

The pōwhiri process

The wero	Lays down a challenge to ensure people come in peace, with honourable intentions
The karanga	Calls everyone to attention, acknowledging people and important connections. Lets everyone know the purpose of the day and calls them to come together now for this purpose
The whakaeke	Asks everyone to take their shoes off at the door. Taking your shoes off is a great leveller; its puts people on the same footing, enables them to become grounded and reminds them that they're entering the sacred space of the meeting house
The karakia	Brings people into the present moment and invites reflection
The mihi	Acknowledges connections and all that has gone before, bringing the past into the present, clarifying the bigger picture and stating the purpose of the gathering
The waiata	Is a supportive action to relish the mihi
The koha	Is an act of acknowledgement and generosity, freely given and with no strings attached
The harirū and hongī	Makes a physical connection, fostering a sense of relationship and unity
The kai	Celebrates coming together, closes the loop on the formalities and opens the way for open and robust dialogue

Conclusion: A reflection on the pōwhiri process

“What comes last,” according to Māori wisdom, “cradles everything that’s been before.” In concluding this chapter on the TIES framework we return to the moment that sparked its creation.

In the midst of a particular Tāmaki Transformation Programme hui, rather than try to fit our communities into unfamiliar frameworks of engagement, which was the proposal on the table, a group of us huddled together and began searching for an indigenous approach; something local and familiar, something that had been around for a long time, something that really worked and had deep meanings for our people.

Then Alfred asked a question that opened the door: ‘Georgie, where does engagement begin on the marae?’ ‘It begins with the pōwhiri process,’ Georgie replied.

Instantly, the conversation took off, as the group came to life with a burst of excitement. Georgie led the way with an enthralling account of what the pōwhiri process meant to her. Unable to stop ourselves, the rest of us chimed in with personal experiences and our own understandings. Having ignited our imaginations, we had to follow the path our conversation was leading us along and here’s where it went.

Grounded in a respectful way of doing things, the pōwhiri process not only takes care of the formalities and informalities of relationship but also shifts the power dynamics. The home crowd takes the lead because things are happening on their ground. When the home crowd has the opportunity and resources to extend manaakitanga, their generosity is on full display and they’ll work very hard to make things a great success.



On the marae, the pōwhiri process sets the context and creates the conditions for respectful relationship. Planning, preparation and practice work nimbly together so as to continue the time-honoured ways of doing things known to work well in all kinds of circumstances and with all kinds of people. These time-honoured ways enable relationships to grow and thrive by acknowledging connections and all that has gone before; and by bringing the past into the present, with the future in sight. With every step the collective becomes much more sharply into focus and, with it, the bigger picture.

Community engagement is about relationship/s, which implies the workings of power. Thinking about the pōwhiri process reminded us that power-full relationships recognise the mana invested in each one – community and government (and philanthropy, business, university and anyone else who wants to make a positive difference in Tāmaki). We had to consider not only what is important for building and maintaining relationships but also how to manage power dynamics, to find a way for community to become greater agents of change.

The pōwhiri process suggested various ways to manage the power dynamics, including: calling people to gather, extending and receiving manaakitanga, distinguishing different roles and identifying people most able to perform these, conducting meetings in ways and in places familiar to and comfortable for the community, taking your shoes off at the door, telling and retelling stories that matter, genuine gift-giving and the celebration of coming together. Time and again we had each experienced how these elements weave and work together to bring people closer, enabling them to unite across a multitude of human divisions or corporate manifestations.

In 20-25 years I'll still be here. My commitment is to this community and our marae. If I want to be here in 20-25 years, then I have to step up and speak up now as a community person because it's the future of my community that's at stake.

Something is going to happen. As a community, we can have our say or not say anything at all. For too long we have allowed a lot of things to happen. Now we have a chance to get involved.

Georgie Thompson

Our reflections on the pōwhiri process and its many meanings (for us as individuals, as community members, as community workers and as citizens of this country) led us to develop the principle-based TIES framework outlined in this chapter. Our hope is that TIES will offer the residents and communities of Tāmaki an *indigenous, inclusive, inspiring, inspiriting* and *innovative* model of community engagement that they can use and adapt.

In the next chapter we outline practical tools to further guide attempts to walk the TIES talk. Doing so will show others how people from our different communities (and from different sectors and backgrounds) can build trust and work together to achieve common goals.



Only if you involve the community will anything change. We need to put time and energy into strengthening our community connections and be open to learn from the people who live here. We need to encourage our people to speak in a unified voice. A lot of our people are in different spaces but are saying similar things in their languages.

Mike Ikilei