



NEXT STORIES



Voices of grant partners

A journey of reflection, learning and insights

‘Hapaitia te ara tika
pumau ai te rangatiratanga
mo nga uri whakatipu’

*Foster the pathway of knowledge
to strength, independence and growth
for future generations*

A learning journey

- Three independent evaluations of NEXT from a grant partner (‘partner’) perspective will occur over the ten year life of the Foundation. The first happened in 2016 and the second in 2019
- Providing grantees with a confidential forum to share feedback on the funder increases equity in the partnership and provides learning insights for the philanthropic trust
- These insights papers shine a light on where NEXT is doing well and opportunities to improve
- In the first evaluation, grant partners described various strengths of the Foundation, such as the people involved and quality of the NEXT network; strategic depth and focus; and value add support
- Various learning areas were identified and as a result NEXT refined course in a number of areas. This includes providing applicants with greater transparency regarding due diligence; building in stronger diversity to selection; and increasing knowledge of Māori tikanga
- Reflection and learning is ongoing and is central to the NEXT approach

‘These evaluations give us insight into where we are doing well and where we can do better. The feedback is valuable. It’s a great learning tool.’

Barrie Brown
NEXT FOUNDATION CHAIR

‘These papers are an opportunity for us to engage our grant partners for honest feedback in a way that is safe and confidential. Following the 2016 evaluation we changed course in a bunch of areas. The 2019 paper gave us further insight into what’s working and where we can improve. We are learning as we go.’

Bill Kermode
NEXT FOUNDATION



Why it matters

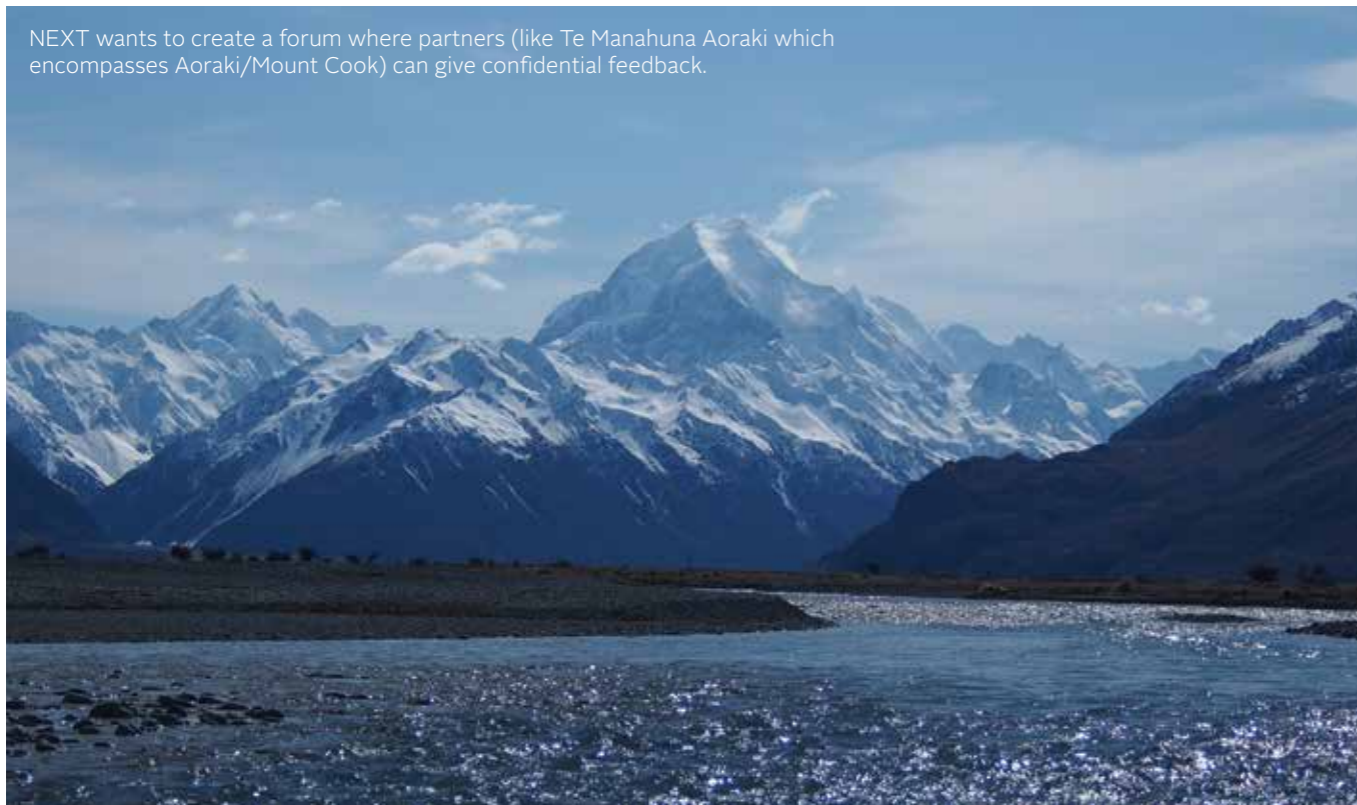
Providing grant partners with a confidential forum to give feedback builds equity in the relationship and provides valuable insights

- Grant partners are given a safe and confidential forum to give feedback - without fearing their funding may be in jeopardy
- The philanthropic trust receives insights regarding their strengths, learning areas and opportunities to improve. This enhances the quality of their mahi or work and makes them more accountable
- This helps build more balanced power dynamics. There can be a risk in philanthropy that the funder has significant power, and the grantee little or none
- Grant partners are enabled to influence the behaviour and shape the DNA of the funder
- Outdated paradigms are challenged

'The traditional funder/ grantee relationship can make some wary of sharing challenging messages with the funder. We wanted to create a forum for our partners where they can give confidential feedback on how we are doing as a partner and to be transparent in that process. It's working to a paradigm that hopefully builds greater equity. If we are to shift the dial on some of these big issues, philanthropy is part of the system change that needs to happen.'

Bill Kermode
NEXT FOUNDATION

NEXT wants to create a forum where partners (like Te Manahuna Aoraki which encompasses Aoraki/Mount Cook) can give confidential feedback.



Early insights

In 2016 interviews were conducted with NEXT grant partners, as part of the first independent evaluation of NEXT from a grant partner perspective. Insights included

THE NEXT APPLICATION PROCESS

Grant partners described the initial Expression of Interest phase in the application process (where a two pager was put forward) as 'refreshingly good' and having a 'focusing' effect. There were various suggestions for how the following 'full on' phase of the application process could be improved. For example by simplifying due diligence, providing fuller transparency regarding what was involved, and broadening advisors to be more diverse and representative of the communities served.

'I found the expression of interest refreshingly good. The concept that you had to describe yourself in a couple of pages, what you're on about, your structure, kaupapa, what you wanted to do to succeed, what you needed, what supports you had ... Telling the story in two pages, requires you to have a grip on what you're doing. Being able to define your financial requirements and defend them if queried. It was among the best application processes I've been involved with.'

Grant Partner
2016 EVALUATION

'I was surprised by the amount of process (in the application). I would rather be out there doing stuff.'

Participant
2016 EVALUATION

NEXT grant partners, like Zero Invasive Predators (seen here at the Perth River Valley) were part of an independent evaluation in 2016. Photo credit Chad Cottle.



LEARNING AREAS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE

Grant partners were asked to describe what learning areas existed for NEXT, and opportunities to improve. There were various learning areas such as increasing knowledge in relation to Māori aspirations and tikanga; further leveraging the 'big minds' and networks of NEXT; and increasing lobbying with the Ministry of Education.



Increasing knowledge in relation to Māori aspirations and tikanga was seen as a learning opportunity.
Photo credit Daniel Lee.

'An area for improvement is learning about Māori politics and Māori aspirations and challenges in education ... Understanding the dimension of whānau, community and iwi involvement.'

Grant Partner
2016 EVALUATION

'I think that we are always interested in big minds. The thing for us is we never think we have it ourselves. We are always looking to be challenged to what is the smarter, better, faster way to do what we are doing ... Getting NEXT involved in the big thinking is a really good idea.'

Grant partner
2016 EVALUATION

'On the environment side (NEXT are acutely aware of this) how do you effect value in the fresh water area? It's such a complex world ... The goal has to be aspirational.'

Grant partner
2016 EVALUATION

'NEXT lobbying with the Ministry of Education may be helpful.'

Grant partner
2016 EVALUATION

STRENGTHS

Grant partners described the strengths and unique aspects of NEXT. These included the Foundation's ten year time frame; strategic depth and focus areas (environment and education); and the credibility and quality of the people involved (including business skills and networks). NEXT were seen as providing value-add support in a range of areas, such as governance, financial modeling and communications. Partners described NEXT as supportive, respectful and professional.

WHAT CHANGED AS A RESULT OF THE 2016 PAPER?

Following the 2016 evaluation and the insights that came from this, NEXT refined course and made some changes including

- Providing applicants with greater transparency regarding the level of due diligence in the application process
- Magnifying leverage of the NEXT network
- Building in greater diversity to selection through additional NEXT advisors
- Increasing knowledge of Māori tikanga (this is an ongoing learning process)
- Exploring different avenues to engage the Ministry of Education
- Looking for opportunities to bring grant partners together through hui and events

'They have mustered a lot of people with really good skills. Business skills. Networks.'

Grant partner
2016 EVALUATION

'A funding relationship with NEXT is generally a much longer term relationship than you would normally get in philanthropy. It's demanding. The thing that marks these things is: would you call it respectful? And the answer is yes. For both parties. That is really, really important.'

Grant partner
2016 EVALUATION

'The relationships have been intimate, easy, frank. I have been able to say, 'I've got a problem here, I'm going to fix it but there's a problem'. Or, 'I have a new idea are you interested?' ... it is highly transparent and respectful. Where there are difficult issues we deal with them.'

Grant partner
2016 EVALUATION

'I believe they are a group of New Zealanders who really care about the country.'

Grant partner
2016 EVALUATION

Reflections at half way

THE NEXT APPLICATION PROCESS

Grant partners were asked to describe what worked well in the application process and how this could be improved. The NEXT appointed navigator or kaihautū (engaged at governance level with grant partner organisations) was described as a valuable support in the application process. And there were areas where selection could be improved, for example through a 'shared investment' in the development work - such as a seed grant or evaluation support at the point of application.

REPORTING

Reports to NEXT were mainly described by grant partners as an opportunity to reflect and 'take stock.' Nearly everyone spoken with said they would value more feedback from NEXT on their reports.



NEXT's fifth anniversary coincided with the second evaluation by partners. Photo credit Daniel Lee.

'Having a person who was the NEXT appointed person, but also had a belief in what we were doing, and able to translate across the initiative and NEXT was really valuable.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

'We got there (with the application), but it could have been alleviated by a shared investment in the development work. If NEXT had said we are happy with how this is proceeding and we know what we are asking for requires a lot of time and investment, we will match you or give you a seed grant ... And if we don't proceed with the funding, we have invested in it and have helped you get to a place where you can find another funder. That could have been helpful.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

LEARNING AREAS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE

There were various suggestions for where the Foundation could improve such as strengthening diversity and inclusion (for example through the NEXT network and events); balancing precise measurement of outcomes and pace - with space for reflection, consolidation and innovation; the Māori tikanga journey could be deepened; and further exploring leadership development of grant partners and 'big horizon' thinking - such as bringing out international experts in specific areas.

'NEXT could provide access to people for international insights - bring out an expert in the first thousand days. Have them come here and work with all of us. There is something in there about helping us have a big horizon.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

'The network that has been built around NEXT is amazing ... After five years I think there is a question about how might that network and the events grow and evolve ... The network is largely made up of conservative individuals who are all pretty similar. How could NEXT diversify the network ... There could be greater diversity within the speakers at the NEXT events ... Also where the events are held ... Go to the marae, or the fale - different venues ... NEXT are at a turning point - they are half way through. It's a good time for a refresh and to move out of comfort.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

'There is a question for philanthropy about what really is the appetite for innovation and social change ... What we are doing is like social R&D and just like scientific or business R&D, that is an investment that may deliver amazing results or it may contribute to the learning and understanding ... NEXT needs to ... allow the work to breath or germinate ... If it's too prescribed I worry the magic won't happen.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

'We need to move fast, but there needs to be a few more periods of consolidation to ensure we are really clear in what we are trying to achieve. More time for reflection, consolidation. There is a fine line between getting things done fast and moving at a speed where others can come with us.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

'I think NEXT are aware they need to improve their practice around tikanga. I'm no expert, but they have improved, but still struggle sometimes. They have had some big wins, such as with Taranaki iwi.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

STRENGTHS

Similar to the findings three years prior, strengths and unique aspects of NEXT were described as the people involved, the NEXT network and relationships (the Foundation was variously described as a convenor, connector, catalytic funder, influencer and facilitator); NEXT's vision, strategic thinking and long term focus (including sustainability of partners); business expertise; and commitment to learning. The strongest area where NEXT provides value add support was described as through the NEXT kaihautū. NEXT was repeatedly described as supportive, approachable and trustworthy.

'NEXT is doing a good job of encouraging a group of us to think about the exit strategy ... it forces us to think about what do we do next in terms of the long-term. The focus is turning to the Crown ... people are prepared to challenge your trajectory, it's sometimes hard to hear but valuable.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

'Bill is meeting government officials and others and talking about (grant partner organisation) – that also creates awareness over and above what we can do ourselves.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

'It's been so helpful to have our kaihautū closely involved ... he is a critical friend ... He's a wise head. That is great. He's helped us and can be a broker of relationships ... he helps me be courageous.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

'Our kaihautū has a continuous dialogue with Bill. That is really valuable ... the advice and guidance she offers is really valuable ... the NEXT network ... I have met loads of great people ... they have added a lot of value to me personally and to the organisation.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

'The sharing of their thinking, their work, their networks, their brokering of people and initiatives and connecting. NEXT are operating in a field of the work as well. It's not just being a funder, which I really like – they could do more of that.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

'They are about impact, not just finding good things to fund. More strategic. NEXT is thoughtful about the whole area of what they are invest in. They do seem committed to learning ... They are approachable. I feel I can have a robust conversation with NEXT ... I sent through an article on evaluating system change they were receptive saying, 'Maybe we can use this framework'. It was great they are open to new thinking.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

'NEXT's reach is a real strength, their ability to bring people together and connect people, their vision and long-term thinking.'

Grant partner
2019 EVALUATION

The way forward

Following the 2019 paper NEXT will take time to reflect on the insights, explore areas for strengthening and carve a way forward. A third evaluation of NEXT from a grant partner perspective is scheduled for 2022 - eight years in to NEXT's ten year life and while there is still opportunity to adapt and apply learning.

'We have intentionally spaced three years between each of the evaluations and that feels about right. This gives us the opportunity to reflect on the insights and refine course. These insights papers are a key part of how we learn as a foundation.'

Bill Kermode
NEXT FOUNDATION



The NEXT network has been acknowledged as one of the strengths of the foundation. Photo credit Daniel Lee.

For more information go to the NEXT website

WWW.NEXTFOUNDATION.ORG.NZ



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NEXT Foundation

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Investing in our land, our people