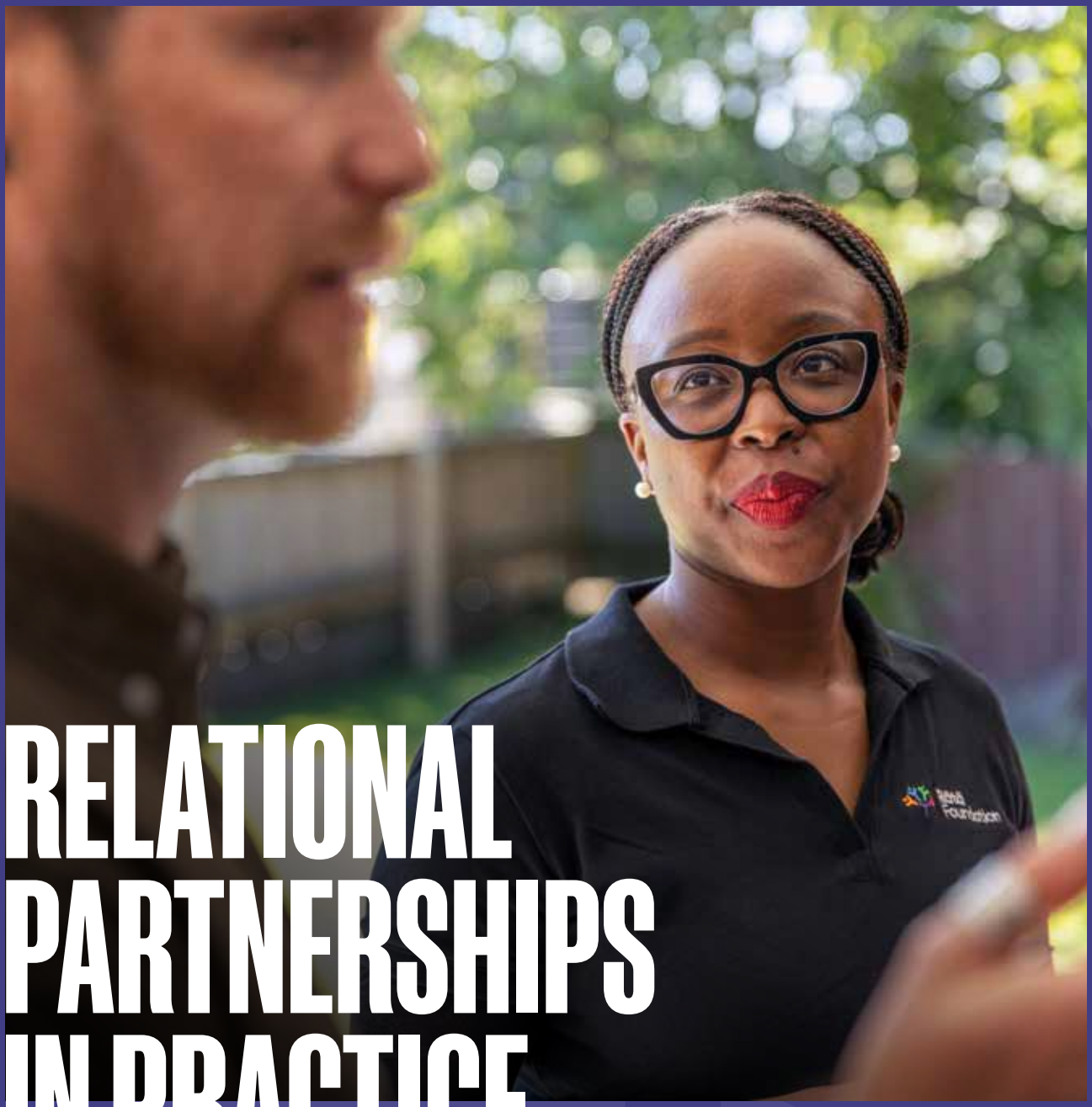
Rātā Foundation



RELATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS IN PRACTICE

Prepared for Rātā Foundation | August 2025

EMPOWERED TO THRIVE

By Wendy Boyce Research

Rātā Foundation

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Acknowledgments

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Executive summary

About Rātā Foundation

Rātā Foundation, one of 12 Community Trusts across the country, funds not-for-profit organisations working in its area, covering Tasman, Nelson, Marlborough, Kaikōura, Hurunui, Waimakariri, Christchurch, Selwyn districts and Rēkohu / Wharekauri (Chatham Islands). Rātā strives for an equitable and sustainable society to support positive intergenerational change.

Purpose of this research

Rātā believes relational partnerships have greater impact in communities and wants to deepen its practice. The purpose of this research is to explore how their relational partnerships work in practice; so they can reinforce existing practices and incrementally improve the way they relate to their partners.

They also want to ensure succession in relationships and support newer advisors to adopt these practices. The research explores the way Rātā Foundation supports relational partnerships, drawing on the literature on this topic and the perspectives of both its partners and advisors who use this engagement style.

Literature

Relational partnerships are a way of working alongside a partner organisation for greater impact. The literature scan identified recent research about the practice of relational partnerships internationally and in New Zealand. Relational partnerships in practice include guiding values, interpersonal attributes and organisational strategy. Guiding values of relational partnerships include respect, integrity, humility and reciprocity. These values lead to action and reflection, resulting in greater wellbeing in communities in need:

> Relational (partnerships) is the practice of paying attention to our relationships and assessing their wellbeing throughout their whole lifecycle. Starting with the ‘work before the work’, moving through forming, maintaining, and closing partnerships, and continuing in the relationship after the work (Ferland, Chen and Berrcera, 2021b).

Findings

The research found that Rātā is an organisation held in high regard by its relational partners. Rātā is a trusted organisation with a focus on removing barriers and relating purposefully with their partners. Rātā and their relational partners share their strategies and goals with each other and identify where their work aligns. They focus on creating impact. This means there is reciprocity in the relationship, leading to more opportunities and greater impact for both Rātā Foundation and their partners.

By taking time to develop these relationships Rātā people and their partners unlock opportunities, either for the partners mahi or for others working with communities or the environment. They strive to share lessons with each other and within the sectors they work with, benefiting the whole sector.

Those partnering with Rātā are generous with their time and knowledge, and focused on finding the right 'values-aligned' partner for them, for example:

- It's never just about 'getting the job done' for us. It's about the wellbeing and belonging (of our people)… If we are going to make a difference in people's lives, we are going to look a bit deeper into our work. And so, it matters a lot who (our)… partners are that are contributing to where we want to go long term.

- We had three banks we approached (for a loan). We also approached Rātā, to see if they do community loans and they did. Hands down, we chose Rātā (to borrow from) because it was easy. There was high level of trust because we've worked with them previously. (Rātā didn't) necessarily offer better terms. We were more aligned in values when it came down to scoring the (loan) proposals.

Rātā people (staff and Trustees) play an active role in creating strategic conversations and working with relational partnerships to support and assist their aspirations along a developmental pathway. They work proactively to identify and support people and organisations with aligned values. They work alongside their partners, being a curious friend and listening for opportunities to support the aspirations of their relational partnerships. A relational partnership with Rātā offers stability, credibility and momentum.

A relational partnership with Rātā enables partners to connect with resources and resource people that they may not have connected with previously. Rātā enables their partners to 'think differently about their work'. For example:

- Rātā people share where Rātā is heading. (They convey) a belief in us, a trust that builds loyalty, iron that sharpens iron, a focus on next steps and forward thinking, sustainability.

- The (Rātā) culture and environment uplifts us and then we are settled. It's an older sibling, younger sibling relationship.

A feature of a relational partnership with Rātā is shared values and high levels of trust. Rātā people are sought after advisers who are approachable, non-judgmental and informed about their sector. Rātā people connect at many different levels of an organisation. Rātā people involve themselves in their communities, attend events, share information and listen to the needs of their relational partners.

- With some agencies we have to manoeuver to make sure they are aware of us. Because Rātā know us and understand our context, it is easier to work with them and put together higher quality programmes and projects.

Flexibility is a core component of the Rātā team's working style, which is particularly valuable when partner organisations face leadership changes, funding cuts, or other disruptions. For example:

- I'm very comfortable being able to contact (a Rātā person) and say: 'We've got this coming up, what's your thoughts?' We'll kick around the opportunities and see if they fit or not. We know we can test our ideas safely with informed advisers. (I can go) 'I've got an idea.' I can run it past (a Rātā person). Because we've seen a need that we want to meet. I've got real confidence that I'll get an honest answer.

Rātā people respect the knowledge of their partners and follow their lead. Rātā people support innovation and have a capability focus. Attributes of a relational partnership with Rātā includes proactivity, transparency, reflectivity, flexibility, accessibility and authenticity.

- The other thing I've liked is the innovative approach to supporting the work we do. It's innovative, but it's got a level of foresight. For example, the Impact Lab. Before it became trendy, we were given the opportunity to undergo a Good Measure Report. They are expensive for a small organisation. But they are really useful.

Rātā people are impact oriented. This means that (Rātā) programmes and services are tailored to the community of need.

In summary

Rātā Foundation's relational style leads to opportunities and wider impact reflecting the learnings from both international and national research on this partnership style. Sustaining quality relational

partnerships takes time and thought. Relational partners appreciate the continuity of the Rātā relationship and support Rātā succession planning to sustain working in this way.

To summarise, Rātā Foundation's partners notice and value these attributes in the way Rātā works alongside their partners:

- Shared values and using a high trust model
- Being innovative, relevant and transparent
- Keeping up with the sector and understanding community needs
- Having foresight and a focus on capability building
- Providing a sense of stability, direction and being opportunity-seeking
- Bringing confidence and credibility
- Being authentic, enlightening and encouraging
- Being accessible and consistent
- Connecting and communicating.

This means there is reciprocity in the relationship, leading to more opportunities and greater impact for both Rātā Foundation, their partners and their communities of need.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Rātā to consider:

- Sustain and strengthen grant making strategy, policy and practice that is innovative and impactful by continuing to recognise the strength of relational partnerships as 'more than the sum of the parts'; working alongside partners organisation for greater impact.
- Continue to allocate resources to relational partnerships, recognising they take time to develop and need attention.
- Continue to support relational partnerships to scale and extend their impact, using an evidence base and tailored packages of support including capacity building.
- Sustain and strengthen grant making that is evidence-informed, focused on communities of need and removing barriers for those communities of need.
- Continue to be oriented towards grantee organisations that are intergenerational, place-based, reflective and reciprocal.

- Continue to plan for the succession of Rātā relational partnership staff to ensure consistency. Relational partners appreciate the continuity of the Rātā relationship and support Rātā succession planning.
- Continue to share stories of Rātā relational partnerships widely.

Introduction

Rātā Foundation, one of 12 Community Trusts across the country, funds not-for-profit organisations working in its area, covering Tasman, Nelson, Marlborough, Kaikōura, Hurunui, Waimakariri, Christchurch, Selwyn districts and the Rēkohu / Wharekauri (Chatham Islands). Rātā strives for an equitable and sustainable society to support positive intergenerational change.

Through its grant funding Rātā supports community organisations to reduce barriers to access and provide support to those communities in need. The way Rātā works with organisations is guided by its Grant Making Philosophy, outlined here:

- We believe in the rōpu/organisations we support and operate in a pono/high-trust model
- Whanaungatanga/relationships are key, and we are present in hāpori/communities - kanohi ki te kanohi
- We are respectful, clear, and whakamana/empower organisations
- We strive to use an evidence base and be a learning organisation – me ako tonu
- We take a lead from the rōpu/organisations we serve about their knowledge of their hāpori/community
- We whakanui/elevate and tell the stories of the rōpu/organisations we support
- We strengthen and manaaki/support rōpu/organisations to deliver better outcomes for the hāpori/community. We don't achieve outcomes on our own – we enable and work in partnership

The purpose of this research was to explore the way in which Rātā Foundation relates to their partners, from the perspective of some of their partners. Rātā want to understand how their partnerships work in practice so that they can reinforce existing practices and incrementally improve the way they relate to their partners, and support their newer advisors to adopt these practices.

The methods used in this research were a literature scan and interviews with grantee organisations and staff and secondary data analysis. The findings are summarised in the following sections, with example quotes identified in bullet points. The attributes and processes that foster and sustain good partnerships are described from the perspective of grantee organisations and Rātā people.

Findings: the attributes of a relational partnership

Literature review

This section scans literature about relational partnerships in practice. Relational partnerships are defined and the attributes, or special ingredients, that may contribute to a relational partnership with Rātā are described. An online literature scan identified recent, relevant practice-focused research on relational partnerships. Articles were sourced from Aotearoa/New Zealand and internationally.

Defining and describing a relational partnership

Washington State (2025) has published guidelines for relational partnerships in practice. They say that relational partnerships are about working with communities in need in an inclusive way, which is centred on the needs and values of these communities. A relational approach is a way of allocating resources more efficiently to those who need it most, and in ways that benefit them the most. A relational partnership integrates core values, strength-based approaches and communication skills together. It can be contrasted with more transactional approaches to relationships:

Relational Partnership	Transactional Management
Trust	Mistrust
Vulnerability	Defensiveness
Healing	Harm
Mindset	Prejudice
Community	Individualism
Intentionality	Carelessness
Reflection & Accountability	Recklessness
Result: Equity & Belonging	**Result: Exclusion & Inefficiency**

(Washington State, downloaded 2025, p.7)

Relational partnership can be characterised by a learning mindset, a focus on community and collectivity, intentionality, reflection and accountability. The result being equal access to resources and opportunities and belonging, instead of exclusion and inefficiency.

Relational partnerships framework

Working in Canada, Ferland, Chen and Berrcera (2021a) say that relational partnerships have value-based attributes and different stages, with diverse aims and needs at each stage. Their five stages move from preparation to closing the relationship:

> Relational assessment is the practice of paying attention to our relationships and assessing their wellbeing throughout their whole lifecycle. Starting with the 'work before the work', moving through forming, maintaining, and closing partnerships... (p. 3).

Chavez, Gavin, Valdex and Carroll (2024) working with indigenous peoples including in Aotearoa, propose a relational practice framework for science based on these four key values:

- Integrity.
- Respect.
- Humility.
- Reciprocity.

This framework places these values in the centre with layers of responsibilities, commitments, actions and outcomes on the outside. In the context of philanthropy the value of respect implies responsibilities of listening to the needs of grantee organisation, taking action based on what is heard and listening with a possible outcome of supporting self-determination.

In Aoteaora / New Zealand, Wilson, Maloney, Parr, Aspinall & Slark (2021, p.1) say that key elements for a locally relevant model of relational partnerships for health could include "whakawhanaungatanga (the process of building relationships) and tikanga (cultural protocols and processes)." They suggest these processes be informed by these values:

- Aroha (compassion and empathy)
- Manaakitanga (kindness and hospitality)
- Mauri (binding energy)
- Wairua (importance of spiritual wellbeing).

Attributes

Pene, Gott, Clark and Stark (2023, p. 1) identified relational attributes relevant to Aotearoa/New Zealand programmes and services in the health sector, including:

- The expressive behaviours and characteristics of professionals.

- Communication to facilitate the healthcare partnership.
- Appreciating differing worldviews.
- The context in which the service is being delivered.
- Whanaungatanga / meaningful relationships.

Wilson, Maloney, Parr, Aspinall & Slark (2021, p.1) say that key elements for a locally relevant model of relational healthcare could include “whakawhanaungatanga (the process of building relationships) and tikanga (cultural protocols and processes).” They suggest these processes be informed by these values:

- Aroha (compassion and empathy)
- Manaakitanga (kindness and hospitality)
- Mauri (binding energy)
- Wairua (importance of spiritual wellbeing).

These ways of developing and sustaining relationships echo the seven principles developed by Ferland et al (2021b) for working in partnership with indigenous communities in Canada:

Cultural literacy: Developing and maintaining basic knowledge and understanding of Indigenous histories, cultures, and experiences. Enabling self-determination.

Reflection: Developing critical self-awareness, including knowing who we are and where we come from, how we learn, work, and relate to the people and communities with whom we want to work.

Relationship: Building relationships that precede, sustain, and outlive programs and formal partnerships.

Reciprocity: Ensuring that communities experience mutual benefit, ownership, and relational accountability.

Protocol: Following cultural practices. Demonstrate respect for Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Humility: Recognising communities as the experts in our partnerships and being ready to contribute in ways that support the vision and goals of communities.

Collaboration: Working in ways that work for Indigenous communities, including creating partnerships where the community has influence in deciding what kind of work needs to be done, why it needs to be done, and how it should be done.

Aotearoa context and being under the korowai o Te Tiriti

Giving effect to relational partnerships in Aotearoa is about cultivating relationships that recover and re-center Māori culture. It is about relationships that are oriented towards collectives, are intergenerational, place-based and adaptive and evolving (Chavez et. al., 2024)

Working in this way to become Tangata Tiriti funders could focus on ‘normalising ethical standards of relating to partners’ and ‘embedding reciprocity’ in their relationships (Chavez et al, 2024, Pene et al, 2024, Wilson et al, 2021).

Bell (2024, p. 125-126) explored what relational partnerships mean to Tangata Tiriti practitioners with long-term experience of working alongside te ao Māori. She found:

> Everyone (in the research) described (relational partnerships) and experiences with te ao Māori that developed and changed over time…evolving and dynamic identities.
>
> They emphasised the importance of learning about our history, how best to think about the treaty relationship as Tangata Tiriti. ‘Knowing our history to know ourselves.’

Summary and insights

This literature review defined and described the nature of relational partnerships across different countries and contexts. Rātā Foundation may wish to continue to strengthen practices that:

- Sustain and strengthen partner relationships by about working with communities in need in an inclusive way, which is centred on the needs and values of these communities.
- Sustain and strengthen grant making that is evidence-informed, focused on communities of need and removes barriers.
- Enable grant making policy that is innovative and impactful.
- Are oriented towards grantee organisations that are intergenerational, place-based, reflective and adaptive.

Grantee interviews

This section shares insights from interviews with Rātā relational partners about their experiences with Rātā. It contains quotes from the interviews, themed according to the attributes identified by those interviewed.

Shared values and a high trust model

Rātā works with partners who have shared values and uses a high trust model. Attributes of this high trust model include openness to ideas, clarity of communication and an outcome orientation. Rātā partners are focused on high-performance and making a difference for vulnerable people in their communities. For example:

- It's never just about 'getting the job done' for us. It's about the wellbeing and belonging (of our people)… If we are going to make a difference in people's lives, we going to look a bit deeper into our work. And so, it matters a lot who the… partners are that are contributing to where we want to go long term.
- We had three banks we approached, and Rātā, to see if they do community loans and they did. Hands down, we chose Rātā because it was easy. There was high level of trust because we've worked with them previously. Not necessarily better terms. We were more aligned in values when it came down to scoring the proposals.
- With some agencies we have to manoeuver to make sure they are aware of us. Because Rātā know us and understand our context, it is easier to work with them and put together higher quality programmes and projects.
- We're pretty open about the things we are doing. If things are going well, we are able to communicate that. If we have some challenges, we can communicate that too. That's how we operate.

Being relevant

Rātā people are sought after advisers who strive to stay relevant to their partners. They are approachable, non-judgmental and informed about what's happening in their sectors. For example:

- Rātā is high up there on our list of quality interaction.
- For us the relationship is key, obviously the funding, it's fundamental. But it goes deeper than that. I feel our relationship with Rātā is here (interviewee holds her hand up high) and with others is here (holds her hand down lower).

- I'm very comfortable being able to contact (the Rātā person) and say: 'We've got this coming up, what's your thoughts?' We'll kick around the opportunities and see if they fit or not. We know we can test our ideas safely with informed advisers. (I can go), 'I've got an idea.' I can run it past (a Rātā person). Because we've seen a need that we want to meet. I've got real confidence that I'll get an honest answer. I also feel safe that I'm not going to be judged if it's something that doesn't meet the criteria or is not a great idea. It's a trust relationship. That's what's really important to me.

- I often pick up the phone to (a Rātā person) about different things. I'll seek out Rātā in times of challenge as well… In recent times we've suddenly had to make a change. I know that their ears will be open, and people will be receptive.

- Building a strong relationship with Rātā Foundation has been a key part in achieving the aspirations of (our communities).

- We started off with operation grants and, as we've grown, Rātā has grown with us and supported us into capital grants.

Keeping up with the sector

Rātā people support partners to put in place the scaffolding of a strong organisation or group, with advice, capability building programmes and networks:

- Rātā has a good grasp on what's happening with other funders. We are getting advice from people who know what they are talking about and know that they have considered the wider sector.

- We are a small organisation... So, to be able to go to a funder that has a wider reach across different areas of the social sector. It's an opinion and advice that is well evidenced.

- Rātā can see things we didn't know we needed. (They) got us to look at what we thought was equity and look at it differently. They got us (aware) that people might not come to us because of how we present. The timing was great. We did an Impact Lab, then we did a Development Plan, then our strategic planning. We put in (place) a three-year Funding Plan.

Connecting at different levels of organisations

Rātā people connect with their relational partnerships at many different levels. For example:

- An Rātā person came up and had discussion with our Board.

- I feel if I call (Rātā) with a question, I will get an answer. Or they will find out the answer. Whereas, if I ring other organisations, I might ask a question and I'm still none the wiser.

Understanding community needs

Rātā people respect the knowledge of their partners and follow their lead. For example:

- Fundamentally, it always comes down to people and those relationships and having people on the ground.
- Rātā has people who appreciate and understand what's happening in communities. That appreciation and understanding is important.
- Rātā is community focused and community minded.

Being innovative

Rātā people are considered innovative. For example:

- The other thing I've liked is the innovative approach to supporting the work we do. It's innovative, but it's got a level of foresight. For example, the Impact Lab. Before it became trendy, we were given the opportunity to undergo a Good Measure Report. They are expensive for a small organisation. But they are really useful. We hope that we showed we used it in the way it was intended to be used and showed the benefit of that Report. We are still drawing on the Impact Report, it adds clarity to our work. It makes everything really clear. Not just to me, but to other funders. We can use it in social media to say, 'If you invest a dollar in us, you will be helping us deliver safe care to children, which is worth thousands and thousands of dollars in that child's longevity'.
- Being 'outside the box' thinkers and always keen and open to new ideas, that's what I appreciate.
- It's always a pleasure to sit alongside (Rātā people). They support new initiatives that can then generate new income streams and new funders. They support community led initiatives and that helps us to deliver over and above the actual numbers funded.

Having foresight and a focus on capability

Rātā is considered to have a capability focus, which adds value to their partnerships. For example:

- Rātā has been good at understanding our needs and the training capability built around that.

- Rātā has walked alongside (us) on our journey.
- We are a working community centre. We want to be more efficient. We want to be excellent in everything that we do. [This influences] how we look at our technology, like AI (artificial intelligence).
- We spoke to staff, and they had become involved - it was a sizeable grant. If we want people to invest money in us, we've got to be really open and transparent in our dealings with people.
- What I've seen is that Rātā staff are more around the opportunities…. It's allowed us to think about our organisation differently and look at the impact of our work differently.

Providing a sense of stability and direction

Rātā Foundation provides a sense of stability and momentum to their partners. For example:

- It's consistency of funding. I think that if they weren't going to fund us anymore that they would be upfront and tell us. A lot of agencies we put in the application and wait three months, and it might still be a no. (Their proactive and direct approach) saves us time. It gives us confidence.
- There's got to be that understanding of how important staff are. Staff have to be settled as well. The (Rātā) culture and environment uplifts us and then we are settled. It's an older sibling, younger sibling relationship.
- It's nice to be able to …reflect and have a kōrero around strategic thinking and that's why it is good to have a conversation outside our workplace. Talking makes me think a bit differently to a structured conversation.
- Rātā people share where Rātā is heading. (They convey) a belief in us, a trust that builds loyalty, iron that sharpens iron, a focus on next steps and forward thinking, sustainability.

Bringing confidence and credibility

Having Rātā as a relational partner brings confidence and credibility to the grantee organisation, enabling them to approach others. For example:

- Having the Rātā name associated with our projects is really good for other funders to see as well. The credibility of their name and brand means a lot. If we have a six million dollar project, Rātā will be able to give what they give, and we can leverage that with others. Their name and what they stand for means a lot. It allows us to scale up.

- We said ‘we should see where Rātā is placed, because we have got to have that really good relationship (with our partners).

A Rātā style of relating

Those interviewed described a ‘Rātā Style’ or way of relating that was purposeful, exploratory and responsive to their needs. Characteristics of the relationship included flexibility and honesty, early idea floating, being open to change and weaving community needs with Rātā priorities. Rātā people listen, reflect and follow up.

Purposeful, proactive and opportunity-seeking

Rātā people are purposeful and proactive, seeking out opportunities. For example:

- It’s that sense of purpose. Always coming back to that action being tika and pono and leading with aroha. That’s the values they carry as individuals. (It offers) a freedom of being able to be who we are and allows the intention to set the tone... there is support.

- I never feel that I need to have all the ducks ready. That’s the power of having an organisation that holds funds in that way.

Open, transparent, reflective and able to ‘get on the same page’ as their relational partners

Rātā people are open, transparent, they capture the essence of what we are talking about. They have a focus on capability building. For example:

- (Our Rātā person) provides a calming approach in the chaos. (It’s) the essence of who they are. You can’t buy, can’t bottle it, it’s in their DNA. It’s innately who they are.

- When you interact with (Rātā) people they are authentic. They have that same frequency or vibration. It encourages me to know that I’m not crazy with my thinking. It earths my thinking. I can go, ‘Yep it’s time to do this piece of work’.

Flexible and nimble

Rātā people are flexible and nimble. They recognise that grantee organisations need to be adaptive and face many challenges. For example:

- (Our Rātā person) listens, (they) is able to reflect and think about (what we’ve said) and come back with some way forward.

- (Our Rātā person) took a recommendation from us back to their office to review… So, it was a bit of a step back (in their work programme). Then they negotiated it through with their provider. Discussed the data and the IP (intellectual property) and come back to us.

- We had an allocation of funding for one particular project. We thought it would be put on hold. We can't do everything. We asked Rātā if they would be open to reallocating the funding provision for a (related project). To have that flexibility. We were able to have that conversation, it was so easy.

Accessible and consistent

Rātā people are accessible, consistent and available to grantee organisations. For example:

- Having someone accessible to us is quite important.

- There is continuity within Rātā. In some organisations, there's a different person every time. (With Rātā) we don't have to restart. We can continue the conversations, keep the markers (of our progress) going. There's nothing worse than having to repeat yourself.

- We try to schedule catchups. Rātā staff are good at saying, 'I'm going to be here at such and such time. Let's see how you are going and what your next thing is that's coming up.'

- If possible, if we've said to (a Rātā staff member), 'Come and look at our new property'. They will. There's time to build those relationships.

- Rātā people are caring, innovating and listening. They will answer the phone when we ring.

Authentic, enlightening and encouraging

Rātā people are authentic, enlightening and encouraging. For example:

- Rātā people bring a calming approach, an authentic approach…. They are enlightening and encouraging.

- Staff are friendly and happy, with time to relate.

Cultivate reciprocity and trust

Rātā people cultivate a sense of reciprocity and trust in their partners. This uplifts the partners and leads them to seek out Rātā as their preferred partners in other projects. For example:

- There's a belief in what we do (from Rātā). There's a trust. It builds this loyalty that sits within a relationship. (It means that) regardless of where we are up to, there's that strength-based approach.
- They were very respectful of our needs. And so was their provider.
- We need a bit of discipline, because we could do projects on a whole lot of stuff. But we need to make sure any project meets the needs of our community. Rātā were excellent at allowing us to co-design the project.

Connectors and communicators

Rātā people are connectors and communicators, enabling their partner organisations to grow and scale up their operations. For example:

- (Rātā people are connectors) from a management perspective and right through to the Rātā Board. So, the Board reflects the community that they serve is quite important.

Summary and insights

Those interviewed about their relational partnership with Rātā mentioned shared values, a high trust approach and having a long-term lens, as being features of the organisation's relationship style.

Rātā worked alongside their partners. Rātā people are approachable, non-judgmental and informed. Their focus is on outcomes and listening to community needs and solutions.

Rātā people work in a way that is well-evidenced, knowledgeable, skillful and professional. This means Rātā people are considered trustworthy and valuable. In turn, Rātā benefits from these high-quality relationships by flexing, learning and adapting.

Rātā people are sensitive to the everyday realities of their relational partners. They understand that their partners work closely with their communities and so they are prepared to 'flex and weave' in order to respond to their partners. Rātā people will put together packages of support in order to respond to the needs of their partners. They will offer capability building packages and networking opportunities, so that their partners can connect with and learn from the wider Rātā network.

Relational partnerships with Rātā enables partners to connect with resources and resource people that they may not have connected with previously.

Those interviewed described a ‘Rātā Style’, or way of relating, that was purposeful, exploratory and responsive to their needs. Working alongside Rātā enabled partners to ‘think differently about things’.

To summarise, Rātā Foundation’s partners see the following attributes in the way Rātā works alongside their partners:

- Shared values and using a high trust model
- Being innovative, relevant and transparent
- Keeping up with the sector and understanding community needs
- Having foresight and a focus on capability
- Providing a sense of stability, direction and opportunity-seeking
- Bringing confidence and credibility
- Being authentic, enlightening and encouraging
- Being accessible and consistent
- Connecting and communicating

The next section summarises some of the perspectives of Rātā people in relation to the way they work with their relational partners.

Interviews with Rātā people

This section shares insights from interviews with Rātā advisors about their experiences of working in ways that enable relational partnerships. This section contains quotes from the interviews, themed according to the attributes identified by those interviewed.

Communication, building rapport, following through

Rātā people are communicators, often attending meetings outside of office hours. They prioritise face to face meetings, often with key individuals in a grantee organisation. They also attend relevant events and expos where groups of grantee organisation will be attending. Meeting in person is an opportunity to share information about Rātā in a jargon-free way and answer questions about Rātā and the grant making process.

Building rapport with communities is about being a clear communicator, with a good grasp of Rātā funding strategy. Staff ask focused questions, listen for community needs and seek to understand the barriers that these communities are facing.

Getting to know Rātā partners takes time and involves skillful and intentional interactions:

- I'm talking all day. If you are relational, you are in conversations all the time.
- (Online meetings) are ok and can help with doing business. But to get to the magic you have to meet in person.
- In order to be able to hear the voices of the community, we have to be available for them, often after hours.
- We're very fluid in the way we work, in terms of times we meet.
- When I go into these spaces, seeing someone that looks like them and talks like them helps increase the accessibility of Rātā to a wider group of people.
- When we go to these spaces, we always have a space available to talk. For those people who wouldn't normally ask questions but would prefer to speak with someone one on one.
- We care and that makes a difference to our partners.
- Talk about some of the challenges they face, and I get a lot of nuance.
- It takes time to get to know them (the relational partners).

- I treat (the partners) with respect and am honest.
- When I walk in a room with (a relational partner), I have power. My challenge is to let that go. To be there in a conversation about what they do and how we can support them, rather than for them to just please me.
- I'm very intentional in the way I move with conversations with communities.
- (At Rātā) we go out of our way to serve and to support (our relational partnerships). Lots of meetings are at night, because these communities work hard during the day.
- Having foresight and a focus on capability
- (Being relational) is what sets us apart as an organisation. Rātā puts relationships at the front. Sharing information, being honest

Rātā people aim to share information about the grant programmes with communities who may not previously have had access to such grant programmes. Some 'early stage' relational partnerships have little or no experience of receiving grants. They are sometimes reticent about approaching Rātā, communicating their strengths and asking for support. So, it is important for Rātā to have people who reach out, connect and follow through with these potential partnerships:

- We can support (relational partners) to understand our funding programmes. Understanding how we can connect and having conversations about their needs. Then, all of a sudden, they say something, and we'll go: 'Ok, tell me more about that'. We are listening out for opportunities.
- When we approach (relational partners). We have been talking to other organisations who say: 'These guys are doing a good job'. When others we know and trust say, 'these ones are doing good work'. It gets us interested.
- I go back every few weeks and say: 'Just catching up to see if there was anything you need more information on'.

Connecting and capability building

Rātā people aim to help an organisation be the best they can be. This means that their work is not just about grant applications, but also about connecting, coaching and reflecting with the grantee organisations. They meet grantee organisations where they are and support them on their journey:

- We want our organisations to be the best they can be.

- If we find an organisation doing similar work. We say: ‘Talk to these ones. They do what you do. They have been on that journey’.
- Our team can refer people on. We will talk with other funders and talk about what our organisation does, sometimes we are interested in part (of what a relational partner is doing).
- Rātā is a place for relational partnerships to get started, for those with huge potential, and (we) let them grow. We take the role of the curious friend.
- We aim to build relationships, through engagement, so that through those relationships, the funding can be more than the money. It’s not just application in, application out.
- Through these, we have the opportunity to create, to dream, to do those things that make a difference. And make a win-win and be more engaged with what’s going on and more in touch with what’s going on in community.
- We are looking for that x factor. Those meaningful connections, for innovation. When you get that spark, that connection, the relational partnership becomes greater than the sum of us. We are looking for meaningful connections that make space for impact.

The purpose of relational partnerships

The purpose of relational partnerships is to understand what is happening in the Rātā communities and identify opportunities to have greater impact. Staff tailor conversations towards increasing outcomes for those communities experiencing high and complex needs. Part of their role is to understand what’s happening in communities and finding opportunities to maximise community benefit.

Understanding the community and the sector leads to more applications that are in scope and could develop into relational partnerships further down the track. And, if the applications are in scope and tailored to their communities of needs, then applicants are more likely to deliver successful programmes, making the Rātā grant go further:

- We know our (relational partnership grant) will go further if the application is tailored (to the needs of the community).
- Our conversations are tighter, more focused because we know Rātā strategy.
- We are getting more and better applications coming in, less out of scope.

- A couple of organisations we have taken from the start (of their journey) and they are now attracting government funding. They've grown themselves, got the right processes in place, got better, they've got evaluation.

Support takes many forms in these relational partnerships, including supporting partners through challenges they are facing. Relational partnerships encountering challenges is to be expected because they are supporting communities who experience high levels of need and complex issues. Rātā people understand this reality of their relational partnerships and strive to support and strengthen these relational partnerships through the challenges they face:

- If a relational partner is struggling, for whatever reason, but their outcomes are on point, then we think 'let's do everything in our power to make (their work) happen'.
- We wish everything (would) go hunky dory, but it doesn't. Sometimes our grantee organisations will say 'we're going well, we just need a bit of support here or there'. (Or, they might say): 'Things are a real struggle right now'. I'll say, 'Ok, tell me about that' and then I can bring in other partners.

Summary and insights

Rātā people are skilled at building high trust relationships. They know reciprocal relationships take time and require attention. They are purposeful, strategic and strength based. They take the role of the curious friend which leads to opportunities to support organisations through their growth and impact.

They prioritise face to face meetings and attend events where they can connect with groups of relational partners. Meeting in person is an opportunity to share information about Rātā in a jargon-free way and answer questions about the grant making process. Staff ask focused questions and seek to understand the barriers that these communities are facing. They act to build networks, connecting organisations to others in those spaces.

The aim of a relational partnership between Rātā and a partner, is to be 'bigger than the sum of us'.

In Summary

Relational partnerships are a way of working alongside a partner organisation for greater impact. Rātā is an organisation held in high regard by its relational partners. Rātā is a trusted organisation, with a focus on removing barriers and cultivating a relational way of working alongside their partners. This means there is reciprocity in the relationship, leading to more opportunities and greater impact for both Rātā Foundation and their partners.

Both Rātā and their partners initiate opportunities with each other. They strive to share lessons with each other and within the sectors they work with. Rātā and their relational partners share their strategies and goals with each other and identify where their work aligns. They focus on creating impact. By taking time to develop these relationships Rātā people unlock opportunities not only for impact, but also to offer support to allow these organisations to grow and scale.

Those interviewed about their relational partnership with Rātā mentioned shared values, a high trust approach and having a long-term lens, as being features of the Rātā relationship style. Rātā people work alongside their partners, are approachable, non-judgmental and informed. Rātā people focus on outcomes and listening to community needs and solutions.

Rātā people

Rātā people are skilled at building high trust relationships. They know reciprocal relationships take time and require attention. They are purposeful, strategic and strength based. They take the role of the curious friend, which leads to opportunities to support organisations through their growth and be impactful.

They prioritise face to face meetings and attend events where they can connect with groups of relational partners. Meeting in person is an opportunity to share information about Rātā in a jargon-free way and answer questions about the grant making process. Rātā people ask focused questions and seek to understand the barriers that these communities are facing. They act to build networks, connecting organisations to others in those spaces.

Rātā people work in a way that was well-evidenced, knowledgeable, skillful and professional. This means Rātā people are considered trustworthy and valuable. In turn, Rātā benefits from these high-quality relationships by flexing, learning and adapting.

Rātā people are sensitive to the everyday realities of their relational partners. They understand that their partners work closely with their communities, and so they are prepared to be flexible, in order to respond to the challenges their partners' encounter.

Rātā people will put together packages of support in order to respond to the needs of their partners. They will offer capability building packages and networking opportunities, so that their partners can connect with and learn from the wider Rātā network. Relational partnerships with Rātā enables partners to connect with resources and people that they may not have connected with previously.

Those interviewed described a 'Rātā Style', or way of relating, that was purposeful, exploratory and responsive to their needs. Working alongside Rātā enabled partners to 'think differently about things'.

In summary, Rātā Foundation's partners reported the following attributes of a 'Rātā Style':

- Shared values and a high trust model
- Innovation, relevance and transparency
- Currency and understanding community needs
- Having foresight and a focus on capability building
- Providing a sense of stability and direction
- Bringing confidence and credibility to the relationship
- Being authentic, enlightening and encouraging
- Being accessible and consistent
- Having an orientation to connect, communicate and find opportunities.

The aim of relational partnerships between Rātā and partners, is to be 'bigger than the sum of us'.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Rātā to consider:

- Sustain and strengthen grant making strategy, policy and practice that is innovative and impactful by continuing to recognise the strength of relational partnerships as 'more than the sum of the parts'; working alongside partners organisation for greater impact.
- Continue to allocate resources to relational partnerships, recognising they take time to develop trust and relationships need attention.
- Continue to support relational partnerships to scale and extend their impact, using an evidence base and tailored packages of support including capacity building.
- Sustain and strengthen grant making that is evidence-informed, focused on communities of need and removing barriers for those communities of need.

- Continue to be oriented towards grantee organisations that are intergenerational, place-based, reflective and reciprocal.
- Continue to plan for the succession of Rātā relational partnership staff to ensure consistency. Relational partners appreciate the continuity of the Rātā relationship and support Rātā succession planning.
- Continue to share stories of Rātā relational partnerships widely.

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