report better mental, physical and emotional health (Severinsen & Reweti, 2019; Oakden & Spee, 2023).

While the value of connection to culture and identity for Indigenous populations is particularly relevant in our bicultural and multicultural country, the literature also provides other examples of how participation can create additional value for different groups who experience barriers to access.

## Summary of the evidence

The literature highlights that sports, active recreation, arts, culture and heritage are effective and inclusive pathways for supporting positive health and wellbeing outcomes, promoting community connectedness and enhancing lives.

Indeed, funding those with the greatest need can have a greater reach and impact on communities. This literature review has found that participation in these events and activities can provide important support for those in need to develop a stronger sense of self regarding their culture and identity. Programmes with culture and identity components provide extra and nuanced benefits to participants and often punch well above their weight for what is delivered.

## Drivers influencing an equity approach to remove barriers to participation

When thinking about how to take an equity approach to participation in active recreation and sports, arts, culture and heritage, Rātā should be aware of the limited literature identifying drivers for this.

### Active recreation and sport

There was limited international literature that identified what influences an equity approach to removing barriers to participation. However, in a 2024 future-focused think piece, *Drivers of Change: Navigating future uncertainty in sport and recreation in New Zealand*, Sport NZ (2024b)





outlined 15 drivers of change in the sport and recreation sector to “navigate the road ahead” in an “era of constant flux”. These drivers focus on how international trends have the potential to impact the New Zealand sport and recreation sector, and are summarised below.<sup>4</sup>

### **Social drivers**

- Use of time – organisations need to accommodate participants’ varied schedules, create inclusive participation opportunities and support volunteers.
- Trust and cohesion – community cohesion is enhanced by ensuring programmes are accessible and culturally sensitive.
- Societal values – as societal values evolve, organisations will need to prioritise inclusivity, transparency and environmental responsibility. Organisations must also reflect diversity and cultural identity to retain community trust and support.
- Ageing – the need for physical activity opportunities for healthy ageing will grow. Organisations will need to facilitate age-inclusive practices and multigenerational participation.
- Population health – preventive health measures will boost sports participation, emphasising social connections and mental wellbeing.
- Diversity – with increasing population diversity, it is vital to implement inclusive policies for all gender identities, create accessible spaces and foster community wellbeing, particularly through enhanced engagement with the growing Māori population.

### **Technological drivers**

- Digital leisure – digital technologies will challenge traditional sports, empowering the general population through wearables and improved data.
- Democratisation of information – online access to content will facilitate broader participation but only if digital accessibility exists for all.

## **Creative activities, culture and tradition**

We found few international studies that described using an equity approach to remove barriers to participation in the arts. One such study, by Crossick & Kaszynska (2016), identified the specific needs of populations traditionally locked out of participating in the arts and highlighted the value of supporting more inclusive arts grounded in those specific needs.

An Australian review of the international drivers of arts and culture policy (Trembath & Fielding, 2020) identified four prominent drivers of cultural policy between 1950 and 2020:

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Information drawn from Sport NZ (2024b) *Drivers of Change: Navigating future uncertainty in sport and recreation in New Zealand*. July 2024. Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa: Wellington, New Zealand. (pp.4–64)



- Collective identity – the purpose of arts and culture is to help groups of otherwise disparate individuals to unite around a collective identity that builds on the things they have (or can be argued to have) in common.
- Social improvement – the purpose of arts and culture is to provide spillover benefits in areas of societal concern (like education, health and disaster recovery) to the widest range of people possible.
- Reputation building – the purpose of arts and culture is to help build the reputation of a country, region, organisation or individual, often by associating these entities or individuals with standards of excellence as defined by relevant stakeholders.
- Economic contribution – the purpose of arts and culture is to contribute to the nation's economic prosperity, either directly through income and/or employment generation or indirectly by influencing innovation.<sup>5</sup>

## Drivers most relevant to Rātā Foundation

For Rātā the most pertinent drivers to an equity approach to reduce participation barriers are summarised below.

### *Societal changes*

**Changing demographics (ageing population, ethnicity of younger population, biculturalism and multiculturalism) require tailored approaches to ensure that those in need benefit.**

An ageing population and the high proportion of young people who identify as Māori and Pacific<sup>6</sup> drive the imperative to respond to the needs of these different groups to ensure participation. Recent Aotearoa New Zealand surveys (Creative NZ, 2023; Manatū Taonga, 2023a; Sports NZ, 2023) highlight the variety of reasons different populations engage in sports and creative activities.

In 2022, Manatū Taonga, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, published their long-term insight briefings, identifying key drivers for an impactful and sustainable arts, culture and heritage sector. These included our unique bicultural identity, of which te ao Māori is the heart, and the need for collaboration and partnerships to drive frameworks and approaches that support the removal of barriers and to reach those most in need (Evans et al., 2023; Manatū Taonga, 2022). For instance, an initiative called *Te Kāhui Māori* is being rolled out among Regional Sports Trusts to “enhance

<sup>5</sup> Trembath, J.L., & Fielding, K. (2020) *Behind the scenes: Drivers of arts and cultural policy settings in Australia and beyond*. Produced by A New Approach think tank with lead delivery partner the Australian Academy of the Humanities: Canberra, Australia.

<sup>6</sup> Stats NZ. (2024, May 29). 2023 Census population counts (by ethnic group, age, and Māori descent) and dwelling counts. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/>

cultural competencies and implement Te Tiriti o Waitangi more effectively” (Sports Canterbury, 2024a).

Aotearoa New Zealand’s population is also becoming increasingly multicultural. Recent literature, particularly in the arts sector, highlights the richness and value to society of embracing different cultural expressions of art and creativity. Crossick & Kaszynska (2016) identified that “ethnic groups can be more interested in arts that reflect their culture rather than mainstream of where they live” (p.72).

The literature also identified that participation in creative activities and heritage positively influences self-identity, empathy and respect for diversity. So, in an increasingly diverse community, being able to participate in activities that reflect that diversity is becoming increasingly important (Sport NZ, 2024b).

**Culturally grounded sports and physical activity programmes play an increasingly important role in responding to the needs of Indigenous communities to support positive outcomes.**

Internationally, sports and physical activity programmes have successfully integrated cultural development to respond to the needs of Indigenous communities. In 2012, Hockey Australia began a National Indigenous Programme, which has continued to develop and now includes an annual National NAIDOC week to celebrate and recognise the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Hockey Australia, 2012).<sup>7</sup> Through its Reconciliation Action Plan, the National Rugby League committed to greater promotion and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Similarly, in South Africa, sport was considered an important part of constructing and developing a healthier society post-apartheid, contributing to social cohesion, nation building and human development – helping to celebrate and raise positive outcomes for the Indigenous culture (Moon, 2012). In Canada, without access to traditional environments, practices or language, Indigenous people struggled to connect with their culture. When sport and recreation opportunities facilitated this connection, Indigenous people said they had healthier lifestyles than those who do not engage with their culture (Mansell et al., 2024).

**Increasing inequities and community disconnection mean that participation is even more important in supporting community connectedness.**

The role of participation in group sports and creative activities to support bridging social capital will become more important in communities experiencing inequities and disconnection. As highlighted in our Connect review (Crocket, Spee and McKegg, 2023), while Aotearoa New Zealand society is

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hockey.org.au/info-hub/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/>



less divided than some internationally, there is a trend for increasing division and disconnect in our communities. In addition, Trembath & Fielding, in their review (2020), highlighted that collective identity was a driver of arts policy, both in Australia and internationally, as a way of supporting disparate individuals and communities to unite.

**Participation in sport is becoming increasingly important as a way of enabling health and wellbeing in an ageing society experiencing significant increases in illness caused by physical inactivity and mental health challenges.**

The health system in New Zealand is not coping with the increasing demand caused by an ageing population, the prevalence of non-communicable diseases and increasing rates of mental distress (RNZ, 2024). Participation in sports and creative activities reduces non-communicable diseases and mental distress, and can support healthy ageing. In the future, there will likely be an increased demand for participation to protect against ill health and morbidities (A New Approach, 2019; Fancourt et al., 2020; Griffiths et al., 2023, Sport NZ, 2024b). Populations facing barriers and in most need are disproportionately impacted by health issues. Therefore, adopting an equity approach that reduces and removes barriers will promote positive health and wellbeing outcomes for those who need it most.

***Economic drivers***

**The increasing cost of living and widening economic inequality means that those in the most need are likelier to miss out on the benefits of participating – contributing to even greater health and social inequality**

Typically, participation in sports and creative activities costs money, such as for fees, equipment and transport. The *Active NZ Survey* (Sport NZ, 2023) highlighted that those living in areas of higher deprivation were more likely to identify cost and lack of equipment as barriers to sports participation. Affordability also hinders involvement in creative activities and culture (Creative NZ, 2023; Manatū Taonga, 2023a). In the current fiscal environment, costs are increasing for those who wish to participate and for community groups that provide opportunities to participate, indicating that cost will become more of a barrier in the future.

**The sports and creative activities sectors are likely to face a funding shortfall due to increased scrutiny of funding sources and a push for ethically funded activities. Additionally, local and regional councils will need more funding for programmes and venues in their areas.**

Traditionally, alcohol, gambling and fast-food sponsorship provided key funding streams to enable participation in sports activities. Similarly, Lotteries and other gambling grants were significant funders of the creative sector (Manatū Taonga, 2023b; Sports NZ, 2024b). In recent years, this revenue has decreased, leaving a gap that other sources of revenue have yet to fill. Increasingly, people note the dissonance between activities and health and wellbeing objectives, and the

funding streams supporting them (Sports NZ, 2024b). There is likely to be increased scrutiny of funding streams in the future and an increased impetus to source more ethical funding (Sports NZ, 2024b). Further, local councils will likely need more funding to contribute to activities, creative programmes and the upkeep of community facilities.

Together, these funding shortfalls create a significant challenge for the financial sustainability of activities, creative programmes and facilities. As a result, the philanthropic sector may experience a greater number of applications for larger sums of money to enable groups to cover their costs.

### ***Environmental drivers***

**Climate change and extreme weather events are creating challenges for participation in sports and active recreation, and pose a risk to preserving local taonga and places of significance.**

Climate change and extreme weather events are affecting our ability to participate in active recreation and sports. The 2022 Active NZ participation survey (Sport NZ, 2023a) found that the amount of rain affected levels of participation throughout 2022. Similarly, increasing heat, sun and drought all reduce the safety of being outside for long periods of time (Sport NZ, 2024b). Further, increasing extreme weather means that ground upkeep is more challenging because of both drought and waterlogged conditions.

Climate change also challenges preserving local taonga and places of cultural and heritage significance, particularly for Māori. Rising sea levels are a key issue, but extreme weather events could damage sites of significance, such as occurred in Cyclone Gabriel in 2023. Finding ways to preserve local taonga and places of significance will become more important as weather patterns continue to change and evolve (Manatū Taonga, 2023b).

### ***Technological drivers***

**The rapidly changing technological landscape creates both opportunities and challenges for removing barriers to participation.**

Digital engagement has significantly increased within the New Zealand population, both in terms of being active and engaging with creative activities. The 2022 Active NZ survey (Sport NZ 2023a) identified that 44% of adults use digital technology when they are physically active, up from 28% in 2018.

These shifts are understandable given that online engagement is more flexible and accessible for those who have devices and internet connections, reducing participation barriers. However, those experiencing digital inequity (they cannot use digital technology because of physical access or limited skills) are more likely to experience social inequities (van Dijk, et al., 2020). Also, when



individuals undertake digital participation in fitness programmes or creative arts, the benefits from group participation may not be realised.

The increasing popularity of digital gaming and esports within some population groups may influence how much people prioritise participation in community-led sports and recreation, and creative and cultural activities. Digital gaming and esports are more accessible for many, particularly for those who can't participate in more traditional sports (Sport Canterbury, 2024b). The Active NZ Survey identified that the proportion of young people who find electronic games more exciting than real-life games has increased from 24% in 2021 to 33% in 2022 (Sport NZ, 2023b).

Aotearoa New Zealand is not alone in this online gaming trend among young people. Thornton et al. (2024) also identified the significant role of online gaming. Interestingly, in this research, the wellbeing score of young people who engaged the most in digital gaming was higher than for those who didn't engage in any activity. This finding contrasts with the negative health outcomes that increased screen time is typically associated with. The pros and cons of digital gaming are still emerging – and research being conducted in Christchurch will establish how esports and digital gaming can positively influence young people (Sports Canterbury, 2024b).





## Populations that would benefit from an equity focus to support participation

The current approach of Rātā to defining need aligns well with the literature about the populations that would most benefit from an equity approach to reduce barriers to participation.

Rātā has defined the populations that are experiencing barriers to access and their need based on the following:

- low socioeconomic status
- gender or sexual orientation
- disability/accessibility/chronic health conditions
- mental health challenges, including people with addiction
- culture or ethnicity
- isolation – for example, rural or other isolation
- age – in most cases, this will be the under 25s and those over 65
- any other specific vulnerability or disadvantage where there is evidence of need.

This is similar to specific population groups identified in Aotearoa New Zealand surveys (Creative NZ, 2023; Manatū Taonga, 2023a; Sport NZ, 2023a) as having greater barriers to participation which are:

- Māori
- Pacific peoples
- Asian peoples
- young people under 25
- people older than 65
- people experiencing mental distress
- people with disabilities.

However, people with intersectionality (experiencing several characteristics of need in their identity) can struggle to participate because their varied and compounding barriers might marginalise them in multiple ways.

For example, Māori face similar barriers to other populations to participating in active recreation, sports, arts, culture and heritage. But there are also enduring impacts from colonisation and historical trauma that act as persistent barriers for whānau, hapū, iwi and hāpori Māori, and overrepresentation in negative markers in social and health statistics (Durie, 2009; Rameka, 2018; Gooder, 2018; Jackson, 2016).



Kaumātua are more likely to experience social isolation and loneliness, end-of-life concerns and chronic health conditions. Housing, income and education inequality also impact on kaumātua quality of life (Dawes et al., 2022; Reid et al., 2019). Similarly, rangatahi Māori can also face distinct barriers. Systemic factors like discrimination, lower school retention rates and educational inequities exacerbate poor outcomes including poorer mental health and wellbeing compared to their non-Māori peers (Clark 2020; Deane et al., 2019).

Within Aotearoa New Zealand, living in a rural area is a key barrier to participation. The *Active NZ survey* (Sport NZ, 2023b) identifies lower sports participation rates in young people living in rural areas. Much of the focus on supporting rural communities rests in the health sector (Minister of Health, 2023; Napier, 2023; Neville, 2018). However, our earlier section highlighted the positive impact of participation on health, particularly for older adults. Therefore, reaching out to rural community groups to help create local opportunities for participation that reflect the unique needs of rural New Zealand is likely to support participation for this group. In addition, engaging with local community groups is likely to support community connection through building social capital (Sampson, 2011).

## What an equity focus to removing barriers or supporting those with needs looks like

Reducing barriers to participation is not just about targeting specific population groups to enable participation in generic and mainstream programmes. Rather, the most value is gained by creating opportunities for these groups to participate in strengths-based activities, affirm their identity and experiences, and create connections to a community where they can belong and thrive. Therefore, an equity focus requires responding to the specific needs or barriers that these populations face at a system and operational level. This section shares perspectives from the literature about systemic and operational strategies to support participation.

Recent New Zealand surveys exploring participation in sports and creative activities highlight aspects that encourage different population groups to participate in creative and cultural activities. The examples listed below underscore the importance of tailoring approaches to promote participation in ways that meet the specific needs of the target population.

- Māori are more likely to engage in creative activities to improve wellbeing, learn more about themselves, have fun, be entertained, and do something fun and interesting with family and children (Manatū Taonga, 2023).
- Pacific peoples are more likely to engage in creative activities to learn about other cultures and perspectives, and to discover more about themselves (Manatū Taonga, 2023).
- People with lived experience of disability are more likely than average to engage with the arts to improve their wellbeing, and are less likely than average to report other reasons for engaging in creative activities (Manatū Taonga, 2023).
- Males are more likely to participate in competitive sports than females, who are more likely to engage in informal activity (Sports NZ, 2023b).
- Young Asian people are more likely to want to increase their participation in sports compared with other young people (Sport NZ, 2023b).

A recent article by King (2024) highlighted the many ways that equity can be expressed in practice, such as:

- Equity in power – programme design, delivery, governance, monitoring and evaluation are conducted **with** or **by** (not done **for** or **to**) the communities affected ([Wehipeihana, 2019](#)).
- Equity of design – programme design explicitly identifies needs and inequities, groups intended to benefit, and appropriate ways of including and working with them.
- Organisational equity – the programme walks the talk of equitable employment, the team's composition reflects the community served, staff from all backgrounds and cultures feel safe, valued and supported.



- Equity of resourcing – project appraisal and investment decisions explicitly allocate resources to addressing inequities, and the level of resourcing is sufficient to support appropriate and meaningful work to address inequities.
- Equity of access – interventions are accessible and acceptable to people from key groups intended to benefit (and actually accessed by them), and eligibility criteria are applied so that resources reach those with the highest needs.
- Equity of delivery – the service implements explicit strategies to engage effectively with priority groups, there is a cultural fit between service providers and service users, and data is monitored to understand impacts on reducing inequities (disaggregated by gender, socioeconomic indicators, ethnicity, etc; gathering perspectives of service recipients and their representatives).
- Equity of outcomes and impacts – real improvements are seen in the lives of people who are intended to benefit, reducing inequities between groups.

At a systems level, an equity approach focuses on the centrality of culture and context in improving participation in active recreation, sports, arts, culture and heritage. These activities have the potential to promote physical, social and emotional health as vehicles for holistic health promotion, and cultural and community development (Thorpe et al. 2014).

The *Arts & Equity Toolkit for Community Art Development* (Louis & Burns, 2019) emphasises partnering as a key principle to an equitable approach. Embedding the activity within the community through working and partnering with locals, physically locating the activity in the community, and setting up the activity to be part of community life (rather than an add-on) are all important to increasing engagement.

Sports NZ also highlights a contextually driven strategic approach to increasing activity. Their strategy (2019) has the following three approaches:

- locally led approach – working in partnership with communities, particularly those communities facing barriers
- physical literacy approach – focusing on needs in a holistic way to support motivation, confidence and competence
- insights approach – using contextual information to understand and meet needs.

Similarly, focusing on groups that support inclusion for people living with disabilities is most likely to enable programmes that meet the unique needs of this population group (Leahy, 2024; Sport NZ, 2019). Research in Auckland identified that a key participation challenge for young people living with disabilities was “ableist intrusions” such as being stared at, questioned, assisted and challenged by strangers, which limited their confidence to participate (Calder-Dawe, 2019). Working with groups who understand this challenge is important to encourage participation.

Arts Access Aotearoa (<https://artsaccess.org.nz/>) is an example of a group deeply focused on engaging with community groups that work with people living with disabilities and those with other



significant barriers. Sport New Zealand also enables the inclusion of people living with disabilities by encouraging sports clubs and programmes to do this.

Supporting equity to reach those most in need to participate in active recreation, sports, arts, culture and heritage requires multifaceted approaches, deeply informed by community context and culturally grounded. An equity focus is achieved by partnering with groups from the target population, or with those who have existing relationships with them, in a way that allows them to lead and design approaches

## **Addressing structural determinants for an equity approach**

The literature outlines the need to address structural determinants and structural change to support communities in culturally appropriate and safe ways (Graham & Masters-Awatere, 2020). This approach to cutting through or addressing structural determinants extends to many population groups in need, for example, supporting initiatives led by the disability and rainbow community sectors as well as different ethnic groups.

Partnering with Māori and making space for them to lead and design policy and strategies can also support resource allocation and strengthen relationships, which helps sustain arts, culture and heritage (Aiko, 2024). In 2020, Sport NZ undertook significant work targeting specific groups, and developed plans to reach those experiencing the most need. Their research highlighted the importance of Māori having the autonomy to determine their pathways towards their preferred future by embedding metaphors and whakataukī that represent te ao Māori within a clear articulation of how to promote sport and physical activity participation “as Māori, for Māori” (Lane et al., 2023).

This is in line with the Tino Rangatiratanga model, in which Wehipeihana (2019) outlines an “as and by” approach as Māori providers (including hapū and iwi), rangatahi, whānau and the community have ownership over delivery to meet their needs. This approach also reflects a needs approach with Te Tiriti-based foundations where “Indigenous peoples have control, and Indigenous knowledge and science are the norms” (Wehipeihana, 2019, p.381). For example, creating spaces where Māori determine a kaupapa Māori expression of sport or recreation, art and culture, and what participation looks like for their programmes.

## **Operational response to barriers**

Responding to the specific barriers different groups experience at a more operational level will also encourage participation.

### ***Cost, location and transport barriers***

Reducing typical barriers to participation, such as cost and location, is essential for encouraging participation for those experiencing material hardship. As noted earlier in this report, cost is a



factor that limits participation in sports and creative activities (Manatū Taonga, 2023; Sport NZ, 2023a). Supporting programmes that offer low- or no-cost opportunities creates greater participation. Another example is that Māori, Pacific peoples and Asian New Zealanders are more likely than average to cite several barriers to engaging with arts, culture and heritage, including difficulty finding the time, difficulty getting there, too far away, not at a convenient time and a lack of awareness of opportunities (Manatū Taonga, 2023).

Finding ways to promote opportunities appropriately to target populations, having flexible hours, and enabling easy access through offering local activities or subsidised or free transport are other operational aspects that can support engagement from target populations.

### ***Having people to be active with***

For some, a barrier to sports participation is having people to be active with (Sports NZ, 2023a, Sullivan et al., 2003). Further, patterns of participation already discussed in this report highlight people's desire to participate in creative activities with family or friends (MCH, 2023). The benefits of group participation for building social capital, a sense of belonging and community connection, highlight the additional value that participation has for those experiencing isolation, and the benefits of connecting across groups.

When working with people from different cultures or amplifying Indigenous perspectives on recreation, sports, arts, culture and heritage, it helps to create opportunities for connection, shared understanding and collective growth (Fox & McDermott, 2019). For Māori, applying tikanga (Māori customs and practices) involving whānau and using te reo will enhance participation and help to build a strong sense of place and belonging for all involved (Booth & Cameron, 2019; Morgan & Martin, 2021).

## **Data review: Alignment between Rātā funding practices and the literature about barriers to participation**

In general, there is clear alignment between Rātā priorities, current funding and practices and those identified in the literature that support “targeting of populations who are or may experience barriers to access or supporting people in need”.

### **Sports and active recreation grants**

A qualitative scan of the types of sports and active recreation programmes funded by Rātā highlights a range of different physical activities funded through Participate. Traditional sports such as rugby, cricket, netball, water sports and lawn bowls are funded alongside less-popular activities such as extreme sports (BMX, paragliding), ice hockey, meditation and yoga. The grantees often represent community-based organisations set up to connect and work with groups of people or within a particular geographical area.

Participate funding is used to reduce barriers. Most grants are for operational expenses and salaries. Operational expenses ensure that the grantees continue to deliver the programmes and maintain the premises to enable use. Salaries are tagged towards development and participation roles that are focused on supporting participation and engaging target populations. In addition, Rātā grants subsidise costs of participation to ensure activities remain low or no cost.

Since the introduction of the equity focus, funding has been more effectively tagged to reducing barriers for populations that experience them. Some examples of this effective funding are:

- working in areas of higher deprivation, supporting both outreach into these areas and locally run groups
- making activities easier for young people to access, offering programmes in schools, providing transport, paying fees
- making activities more inclusive and accessible for people living with disabilities
- supporting participation for migrant communities through funding new offerings
- supporting participation of women in sports through facilities (such as changing rooms) as well as new offerings designed for women.

### **Creative activities, heritage, culture and traditions grants**

Various types of creative activities are funded through Participate, including visual arts, performing arts and musical arts. Some of these programmes have a community development focus.

Participate funding in the creative sector also reduces barriers. Operating expenses form a large component of the grant purpose – ensuring that programmes and venues can continue to operate.





Salaries are used to run events or support the development of new and more inclusive offerings. The other common use of Rātā Participate funding is subsidising fees or paying for equipment so participation is low or no cost.

Since the introduction of the equity focus, Participate funding has had a more intense focus on removing barriers for those who experience them and supporting inclusion. Specific examples are:

- more community outreach to allow opportunities in areas of higher deprivation, particularly for children and young people
- greater focus on activities for young people, Māori and Pacific peoples
- supporting inclusion and accessibility for people living with disabilities.

### **Rātā has good alignment to remove barriers**

Data analysis shows Rātā is performing well in funding organisations to remove barriers and support those in need to participate.

## Part B: Voices from Grantees

This section reports on a small qualitative study that assessed the value Participate grantees found in the programme and the difference it made to them. It also describes outcomes observed and the contribution to the community.

The many quotes describe the experiences of Participate grantees whose mahi closely matches the new funding focus. These are the words of people working at the grass roots to achieve health and wellbeing outcomes. Their experiences and practice resonate with the literature review above. These are the voices of practice change.

### Method

Six grantees whose projects closely matched the new Participate funding focus were selected using a purposive sampling method. The criteria used to select these interviewees covered different Rātā regions and a range of types of projects.

Rātā staff introduced the researcher to the grantees through emails and/or phone calls. The researcher shared information about the research process, including the interview schedule and the focus of the questions: Participate grant outcomes, benefits and challenges. Grantee informed consent was obtained at the time of the interview.

The interviews were guided by these questions:

- What is the value or added benefit of the programme to the grantee?
- What difference has the programme made to the grantee, and what are the reasons for this difference (value criteria)?
- How important is the programme to community organisations (dollars, years, timing, innovation, size and stage/context)?
- What have been the outcomes of the programme?
- To what extent can they be attributed to the Participate grant (direct and indirect, specific and general)?
- Has there been a change in the programme since 2022?

The interviews were conducted between 23 July and 9 August 2024 by video or phone, and were recorded and transcribed. At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewee was offered the opportunity to follow up with any additional comments if they wished.

A qualitative analysis then themed the transcripts according to the issues raised at the interviews. These themes reflect the principles of the Participate Funding Area. This analysis was shared with Rātā staff for sense-making and collaborative recommendation development.



## Programme design to encourage participation

Grantees shared their definitions of participation and described how they design their programmes to increase participation among their target groups.

### Defining participation broadly – “not just sport”

Grantees said that being active will look different to different people and communities. And being active will look different through different lenses:

“It is recreation and arts. It’s not one outweighing the other.”

“One of our key learnings is we need to view active recreation outside of western views, like kicking a football around or going for a kayak. Whereas traditional views of recreation could be kaimoana collection or hunting. Having that knowledge and being open to suiting the different ethnicities that we are working with. That breaks down a lot of the barriers.”

“Active recreation can look different to different communities, and nothing is off-the-table. If it gets people physically active, if it’s helping their wellbeing, their overall hauora, that’s a positive. Don’t box active recreation into a little square.”

“Being a support system for our community. It’s important that it’s not based on health. All of our organisations here are based on health and meeting people at the bottom of the cliff. We are working from the aspiration down.”

“For youth to tap into their own knowledge, to have a voice, to find where they stand, we follow several approaches [including] Te Whare Tapa Whā, Mana Taiohi and Ara Taiohi. [This means] youth finding their own way and how adults can support that. We [find ways] to intrigue youth, for them to have a voice for themselves.”

“Not [everyone] understands how active recreation can be a big enhancer.”

“Active recreation is a tool for an active life.”

### Being involved in arts, culture and recreation is motivating for people:

“We have a strong arts programme. The arts are an important part of all our lives. Whether we know it or not. And that’s no different for people living with disabilities. Being creative is fulfilling and meaningful and makes you feel good.”

“Understand that activity is going to be unique to the different groups. [Focusing on] the barriers and cultural desires has been really beneficial for us. Not presuming any one group is the same.”



## Deepening understanding

Grant recipients are working to increase their understanding of te ao Māori, and building intentional and respectful relationships with tangata whenua. Strategies include working with key people and organisations to increase their knowledge, and increasing the diversity of staff and clients they support:

“We are working with [a trainer to] understand the iwi and the tangata whenua we work with, where they whakapapa.”

“Sport only offers the sport itself. With active recreation we can bring in all the values of the young people, all elements of Te Whare Tapa Wha. We can use active recreation as a tool to guide, support and enhance the mana and ihi of rangatahi themselves.”

“Being a Pākehā organisation working with Māori entities has highlighted our lack of knowledge and that we need to accept the unknown. [We] take a learning approach, where the hapori leads its own way and it's done in a mana-enhancing way.”

“We take Pacific teacher-leaders out to run workshops through a Pacific Social Service provider. [It's a] dance workshop [we take] to other Pacific people without disabilities. It breaks down barriers within the community.”

“We are intentionally working with a couple of other organisations so we can look at other ways of [delivering our programmes]. Whether it's just a relationship or linking people into the programme. We work with [a Pacific provider] and their network of people have come along in droves this year.”

## Choosing levels of influence and strategy

Having an outcome-orientation increases the success of those running Participate programmes. Grantees described outcome pathways and articulated who, where, why and how they were delivering their programmes. They were intentional about how they went about their work, seeking a pathway which would have the most lasting impact:

“We work alongside other organisations to build that capability. We ask: ‘Are they listening to the voice of youth?’ ‘Have they considered recreation as a modality for transferring knowledge?’”

## **This community migrant organisation was orienting itself towards youth, using culture, nature and active recreation as tools:**

“So, if a young person said, ‘I want to learn more about my culture, I want to learn more about the environment, I want to have my whānau included.’ Then they could. We'd get the organisation that is working with this [young person] to take them out on the waka, including culture... in an activity that links to their tupuna. We can wrap around



environmental information, pūrākau, stories. We can bring in the whānau. Encouraging organisations [in this way] will create a massive shift.”

**These organisations choose where they have the greatest impact. They are selective and specific about who they seek to influence:**

“We work with people with disability and adults with learning disabilities or intellectual impairment. This is the niche we have created for ourselves.”

“We want our groups to [see us as] a stepping stone. Part of someone’s journey to participation. So, for us, it’s all about having choices and options. Like coming to a disabled persons group. There’s nothing wrong with that, as long as it’s their choice.”

“[We asked ourselves] ‘What level do we want to be playing at? Local, community, regional?’”

**Grantees then design a range of support, depending on the needs of the organisation and the participants they are focused on:**

“We have graduated from a local community focus to a regional focus. We want to focus on the community or regional level. If you think of a tree with branches, the more branches it has to reach out, the better. Meaning if we are working at the regional level, we can have more of an impact. If we work with regional organisations, such as a Māori health provider, we can have more of an impact. We can reach 100–200 rangatahi and we are more likely to be sustainable with a larger organisation than working with a smaller entity. Our support becomes less and less because we are looking for sustainability. We start off by walking closely alongside them building capability and as we move through the project, we start stepping back.”

This grantee is working with a youth education programme at a marae, rather than in an after-school programme:

“The marae [we are] working with has an alternative education programme. We have plugged [our programme] into their education time. As opposed to us saying, ‘Let’s do it in an after-schools programme’.”

Another is developing networks to involve and call-in more recreation facilities:

“We got some amazing information around barriers ... so many of these industries are not set up to be inclusive. If we want a substantial change, it needs to be systemic and societal. So, that’s why we are working on developing networks to call in more activity spaces, so they can be more inclusive.”

“The health and fitness industry has not done a good job for its customers for the past few decades.”



## Tailoring programmes to remove barriers

Grant recipients noted many benefits from tailoring programmes to the people they are working with. They described changes made as they continuously improve their programme.

### Careful programme design leads to success and longevity of Participate programmes:

“We had to spend a lot more time unpacking what it was that we were trying to achieve. That’s something we have realised across-the-board. We are doing something quite different. So, it’s hard to find the right messaging for people to immediately go, ‘Oh, that’s what that is and this is how it benefits me’.”

“Another learning is the transition from Year 1 to Year 3 [of our programme]. In Year 1, we were going big, with big numbers and big groups. But now we’ve realised that if we are really going to get impact, [we need to be] working with the right organisations. That’s the key to having a long-term and sustainable impact.”

“When people participate in any activity, when it’s because it’s something they are interested in, that becomes the focus of their interactions. So, if you are interested in printmaking, for example, or an activity [our venue] is running, and there are disabled people there.”

### Having a long-term, big picture or goal helps overcome barriers:

“Our long-term big picture mission is that all gyms, sports clubs and dance studios – everyone who delivers physical activity – provides a more inclusive space. Then our programme doesn’t need to exist. We want to work ourselves out of a job.”

### The issue of affordability can create “an uneven playing field”. Minimising the costs of participation was a focus for one grant recipient:

“We minimise costs. We charge for baseline materials, but not our time. It means people can come in and have access to technology they may not have had before. And we teach them how to [use] it. For individuals and groups who may have had an idea but may not have had the resources to be able to do it.”

“Another challenge is the cost [to participants of a large kapa haka event]. [It’s a] huge undertaking to fund the resources to support the event.”

### The digital divide – families not being able to afford computers – was a barrier for this grant recipient:

“The biggest thing we deal with is the digital divide. [We have a] wait list of over 200 people who just need devices. Digital Future Aotearoa, which were [also] funded by Rātā, have helped us to bridge that.”



**This grant recipient emphasised the importance of volunteers to the success of their Participate event. They said that their volunteers were the engine room of their kapa haka event and therefore finding ways to help them reduce costs was key:**

“Whānau and family are the engine room of [our] programme delivery.”

**Unfortunately, prejudice and discrimination could be a barrier to participation:**

“We get a lot of support from the community. Although [some members of our community were] challenged, [by] having a lot of young Māori in our region. This is still a challenge within our society. We heard from a few teams that said that was happening. In saying that, it’s a very small part of the population. A lot of teams said [the community support] was wonderful. A lot of people just went ‘kia ora’. They knew there was an event happening in town for young people.”

**Access and transport was mentioned as a barrier by several grantees:**

“The biggest problem with after-school programmes is transport. Not necessarily coming in, but with them going home, getting them home safely, not out on the streets.”

Grant recipients overcame transport barriers in different ways. For example, having their own vehicle suited one grant recipient, while partnering with organisations with their own transport suited another:

“With our funding we try to break down the barriers. When we are working with groups such as a [migrant organisation] or [marae], they have their own transport systems.”

Being on the top floor, with stairs, was a barrier this grantee needed to overcome:

“A barrier we still have is [being] located on the top floor of a building. People don’t want to walk up the stairs. Like, as simple as that.”

**Travel and accommodation can be challenging for those running larger events:**

“Where teams are travelling to and from [our event] and travelling from the North Island into Nelson, across the ferry. Or flying. And having accommodation available. So, we utilised a lot of schools, and a lot of halls for teams. Another challenge was finding practice venues for teams to practice while they are here.”

## Enhancing self-perception and potential

**Cultivating identity and belonging helped many grantees overcome barriers and increased the success of these programmes. Grant recipients identified gaps and created innovative programmes to fill these gaps:**

“[Our people] need to know there is something that is theirs. That they have a connection to and belong to. There’s longevity. Out of belonging comes ownership.”





Being able to vision yourself to be more. To dream. To be curious. Our community seeing themselves on different pathways. A lot of our work is around that. Our people's ... wounds stop a lot of engagement. What's being reflected to them. That narrative needs to be changed for our community."

"In one of our [financial education] classes, recently, a student wasn't participating. We asked him, 'What's up, we're here teaching you this stuff, why aren't you engaged?' He's like, 'What's the point? I'm just gonna end up working a job that doesn't earn any money? What's the point?' So, we go, 'What's the point is that you can change that! You are allowed to think you can be something else.'"

"We deal with a lot of kids that will sit there and say to themselves: 'I'm stupid, so I won't try.' They say to themselves, 'I'm dumb', 'I don't get it'. Nearly all the Pacific kids we have. We've got these switched-on intelligent people coming to us that have been dumbed down by the services they have accessed. We challenge that. We challenge the services."

"We have another programme in Justice residences and that's been a trickier space, because there are a lot of institutional barriers. Whereas, working in the Rainbow community, the [barriers are] social and systemic. But we have a lot of control over providing solutions for that, particularly because we are able to provide an exclusive space. We can set up a space that works well for our community."

"Our focus is all about ... disabled people out living their lives in the community."

## Challenge, learning and being on a journey help overcome barriers

"Most [rangatahi] want to see success. But they don't want it to be an easy ride. They don't want the [social media] story. Because that's not the real story behind it. There's always journeys, there's always challenges. There are always learnings and that's where the goodness lies."

### **Sharing knowledge builds confidence and motivation among participants. Developing deep connections and being intentional helped overcome barriers to participation:**

"We were really clear about what we wanted to do. It was important to us that people were gaining knowledge and getting something they could take away."

"It was important to us that [our participants] were involved in a community and that there were intentional aspects involved in each [gym] session. That they had an opportunity to develop confidence and ... had optional ways to challenge themselves and overcome barriers within the sessions."



### **Collaboration takes time, so this was sometimes a barrier. However, grantees said that collaboration was worth doing so that the sector could be the strongest it could be:**

“It can be a slow process to collaborate with the organisations [we need to work with]. That was key and important for us ... We see that this is the way our sector can be the strongest it can be. Many of the Rainbow organisations can be underfunded and understaffed. So, they need time to connect. It took months and months to get a meeting [with some of the groups].”

“We’ve evolved organically. We develop deep connections and relationships in the community. We are not a franchise.”

### **Right places and spaces**

Being active would also be different for different population groups. Locally designed and delivered programmes can help overcome some of the barriers to participation:

“For us, one of the challenges is finding the right locations to use. We have fairly specific needs as far as what’s in the space, because we are running a gym programme.”

“There are some barriers still in place, as far as location. Also, the session runs at 7.30 in the evening, which is just too late for some people. So, if we can provide a few sessions a week, we can cater for different times and cover more of Ōtautahi. We are considering placing something in Rolleston. There’s a demand for rural services.”

“Every community or region is different. Ōtautahi is different to Northland is different ... to Ashburton. Auckland is different to Te Tau Ihu, to Blenheim.”

“The biggest thing is that with our in-schools programme we provide a platform which is not available to most Pacific students. That means they see themselves in the education system. [They can] be taught by people that look like them and are genuinely interested in their education. The kids feel like attending our programmes. They feel culturally secure, we remind them of home, of their grandparents.”

Creating a space where people can express themselves and connect over shared interests helps overcome barriers to participation. Participation becomes an invitation, rather than a prescribed programme. And art as a medium creates an opportunity for expression and connection:

“[Our mahi] is more around creating a space where people can express themselves. More like demonstrations and the people in the [art space] will see that demonstration. They will either engage with it because they are interested, or they won’t.”

“We have always had an art room where we provide materials and resources and people work on their own thing. Over the last 10 years we’ve taken it to the next level and [now



have] a creative space. Increasing the visibility of disabled people as artists. The [art space] is slowly getting its own identity.”

## Being in nature can help overcome barriers

Being in nature helped participants to learn and enjoy their learning, although nature-based programmes had some challenges:

“All youth [we consulted] said they wanted to be in the environment in some way and learn about it.”

“Weather can be a challenge.”

“[Running youth programmes] there’s always challenges. Nothing is ever smooth sailing.”

## Programme delivery to remove barriers

**Individual support, and a commitment to sharing knowledge and supporting each other were often emphasised by grantees:**

“We meet our community where they are and have a reactive, holistic programme that wraps around with a focus on children and young people.”

“Our staff support [participants in our programme] to create a plan for their life. Helping to draw out of a person what their goals and aspirations are [by asking], ‘What are the barriers, individually, to achieving those goals?’”

“If someone hasn’t turned up for class, I’m on the phone talking to the community home. If we have a new support worker come into class, I’m over there saying, ‘Hey, how are you?’ Getting to know their names.”

## Innovation

**Grant recipients were innovative. They made many incremental changes and were also prepared to make bigger changes, at pace, if the need or opportunity arose.**

“We have an e-cargo bike. It’s like a mobile art studio. We are able to rock up to community events and locations and make art. [The council] ran a series of four place-building projects in different community locations. They help bring workshops that are open to anybody to join in and culminate in pizza and entertainment and recreation activities.”

“Things can morph and change. For example, [a rural beachside community] didn’t know where the safe places were to swim. We are now working with [councils, iwi and swimming



organisations] for a plan to understand where the safe spots are to swim and having water safety [programmes] around that.”

“We do have a thing for delivering youth services and there is a significant need for those services. But we sometimes don’t consider that intergenerational aspect. The power of having people together in one space and knowledge-sharing and the joy-sharing. Now our programme is much more [age diverse].”

**This grant recipient developed an innovative programme that brought together art, technology and culture to create new enterprises:**

“We have a Maker Space. We have 3D printers, laser cutters, access to the internet. Creative software, cameras, lighting equipment, a direct-to-garment printer. We work to get gear, figure out how to use it and then take it to the community, or they come here to make creations.”

“We’ve sat kids down and taught them how to code [write programmes for computers] and you see the spark in them. They are going back to school, and that’s what they are thinking about doing [for a career].”

“[We] help artists say, ‘I can be an artist and have an exhibition.’ That leads to sales and other opportunities. We’ve had that happen.”

**Similarly, this grant recipient seized an opportunity to move to a bigger venue and be part of an art hub:**

“With our community connections, we had the opportunity to move venue. This was like our three-year plan. But it happened in six months. To move [our venue] to [a new] Campus ... that is becoming quite the creative hub. It already has a strong environmental focus. Since we’ve moved in [a community theatre company] has moved in. A screen printer has moved in ... An artist and bone carver has moved in. It’s becoming appealing to creatives.”

**Forging partnerships enabled some grantees to expand the reach of their Participate programmes to include more vulnerable communities:**

“One of our goals, with the new venue, is to transition from a disability-exclusive space to a more community-inclusive space. [We’ve done this] through the partnerships we’ve been able to forge through [our] outreach programme. [Now], we work with homeless people in Ōtautahi and a community housing group.”

## Improving wellbeing and getting results

Grant recipients make a difference to participation in arts and recreation in many different ways. For example, one of the Participate grant recipients had completed a formal programme evaluation, finding these results from their youth programme:



“One organisation we worked with said they had seen ‘increased engagement of youth in the classroom, increased awareness of their own culture, giving back to kaumātua, increased social skills, and further enhancement of English-speaking capabilities.’ Students progressed faster with active recreation. [There was] increased sharing of their culture and understanding of Māori culture and an increase in physical activity and confidence.”

“At the start [of youth programmes] there could be behavioural issues, and, as they have moved through the programme, this has changed and altered.”

**Another grant recipient said that working with autonomy was an outcome the grant contributed towards:**

“We have a lot of control over our solutions.”

**Others mentioned changed dynamics and a “mixing-up” of relationships between, for example, those living with disabilities and the able-bodied. For example, this young person said:**

“I really enjoyed doing the dancing. It was a mix-up, because, instead of us teaching you [a person with a disability] something special – you teach us.”

“[Our approach] has completely changed the dynamic, stepping into the dance space. [Our participants say] it’s their favourite part of their week. They have one hour in the week when they come in and they can see their client [and each other] in a different light.”

**Another result of this impact orientation was increased positivity among grant recipients:**

“We have a lot of fun in classes. We are constantly laughing.”

“For the most part, [our programme] has been taken on really positively.”

“We have a really low turnover in our staff.”

“For new kapa who have just started performing on stage. We make sure all our young people are acknowledged. They get certificates of participation. Have a trophy for new teams coming in, to be judged by the audience.”

**Increasing the accessibility of the Participate programme to participants was a feature of some programmes:**

“We bought a van ... We like to get schools into us at our Pacific Hub and because transport comes at a great cost to schools, it is life-changing to have a van. The van is a hybrid, a 10-seater. The seats fold up and we can fit a whole bunch of gear in it. We have the ability to be mobile. To be able to get a lot of tech equipment and resources for school groups and the community.”



“[There is ]increasing accessibility to programmes, resources and places.”

### **Trust, reputation and credibility are important**

“We see [our credibility] when we walk down the street. People in the community remember who we are.”

“The more people trust the programme, the more it grows in reputation and credibility. And because people have turned up and gone, ‘Oh yeah, this is really beneficial to me’ then we see a more consistent uptake of the programme by each individual as well.”

## **Increasing impact through outreach programmes**

**Grant recipients extend their impact through outreach programmes. For example, running workshops in schools and sharing knowledge with aligned service providers:**

“The model we believe in is sharing resources and knowledge to empower local communities to set up their own programmes.”

“People coming into our classes have gone away and set up their own dance classes.”

“We’ve had teachers that have implemented parts of our programme and technologies into their classroom and they are more confident. Kids who say, ‘I know what to go on to. [I’m going] to do medicine.’”

**The Participate programme was often a central point from which grant recipients extended their influence through various types of outreach activities:**

“We have people speak every quarter, every couple of months. Spending the time meeting those people and having them come in. We run field trips ... we go to other physical activity spaces ... Now we are moving into providing education for those spaces, so that we know they can provide a safe and accessible space for our community.”

### **Training and sharing knowledge**

This grant recipient took a long-term approach to impact through training tutors from within the disability community and sharing skills with support workers:

“There’s a long-term investment in their training. We are constantly upskilling [our tutors]. We’ve created pathways for leadership. [Three staff members] have been with us 8+ years. We are ... increasing accessibility through training and inspiring people to establish their own programme. We’ve got good relationships and growth.”

“These are people working in this really full-on, day-to-day service [and they will] put in extra time and effort because they are inspired. These are people on minimum wage. We are offering them training. We say, ‘Hey ring us up any time.’ ‘Email us anytime.’ ‘Come



and see any class.’ Our community gets the best if we are training the people [working] around them.”

“[A service provider in Ōtautahi] is the biggest day service provider in the South Island. It’s massive. We’ve known the Chief Executive Officer for years. This service provider now runs four of their own onsite dance classes.”

## Connecting participants with each other

**Participants in these programmes connected with and supported each other, for example, by setting up their own groups:**

“[One result is] that people’s confidence was significantly higher after our programme. Someone had started a Slow Runners group. Someone had organised an Arthur’s Pass Walk. So, it was good to see that it had delivered on its purpose.”

## Communicating about the programmes

**Getting information out about their Participate programmes and amplifying their work was important to many grant recipients:**

“Getting information out to people to participate is also a barrier. Things are so tight that we can’t justify having a dedicated [communicator] to go out and amplify what we have going on.”

“It’s part of [our organisation], but it’s starting to stand on its own a bit. We did get some funding to grow our creative space. We established an outreach. The space is so busy. Monday – Friday 9am–3pm. It’s overflowing with artists. People wanted to do more art, but we didn’t have the capacity. With the outreach programme, we were able to run evening sessions. Open-up on Saturdays. To give people more options, more time.”

“In the next event, next month, it is usually one-day event, now a two-day event. The number of schools showing interest is growing. We are going to have an audience participation activity to choose the team.”

“Because it was a new programme and we were starting something from scratch, there’s a whole lot more communicating than we thought there would be. Initially, we only tagged funds for running the programme. This year’s [communicating] budget is significantly larger, because we know the impact is much greater.”





**Grant recipients were working to increase the number of offers, the number of people attending, and the number of places their programmes were held:**

“Right now, we run one session a week. We are looking at introducing two more sessions a week.”

“In terms of the gallery programme, we’ve been able to engage more schools than we ever have before.”

**Learning, reflecting, tracking success, evolving**

**Reflective practices used by grant recipients led to changes in the way they delivered programmes. By learning quickly and building relationships, grantees were able to overcome scepticism and distrust:**

“We had to spend more time in front of people. Especially with a gym programme, where there is already a lot of stigma. A lot of scepticism and distrust.”

“With the Rātā grant, we’ve been able to make some good learnings very quickly. For example, we underestimated how much time we would need building relationships and developing trust within the community. Instead of saying, ‘Hey we’ve got this amazing service, which we’re pretty sure is going to be beneficial.’ And then just expecting people to turn up ...”

“Every six months we do an analysis of what the goals are and what the barriers are. And we use that to figure out what our programme needs to look like to support that.”

**Reflective processes and careful design have led to long-term success:**

“We keep doing review processes and every time we’re surprised ... We’ve collected a lot of information ... [Consequently], we haven’t had to change the programme much over the last 12 months. It’s been positive and effective.”

“There was an adjustment we made early on. Because we were initially delivering a rangatahi service and we had feedback that it was needed beyond 25 years of age ... [Now] we can see [all] ages attending.”



## Case study: Enabling deeper understanding of tikanga Māori in arts, heritage and traditional tākarō

Te Tau Ihu o te Waka a Maui Māori Cultural Council Incorporated ran a large community kapa haka event for the first time in Nelson. The event involved the whole of Te Tau Ihu region in order to provide accommodation, food, venues and transport for the visitors.

The Chair of the Te Tau Ihu o te Waka a Maui Māori Cultural Council commented:

“We had over 8000 visitors coming into the region, (with) 300 volunteers, 45 kapa (groups) from around Aotearoa NZ that equates to 1600 performers and tamariki from around the country.”

“Seven people oversaw the operation, but a whole community got behind us.”

### Volunteer involvement

Volunteer involvement was important with this scale of event, and mentoring young people was a focus.

“We worked in teams. We had people who looked after the training of our young people in the pōwhiri. We had a group of iwi who made sure we had waiata to teach the students. All the speakers came from iwi and we were just the backup singers.”

Building the capability of young people to host these events and understand what it takes was important to this grant recipient:

“We had young people working behind the scenes, mentored by our more senior members. Working together like this, our young people got to see what happened behind the stage. All the Health and Safety briefings. Feeding people.”

“With kapa haka, the engine room is the parents. Cooking, picking up children, carpooling. That’s because the teams practised after school or in weekends. There were uniforms to be sewn, fundraising to be organised. It was a whole family effort.”

### Tamariki at the forefront

The children were at the forefront:

“We focused on the kaupapa of getting our children on the stage to perform. The feedback from the teams was that it was a positive experience. A highlight was the haka pōwhiri. It went for 30 minutes as part of the two-hour powhiri ceremony. Tamariki were at the forefront, bringing together about twenty schools.”



## Sustaining culture into the future

The event was about oral education and passing the knowledge of one generation onto the next. Young people learnt about the area and researched local history. It also meant young people were learning about manaakitanga and whanaungatanga:

“Kapa haka is so important for sustaining Māori culture. One of the highlights about hosting the event was that all the teams that came in learnt the history of the region. There’s a big lead up and follow through.”



## Rātā relationships

This section shares feedback from grant recipients about the way Rātā supports their work.

### Rātā values grantees' work and is interested in their ideas

"The biggest thing we dealt with was the digital divide. [We have a] wait list of over 200 people who just needed devices. Digital Future Aotearoa, that were funded by Rātā, have helped us to bridge that."

"We applied for funding once and they declined it. But they also said, "We're interested in your ideas. We'd like you to develop it further – so here's some funding to develop a business plan." When its no, it's "no, but". Which is really nice. Because so many times funders just say flat out "no" and don't give you any feedback or support."

### The equity lens and real partnership and being solution-oriented

"We believe in having a real partnership with Rātā and being able to achieve our visions, but also how our work supports theirs. To me that is about being reciprocal. Having people interested in the work we do day-to-day. Catch ups and feedback. Putting opportunities in front of each other. That extends past the money."

"Rātā are really helpful ... Rātā has changed their focus [towards equity] following on from feedback from groups like us into their strategic plan."

"Our new strategy aligns nicely with where Rātā is going with [an] equity strategy."

"Rātā has invited us to apply for multi-year funding. Which is an honour. They value our work and we align with what they are trying to achieve."

## Approachability

Grant recipients appreciated the approachability of Rātā:

"Our contact person was so approachable. We could call or meet. We could talk through our ideas before we'd properly formalised them. [They] made suggestions on things we might like to consider."

"It is good to get face-to-face with groups like us so that we're not just a piece of paper. [To hear] people who talked passionately about their [Participate] events. Nothing beats showing up to practice sessions."



“Our [staff member] was amazing. A great support. Open communication, understanding of flexing [needed] to ensure a locally-led approach. We’ve only had positive experiences with Rātā. They are really great.”

## High trust and flexibility

Rātā enabled this grant recipient to tailor their work to their people:

“Rātā has never come back to us and said ‘No, you are putting too much time into this thing.’ But it’s good to reiterate.”

“The one thing I would say, from a funding perspective, is to ensure that there is adequate funding put towards [communicating].”

“Our relationship with Rātā has been a smooth and open. They’ve allowed for flexibility. Meaning that if the community needs were changing slightly, they understood that and allowed us to keep being locally led.”

“Rātā is a very supportive organisation, and we’ve worked with them for many years.”

“The thing we appreciated most about Rātā is you can apply for anything. Which was nice. Lots of funders were restrictive and exclusive – you can definitely apply for this and not this ... Rātā trusted us to tell them what we need and then they decided whether it aligned with what they were supporting. It’s a different approach.”

“Not have to do ‘this way’ or ‘that way’.”

## Feedback for Rātā

A grant recipient who had received their first Participate grant was eager to receive feedback about her application to aid her confidence in applying for another grant:

“I would [appreciate] more feedback.”

A grant recipient noted the work it takes for apply for a small amount of money.

“Being able to have the option to apply for the large grants as well. We find that when we are applying for funding it can take as much work to apply for \$2,000 as \$50,000.”

## Funding context faced by grant recipients

Grant recipients considered Rātā to be a valued and key funder in the Participate sector. Several grant recipients mentioned that the funding context was changing, and this had created uncertainty about the future of the programmes:



“We got the [grant] at the beginning of the year, and it provided so much security.”

“[There will be] more funding pressure coming. Rātā is a key funder ... we will be losing national funding, the stress of that will be quite major.”

“We acknowledge the [Rātā] Board will have hard decisions to make. We understand and many groups will be looking for the resources.”

“Receiving the [Participate grant] was a barrier we overcame.”

“It was great to have the [grant] because it filled a gap of funding that was no longer available to us. Really huge. [Rātā] priorities aligned with ours. We grow Pacific STEAM through arts, language and culture. We amplify arts, language and culture.”

“The contribution from Rātā has grown over the years. We get sponsorships like Manatū Taonga ... Te Whatu Ora. What made [our programme successful] was everyone coming together. All our partners and funders came together to host the event.”

“Our government funding was contributory. They were very explicit about that. They do not fully fund our services. They contribute towards the cost of funding the service. Which means we have to generate [the rest of the funds].”

“The grant towards the gallery programme was instrumental. We got partial funding from Creative NZ for a grant. The Rātā grant helped fill the gaps, because otherwise we would not be able to do it. It created huge momentum.”

“With any funding, we have to broker one, to get the other. It was quite stressful and when we know we are doing good work and reaching a lot of people. [It means] we were able to focus on our staff wellbeing.”

“Economically things have changed and there will be a lot of groups really struggling.”

## Capacity building

The Rātā grant enabled recipients to build capacity in their teams which in turn enabled them to achieve goals such as developing new partnerships, moving to a new venue and purchasing new equipment:

“The role we developed this year was a Safe Gains Lead who ran the programme for us. A very large part of her role was relationship-building and that’s because we understand the importance of it and we know how much of a difference it made to the programme.”

“The Participate grant meant we could create and deliver programmes. Teaching programmes and performance programmes. The operational side was so important. [We



had funds for] admin and payroll. We have a big turnover, financially, and we didn't have the skills to handle this side. The grant took the pressure off and allowed [us] to push the artistic side of [our organisation]."

## Supporting employment

Some Participate grant recipients had been able to turn contractors into employees:

"Previously we ran this programme with a couple of contracted coaches and a GM doing some of the other stuff. Having a full-time person on meant we were able to do things like presenting in high schools and attending networking meetings so that other services understood what we do."

"We applied to the Rātā Participate fund to support additional staffing of the Gallery space and to support the management of that space."

"Staff wages for our community facilitators and wages for our art facilitators [were funded by the grant]. The community facilitators are our flax root or frontline workers."

"[With paid hours from the Participate grant], we used those to deliver programmes, to strategically plan and to have operational support."

"The Rātā grant contributed to salaries for the Artistic Director and General Manager. We still run on high volunteer hours."

## Characteristics of high-performing organisations

In summary, high-performing Participate grant recipients were able to increase the reach and impact of their work by:

- tailoring programmes to their people to reduce barriers to participation
- striving to reach more vulnerable populations.

These Participate grant recipients tended to define participation broadly and were results-oriented. They were strategic about who they worked with and the populations they were trying to reach. Grant recipients were innovative and willing to work with social and commercial sector. They blended art, culture and recreation with technology and commerce. They addressed the digital divide by creating innovative spaces where people felt able to be themselves, while also having access to advanced technology.

These grant recipients made many incremental changes. They were also prepared to make bigger changes, at pace, when a need or opportunity arose. Examples included designing a 30-minute cross-schools haka referencing local history, purchasing an e-cargo bike for art outreach



programmes, developing a high-tech art training and exhibition space, rolling out a community-developed water safety plan, and creating a Rainbow community gym programme.

Programme affordability was always a feature of these Participate grant programmes. Grant recipients aimed to create a more even playing field for their participants. For example, they provided transport, venues, accommodation, food, technology and equipment. Family, whānau and volunteers were often the “engine room” of a grant recipient programme, although they also had key staff and contractors.

Participate grant recipients were adaptive and realistic despite ongoing challenges. Prejudice and discrimination were often barriers to participation. Grant recipients worked with their people to reframe how they saw themselves and cultivate a stronger sense of identity and belonging in their programmes. Consequently, grant recipients were able to reach some of the more isolated and high-needs members of their communities.

Grant recipients shared knowledge widely to strengthen the sector. Participants were empowered to start their own journey and create their own initiatives. Programmes were locally and regionally relevant. Collaborating and amplifying their work was important, with an emphasis on trust, reputation and credibility. The programme was a central point of influence, with impact extending beyond its initial scope.

## In summary

Grant recipients designed thoughtful programmes to overcome barriers to participation in arts, culture, heritage, sport and recreation. They did this by:

- tailoring their programmes to meet the needs of their people, addressing many barriers to participation
- adopting a broad definition of recreation and physical activity, which included traditional activities such as kapa haka, performance and dance
- increasing their understanding of te ao Māori and building respectful relationships with tangata whenua
- identifying gaps and creating innovative programmes to fill these gaps
- being strategic about who they work with, and taking time with collaborations to increase outcomes
- using reflective practices to make changes to the way their programmes were delivered.



# Recommendations

In general, this review concludes that Rātā is currently doing a good job of supporting positive health and wellbeing outcomes by focusing participation on population groups experiencing barriers or who are in need. The following recommendations reflect the key findings from our review to be mindful of in the coming four years. Some of these recommendations reflect practices for Rātā to continue, and others are considerations to support future Participate funding.

## Recommendations for practices to continue

Continue to fund a range of activities from sports, active recreation, creative activities, culture heritage and traditions.

Continue to fund premised on reducing barriers to participation and for population groups more likely to be experiencing need.

Continue to review funding criteria and assessment practice to create deeper change through the equity focus. For example, continuing to be more intentional with practice around design and cultural responsiveness.

Continue to enable a greater understanding of the power of sports, active recreation, creative activities, culture and traditions by reviewing them together to share learnings and advocate for the importance of all of these practices for wellbeing.

Continue funding programmes and organisations that tailor their approaches to the specific needs and contexts of those they are seeking to serve.

Continue to focus funding on programmes that work holistically to influence a range of positive health and wellbeing outcomes for those who need it most.

Continue to support group programmes that enable *bonding* and *bridging* within and between communities.

- *Bonding* programmes seek to create connection between people of similar backgrounds to support a greater sense of connection and self-identity
- *Bridging* programmes bring together people from different backgrounds to build empathy and understanding of each other.



## **Recommendations for practices to consider for future Participate funding**

Consider partnering with groups from the target population or those who have existing relationships with them in a way that allows them to lead and design approaches.

Consider opportunities to fund in emerging areas such as digital technology and esports to enable positive benefits for those involved.

Consider keeping a watching brief on changes to broader community context that may influence who is experiencing need and the barriers they are facing.



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## EMPOWERED TO THRIVE