

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This is the report of the evaluation of SocialLink Tūhono Pāpori ('SocialLink') commissioned by BayTrust and carried out by Momentum Research and Evaluation Limited, in April 2025.

BACKGROUND

The Social Sector Innovation WBOP Charitable Trust, known as SocialLink, was established in 2012 to build the capability, confidence, sustainability, and voice of the for-purpose sector in the Western Bay of Plenty. Guided by its strategic plan, SocialLink has three goals: Build, Empower, and Serve the Sector, and supports organisations through various workstreams. SocialLink's strategic plan is due for review, and in April 2025, BayTrust and SocialLink commissioned an independent evaluation to provide information to inform the review process.

The evaluation aim was to gather information to answer the following research questions: (i) Across all activity areas, what is working well and are goals being achieved, and what is not working so well, and what are any identified improvements? (ii) What is the value of SocialLink to the community and how does it fit into the local social and community sector ecosystem?, and (iii) Are there any gaps identified and/or future services that could be delivered by SocialLink? Evaluation methods included reviewing SocialLink documents and data, an online self-completion survey with 101 sector stakeholders, 19 of whom were Kaupapa Māori providers, and 37 interviews with 38 people; 11 staff/board members, 22 sector stakeholders and 5 external stakeholders.¹

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The evaluation found that:

- **SocialLink is fulfilling its intended purpose**, meeting its goals to build, empower, and support the for-purpose sector, effectively engaging hapori Māori organisations, providing useful and relevant services, advocating for the sector and having a genuine commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- Stakeholders report a **high level of satisfaction with SocialLink** and its services, and **it is viewed as beneficial** to the for-purpose sector.
- **SocialLink is valued** because it connects and advocates for the sector, provides a range of essential and affordable services, and has skilled staff who support for-purpose organisations to build capability and confidence.
- **SocialLink fits in the sector** as a peak body or umbrella organisation filling what would otherwise be a gap in support, services, and advocacy.
- Suggested **areas for improvement include** raising SocialLink's profile, enhancing existing services, proactively engaging with the sector and ethnic communities, continuing to strengthen cultural capability, capacity, and impact measurement, and addressing the parking at The Collective.
- **Future challenges** for the for-purpose sector include funding constraints, government policies, sustainability, high demand and the need for support to collaborate, survive, thrive and demonstrate impact.
- There is support for **maintaining SocialLink, and strengthening and enhancing the services offered**, to meet the sector's current and future needs.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The evaluation found that SocialLink is an organisation that effectively supports and builds capability in the for-purpose sector, is meeting needs, and achieving its goals. SocialLink occupies a unique place in the sector,

¹ Sector stakeholders are those from for-purpose organisations who engage with SocialLink; that is those who are 'the client group' for SocialLink. External stakeholders are those from organisations that have a relationship with SocialLink but not necessarily as users of the services; this includes for example, funders and other organisations that work with, or for, the community such as local councils.

connecting, supporting and advocating for the sector. Identified areas for improvement are related to enhancing what is already offered and strengthening communications about what they provide. Future needs and challenges are primarily financial, with organisations needing to survive in an environment with high demand and reduced funding opportunities. Findings support SocialLink continuing to operate, and to proactively promote, maintain and enhance their current services to continue to build, empower, and serve the for-purpose sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. SocialLink continues to be supported by partners, as there is value in enabling their work and support for them to continue.
2. SocialLink uses the evaluation findings to inform their Strategic Plan review and their workstreams moving forward.
3. SocialLink continues their current services to support, empower and grow the for-purpose sector.
4. SocialLink continue to develop and strengthen their services and support for hapori Māori organisations.
5. SocialLink enhance their current services, proactively engage, and raise their profile, to enable them to more effectively support the for-purpose sector.