

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.

EXPANDED FINDINGS

SECTOR STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK (N=22)

Key themes from sector stakeholder interviews were:

- SocialLink is relevant and connected, builds capacity, capability, and confidence, facilitates connections, is affordable, has responsive, skilled and professional staff, and effectively connects, supports and engages with hapori Māori through its Whakamana Tangata service.
- Sector understanding of SocialLink's role to support, connect, and advocate for the for-purpose sector is consistent with SocialLink's purpose and is evidence of appropriate and clear messaging about their role.
- The newsletter, proactive outreach, and whanaungatanga connections are factors that help initiate, facilitate, and sustain engagement.
- Suggested areas for improvement are to raise the profile of SocialLink and its services, enhance and strengthen existing services, and address the parking at The Kollektive.
- SocialLink is valued and useful because it is a 'one stop shop' that connects the for-purpose sector, has quality staff who provide essential support, services, information, resources, and advocacy at an affordable cost, and is value for money for the sector.
- SocialLink fits in the sector as a unique organisation which connects the for-purpose sector and fills what would otherwise be a gap in support, services, and advocacy.
- Funding, sustainability, capacity, thriving, and building capability are the key challenges facing the for-purpose sector in the coming years.
- SocialLink should maintain current services and support, enhance existing services, and better profile the services on offer.

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK (N=5)

Key themes from external stakeholder interviews were:

- SocialLink is fulfilling its role of supporting and developing capability and capacity in the for-purpose sector, providing services consistent with its purpose, and as a result the sector is more cohesive.
- Suggested areas for improvement include being more proactive in sector engagement and with ethnic communities, increasing connection to, and knowledge of, the sector, measuring impact, ensuring the structure and internal systems enable the work, strengthening all services, and improving collaborative practice, research, SOS and Business Heroes services.

- The value and place of SocialLink in the sector is as a coalescing umbrella organisation which connects the for-purpose sector and fills what would otherwise be a gap in support, services, and advocacy.
- The main challenge facing the for-purpose sector in the next few years is funding.
- SocialLink should focus on enhancing current services aligned with their core purpose.

STAFF AND BOARD FEEDBACK (N=11)

Key themes from staff and Board interviews were:

- SocialLink provides useful, relevant, and needed services and support, has skilled and experienced staff, who work well as a team, is a respected brand, builds capability, confidence, and connections, engages and supports hapori Māori, and is connected to, and effectively advocates for, the sector.
- SocialLink is genuinely committed to developing cultural capability and strengthening commitment to Te Tiriti, evidenced by the co-governance model, establishment of Whakamana Tangata, Māori staffing levels, and the development of the Māori Strategy - Rautaki Māori.
- SocialLink needs to communicate to the sector about what it offers, enhance current services including access to experts, and address the parking at The Collective.
- SocialLink needs to increase its knowledge of the sector, measure its impact, strengthen cultural capability, and address capacity to respond, succession planning, and diversity.
- The value and place of SocialLink is as the 'go to' organisation, which provides a voice, is independent, connects, builds and grows the for-purpose sector and fills what would otherwise be a gap in support, services, and advocacy.
- The main challenges facing the for-purpose sector in the next few years are funding, sustainability, capacity and capability.
- SocialLink should focus on maintaining and enhancing current services, raising their profile, communicating what they offer, and building their capability and capacity to enable them to better serve the sector.

SECTOR SURVEY FINDINGS

Key findings from the sector survey were:

ALL SURVEY PARTICIPANTS (N=101)

- 88% of the 93 participants who had used SocialLink services found them very useful or useful.
- 79% of the 101 participants strongly agreed or agreed that their organisation had benefited from the work of SocialLink.
- Suggested areas for improvement were to improve communication about, and raise awareness of, services and events, enhance networking and collaboration opportunities, and enable The Collective to better service the for-purpose sector.
- 90% of participants rated SocialLink as very valuable or valuable to the sector.
- 71% of participants noted the main challenge facing the sector was funding, followed by government policies (25%), volunteers (11%), high demand for services (11%), and the economic climate (11%).
- The most common future needs identified by survey participants were support with collaborating with others (67%), funding (67%), Artificial Intelligence (51%), demonstrating impact (49%) advocacy (49%), cultivating leaders (47%), communication strategies (45%), and succession planning (45%).
- The majority (69%-94%) of participants supported all SocialLink activities to continue, because SocialLink and the services were needed, useful, helpful, supportive, and of good quality.

KAUPAPA MĀORI PROVIDER PARTICIPANTS (N=19)

- 89% of the 19 Kaupapa Māori provider participants found the services very useful or useful.
- 90% of the Kaupapa Māori provider participants strongly agreed or agreed that their organisation had benefited from the work of SocialLink.

- 89% of the Kaupapa Māori provider participants rated SocialLink as very valuable (47%), or valuable (42%) to the sector, 5% rated it as slightly valuable, and 5% as not valuable.
- 58% of the Kaupapa Māori provider participants noted the main challenge facing the sector was funding, followed by government policies (21%), sustainability (16%), high demand for services (11%), the economic climate (11%), and Treaty rights (11%).
- The majority (58%-100%) of the Kaupapa Māori provider participants supported all SocialLink activities to continue, because SocialLink and the services were needed, useful, helpful, supportive and of good quality.

SOCIALINK DATA

Key findings from SocialLink satisfaction surveys, funder reports, annual reports, and online sites were:

- SocialLink Annual and Funder reports (2023 -2024) show that they meet or exceed their KPIs across most services.
- Two services (Business Heroes and SOS) have yet to realise their full potential although progress is being made and where feedback has been received, this has been positive.
- Of the 39 respondents in the 2024 SocialLink satisfaction survey:
 - 76% were very satisfied or satisfied with SocialLink services,
 - 79% strongly agreed or agreed that their organisation had benefited from the work of SocialLink,
 - 80%-97% rated each SocialLink service as performing well or very well, and
 - 64% rated SocialLink as having high value to the sector.
- Of the 20 Organisational Advice and Support Service users in a 2205 survey:
 - 84% reported that the support had a great deal or a lot of impact on their organisation,
 - 100% were very satisfied or satisfied with the service overall,
 - 100% would definitely recommend the service to others, and
 - 90% appreciated the responsiveness, 90% the one-to-one assistance, 85% the clear guidance and advice, and 85% the knowledge and information provided.
- Of the 40 Volunteering Service users in a 2025 survey:
 - 100% were very satisfied or satisfied with the service overall, and
 - 57% reported that the training and workshops were useful, 52% the advertising of their volunteer opportunities, 43% promoting the work of the for-purpose organisations, and 43% promoting volunteering in the community.
- A 2024 survey of 61 respondents from the for-purpose sector found that funding is a key area of concern, with government funding not keeping up with rising costs, income remaining static or decreasing, and the lack of funding already resulting in reduced capacity to meet demand.