

Value of MAHI AROHA

Mahi aroha includes the provision of assistance (either directly or ultimately) towards meeting physical, social and economic needs, and for cultural survival and recovery.

“Every person’s mana derives from their social commitment to others.”
(Kaumatua/Academic)

Mahi aroha activity is critical in the delivery of essential services or other benefits to Māori that would not otherwise be available, and which contribute to improving the well-being of Māori as a people and as individuals.

For many Māori, mahi aroha activity involves transmitting cultural knowledge (such as tikanga, performing the haka and traditional and contemporary Māori carving) between people and across generations.

Mahi aroha activity benefits all New Zealanders. Māori culture is an important part of Aotearoa / New Zealand’s national identity and uniqueness.

Key principles of MAHI AROHA

Tikanga

Doing what is believed to be the right thing to do according to Māori values and worldview, as passed down by one’s kaumatua and ancestors.

Cultural survival and recovery

Doing whatever is needed to ensure that tikanga Māori survives and thrives.

Extent of need

Responding to clear and urgent needs related to poverty, social stressors and support for Māori values, systems and institutions.

“We all know that we’re struggling to keep our culture alive, not just the reo but the tikanga. If we don’t look after our marae, we’re not Māori any more, we’re something else.” *(Kuia)*

Key concepts from tikanga Māori which underlie mahi aroha are:

- hau (life essence)
- aroha (love, sympathy, compassion)
- mana (dignity, integrity, authority)
- whanaungatanga (family connectedness)
- manaakitanga (care, caring for)
- ahi kaa (duty to one’s tūrangawaewae)
- kaitiakitanga (guardianship)

MAHI AROHA design concept

The design concept represents Nga Hau e Wha (The Four Winds of Aotearoa) upon which the message of the OCVS report is sent. The centre of the design represents the spirit of the individual (wairua) sending the message of manaakitanga (support) to all throughout Aotearoa. The colours are of the sky and the earthy tones of Aotearoa.



Hutia te rito o te harakeke
Kei hea te kōmako
He aha te mea nui i te ao
Māku e kī atu
He tangata
He tangata
He tangata e

If you pluck the heart of the harakeke (flax)
Where will the bellbird feed?
It was once asked of me, what is the
greatest treasure in this world?
It is people
It is people
It is people

A full copy of the report
will be available from 1 May 2007.

Mahi Aroha: Māori Perspectives on
Volunteering and Cultural Obligations
can be downloaded
from the OCVS website
<http://www.ocvs.govt.nz>

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of the report, please send an email
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MAHI AROHA

MĀORI PERSPECTIVES ON
VOLUNTEERING &
CULTURAL OBLIGATIONS

What is “MAHI AROHA”?

Mahi aroha is the closest literal translation of the term “voluntary work”.

Mahi aroha is the unpaid activity performed out of sympathy and caring for others in accordance with principles of tikanga and to maintain mana and rangatiratanga, rather than for financial or personal reward.

Mahi aroha is one aspect of tohu aroha, an expression that incorporates the spiritual and temporal aspects of volunteering.

“It’s just how we operate. If someone in my whānau needs help, then I do it. It could be going to a tangi of someone I never knew, or getting hold of information for someone, or helping out in the kitchen, or whatever.” (Kuia)

For many Māori, mahi aroha carried out for the benefit of whānau, hapū, and iwi is often seen as an essential part of fulfilling their cultural obligations to the wider collective. It is also central to their own sense of identity and for maintaining their culture and traditions.

Māori language and culture, incorporating principles of tikanga, mana, manaaki and whānaungatanga provide a rich framework for understanding Māori perspectives on and motivations for undertaking mahi aroha.

How was the report written?

The Mahi Aroha: Māori Perspectives on Volunteering and Cultural Obligations report is based on information obtained through interviews and focus groups with Māori and from a review of local and overseas literature on indigenous and western concepts of volunteering and Māoritanga.

It covers:

- the nature of the unpaid activities undertaken by Māori
- the Māori terms or concepts that best describe the nature of those activities
- the factors that motivate Māori to participate in such activities
- the meanings and value that Māori attach to those activities and their participation in such activities.

“It’s about identity – knowing who you are, what our ways are. We pass these principles on to our children and our moko, and that’s how we teach them that giving in this way is what it is to be Māori.” (Kuia)

The report was commissioned by the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector as part of its work to address barriers to volunteering.

The government’s vision for volunteering, as set out in the 2002 Government Policy on Volunteering is:

A society with a high level of volunteering where the many contributions people make through volunteering and the fulfilment of cultural obligations are actively supported and valued.

Who is this report for?

The Mahi Aroha: Māori Perspectives on Volunteering and Cultural Obligations research report is a valuable source of information on how and why Māori “volunteer”.

It will be of interest to government agencies; employers; whānau, iwi, hapu and Māori organisations; the community and voluntary sector; and others who engage with Māori who undertake mahi aroha.

It is also a useful resource for local and overseas policy-makers, researchers, academics and students wanting to know more about the context and activity of Māori volunteering, and the commonalities they share with other collectivist indigenous cultures.

It is hoped that by the increased understanding of the motivations for mahi aroha and the role it plays in Māori culture, government agencies and employers will be better able to support Māori in their day to day lives and activities in which they undertake mahi aroha.

Types of MAHI AROHA activities

The range of mahi aroha activities undertaken by participants was diverse and involved the application of a wide range of skills.

Generally activities were:

- whānau related
- hapū/iwi related
- marae based

and included:

- advisory work for whānau and government agencies
- advisory work in relation to Treaty matters
- mahi aroha for kaupapa Māori services
- Māori small business
- mainstream volunteering
- responding to needs of whānau, whānaunga and others.

Research participants spent between five and 60 or more hours per week on mahi aroha activity.

Māori women often carry a bigger share of the mahi aroha workload. Reasons suggested for this included that much of the mahi aroha contributed involves work which has traditionally been seen as “women’s work”, and is a “natural” extension of women’s roles of nurturing and care – for example whāngai care, looking after the sick and elderly, work in marae kitchens and cleaning, and administrative tasks. Māori women also have special roles in preparing for a tangi and other significant cultural events at marae.

“That’s what hutia te rito means – bringing up our whānau to know how to look after one another.” (Kuia)