Connect & Kōrero

Innovating to amplify refugee and ethnic migrant youth voice in Aotearoa New Zealand policy

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

Innovation Unit
Creating impact
Reducing inequalities
Transforming systems

MINISTRY OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO TAIOHI
Administered by the Ministry of Social Development

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Glossary

Box and Whisker Plots – box and whisker graphs are used to visually represent the distribution of quantitative data in the evaluation section of this report. The ‘x” indicates the mean scores and the horizontal line represents the median. The middle section of the boxes represent 50% of the scores in the middle quartile and the top and bottom lines represent the upper and lower quartiles. Outliers are represented by circles.

Co-design – an approach of actively involving stakeholders (in our case, ethnic young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and policymakers) in creative participatory methods to design, deliver and/or evaluate a response to problem that is centred on the needs of the users.

Empathy interviews – elicit specific stories related to the issue of concern and seek not only to describe an individual’s experiences but to understand the thoughts, feelings and context associated with their experiences.

Ethnic person – in this report, ethnic refers to people belonging to one or more of the ethnic communities that are the focus of the New Zealand Ministry for Ethnic Communities, including people who identify as African, Asian, Continental European, Latin American or Middle Eastern.

Fun Committee – the youth-led branch of the project implementation team that was comprised of nine young ethnic people and one adult facilitator.

Hui – to gather, congregate, assemble, meet.

Kōrero –a conversation or discussion.

Logic analysis – a review of existing evidence that serves to check the logic of a theory of change to see if the assumptions are supported by other studies examining similar initiatives or experiences, or if existing evidence conflicts with the assumptions.

Policy – a deliberate system of guidelines or protocols that inform and guide decisions to achieve intended outcomes. A policy is a statement of intent and is implemented as a procedure or protocol. Policies are generally adopted by a governance body within an institution (such as a ministry) or organisation.

Policymaker – in this report, the term policymakers is used in a broad encompassing way to capture those involved in policy development. This is inclusive of advisors, community engagement workers, politicians and ministers. This term recognises that the generation of policy involves numerous people and roles to realise its formation.

Tangata whenua – indigenous people, people born of the whenua (i.e. of the placenta) and of the land where the people’s ancestors have lived and where their placentae are buried.

Tauiwi – a term for people who are non-Māori.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi - Te Tiriti o Waitangi, New Zealand’s founding document, was meant to be a partnership between Māori and the British Crown. Although it was intended to create unity, different understandings of the treaty and breaches of it, have caused conflict. From the 1970s the general public gradually came to know more about the treaty and efforts to honour the treaty and its principles expanded.
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Theory of change – a representation (often visually communicated) of how an initiative is presumed to produce desired outcomes. Our theory of change also incorporated the conditions that can help make an innovation more or less successful when implemented in the real world.

Young people – refer to individuals aged 12 to 24 years, in alignment with the New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development’s (Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi) definition of youth.

Whakawhanaungatanga – process of establishing relationships, relating well to others.

Executive Summary

Young people across the globe celebrate opportunities to express their voices and contribute when those opportunities are meaningful. Unfortunately, traditional, adult-driven approaches to youth participation are often tokenistic and can alienate rather than attract young people's involvement. This issue is particularly the case with policy development, where important decisions that impact young people's lives are made.

If Aotearoa New Zealand aspires to be "the best place in the world for children and young people"[1] , the policy development process needs to account for the diverse backgrounds, needs, interests and aspirations of all young people who call Aotearoa New Zealand home. Over twenty percent of New Zealand's population identify with African, Asian, Continental European, Latin American or Middle Eastern ethnic groups. Collectively, they represent over 200 ethnicities and speak over 170 languages. Of this group, approximately 40% would classify as young people. [2] However, young ethnic people report that they feel unseen and unheard in Aotearoa New Zealand society. Their voices need to be considered in the policy-generation process and innovative solutions are required to address ethnic young people's unique participation barriers.

A team consisting of young people and adults working with the Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies at the University of Auckland – Waipapa Taumata Rau and the Innovation Unit partnered with the Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) - Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi to co-design and implement an innovative initiative to address this noted policy gap. The following sections of this report provide an overview of the 18-month project, which was delivered over multiple phases with ethnic young people, community leaders and policymakers. The project focused on ideating, prototyping, implementing and testing a co-designed innovation based on insights about the ethnic youth policy participation gap gained from interviews, community engagement hui and a review of existing research evidence.

The innovation is called Connect & Kōrero, a series of hui that create space for ethnic young people and policymakers to come together in a fun and relaxed environment to forge trusting relationships before having brave conversations about their lived experiences, interests and needs. Evaluation data indicated that Connect & Kōrero is a promising vehicle for bringing young people and policymakers together for meaningful connection and perspective-taking. However, the success of Connect & Kōrero depends on a well-resourced implementation team that genuinely involves young people in planning and decision-making and includes skilled facilitators that can effectively manage challenging power dynamics. Within this project, a "Fun Committee" of nine young people who were supported by an adult facilitator drove the decisions, design and delivery of Connect & Kōrero with support from the implementation team. This youth-led branch of the team was an additional innovation produced from the project.

We recommend investment in the following Framework for Ethnic Youth Participation in Policymaking, which draws on the core components of both Connect & Kōrero and the Fun Committee. The framework positions a co-governing youth-adult steering group as the driving force behind future Connect & Kōrero hui. The framework also incorporates five evidence-informed features affirmed by existing research to enhance safety, inclusion and effectiveness:

1) authentic youth-adult partnerships;
2) capability building for youth and adults;
3) incorporation of skilled peer mentors and facilitators;
4) use of diverse and proactive outreach pathways; and
5) adequate time and resourcing.

Detailed descriptors of each key feature are provided at the end of the report as recommendations that are likely to be relevant to anyone interested or involved in youth participation.

The framework summarises the infrastructure needed to support government and youth-focused organisations to connect the dots across various programs of work to promote meaningful and authentic communication and engagement grounded in ethnic young people's interests and needs. The framework also provides a potential basis to address the often siloed nature of youth policy development across government ministries. Further development to implement and evaluate this framework will be needed to create the long-term impact envisioned by this project: a future where ethnic young people feel affirmed, valued and that they belong in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Overall framework to amplify refugee and ethnic migrant youth voice in Aotearoa New Zealand policy

Steering group for Connect & Kōrero at the centre

Implementing quarterly Connect & Kōrero hui that bring wider groups of young people and policymakers together

Steering group based on co-governance and co-facilitation structure

Roles and expectations are clear, goals are shared, youth and adults are equally valued and all members compensated

Hui are guided by clear principles and expectations and feedback is used to inform future hui and policymaking

Steering group members are responsible for documenting and disseminating insights to decision-makers and demonstrating accountability by closing communicating loops

Youth and adult co-facilitators receive training and have lived experience

Enables an approach based on ako, positive youth development and participatory principles, cultural humility and responsivity and trauma-informed care

Steering group members act as mentors during hui to support participation and facilitate new relationships

New (both adults and young people) participants require support to overcome access and participation barriers and benefit from having an ally alongside to help bridge cultural divides

Steering group meets weekly to plan quarterly hui and engage regularly with decision-makers

Consistent engagement maintains momentum and feedback loops with hui participants and youth voice has resonance with decision-makers

Steering group members co-design and conduct outreach to engage a diverse range of youth and policymakers in upcoming hui

Promotional materials are co-designed, accessible and engaging and steering group members are actively involved in online and in-person recruitment

Youth and adult steering group members have independent branches for reflection on power dynamics and adultism

Peer-based safe spaces supported by experienced facilitators are needed to process, debrief and collaboratively address communication tensions

Contextualising the challenge

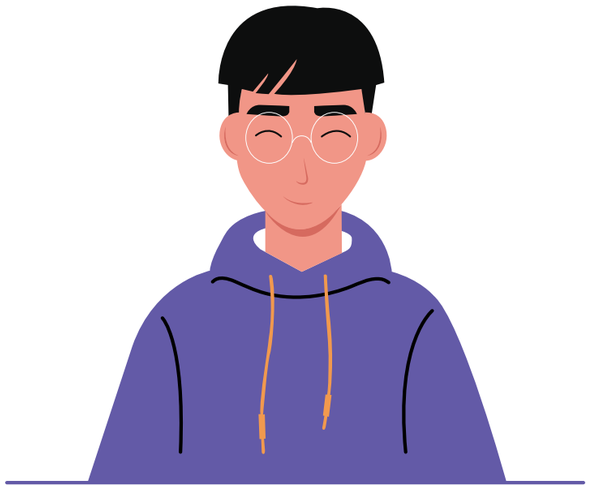
We begin the project overview by introducing Tan, Akiki, Sylvia and Raven. They are not real people, but their stories are. We created these fictional composite personas based on a synthesis of lived experiences shared by people involved in this 18-month project journey. We share these to bring to life some of the complexities that young ethnic people and people working in the policymaking space contend with in balancing their interests and needs with those of the communities they represent and serve.

Tan

Pronouns: he/him

Age: 15

Ethnicity: Second-generation New Zealander of Chinese Malay descent born in Aotearoa New Zealand



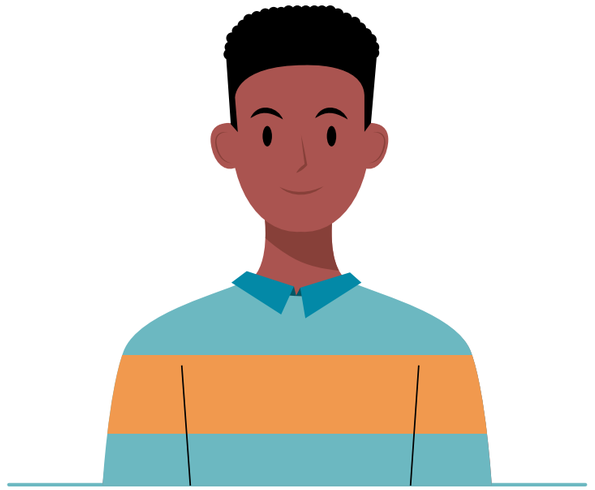
Tan has multiple interests; he is a member of Generation Zero and has been active in the recent school climate strikes. He is part of his school's environment and sustainability rōpu and is active on most social media. Although he loves gaming, he does not have as much time for it this year because he is focusing on good marks for a scholarship for University in Year 13. He has enjoyed being part of his school's environment and sustainability group and is proud that they eliminated single-use plastics last year. He still feels like a novice climate advocate but loves that Generation Zero is youth-led and has many volunteer opportunities. He also has his frustrations: he hates how much broken glass is on the cycleways; he wishes his grandmother had more responsive care in her rest home as a non-English speaker; he is passionate about his Chinese Malay heritage but does not get opportunities to share this much at high school where there seems to be no understanding that the Asian label includes more than the South East Asian majority at his school. He feels like he does not have enough time for everything, especially with his school assignments that are becoming larger this year. It upsets and frustrates Tan that he has friends who have been bullied at school this year for being "Asian", even in a super-diverse city like Auckland!

Akiki

Pronouns: he/him

Age: 28

Ethnicity: New Zealander of Ugandan heritage who arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand 18 years ago



Akiki did not see many people who looked like him when he was growing up and he witnessed racism at school and in the community. He developed a strong affinity with his Māori and Pacific peers, who also faced racism. Over time, he recognised his identity was not the same as Tangata Whenua, despite his strong affinity for Te Ao Māori. He wanted to take this experience and make change and was delighted to get a youth-focused policy role. However, after two years, he is becoming increasingly worried that he may not be able to stay at the Ministry for much longer. He struggles to get ethnic minority youth experiences effectively addressed in policy, especially when there is still so much work and resourcing needed to address effective policy for Tangata Whenua. He is increasingly mindful that he is the person who always reminds colleagues and community advisors to consider the diverse voices that constitute contemporary Tangata Tiriti. He often feels like people see these requests at worst as personal fancies and at best as 'nice-to-haves'. He is staying on for the moment; he sees positive, though slow, changes in the embracing of Te Reo and Te Ao Māori at the Ministry and hopes that this can also be the opportunity to better recognise the fullness of Tangata Tiriti in the policy process. However, his exhaustion is growing and being 'the' voice on the diversity of ethnic minority youth needs makes him uncomfortable.

Sylvia

Pronouns: she/her

Age: 21

Ethnicity: Colombian who arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand with her family eight years ago as a refugee

Sylvia is halfway through her Law and Arts Degree. She lives with her mother and three younger siblings and is active in supporting the family emotionally and financially. She sees first-hand some of the challenges her family face in a range of settings. She is passionate about using her tertiary education experiences to advocate for young people from refugee backgrounds. In her first year at Uni, she successfully ran for a position on the local council's youth advisory board. However, the overall representation on the board was severely limited and she felt like the token 'ethnic' there. In addition, she was often asked to talk about things from a migrant perspective as if her experience as a refugee and that of migrants were necessarily identical! She liked that her voice as a young person seemed to count – it felt like a safe space and people genuinely seemed to listen. The following year, she was recruited to join a council project focusing on enhancing social inclusion. Still, it quickly became apparent that she did not have the same decision-making power as the adults on that project. After being absent for several meetings, she skillfully found a way to exit so that she did not need to support something she thought was misguided. She recognises that the changes she wants to see need policy and structural change, but she is feeling increasingly cynical about whether her needs will be addressed if a diversity of young people's voices are missing from the table.

Raven

Pronouns: she/they

Age: 39

Ethnicity: Trinidadian who arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand six years ago

Raven's work history includes local and city council policy work in France and work for the Children's Commissioner in London. She currently manages a small team that includes Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti, including ethnic minority staff. Although they actively seek to support ethnic minority staff in their team, they find it difficult to get space for the ethnic minority voices in their work. In the UK and France, where multicultural ideas were "the norm," she did not find it so difficult to do this, especially as there was more time, money and community expectations for 'cultural inclusion'. Because Raven's team is not as culturally diverse as she would like, Raven worries that too much pressure is placed on the community engagement team to provide accurate information across their portfolio. Her team members, especially those from ethnic minority communities, complain that the community engagement team do not have time to ask the "right questions". Raven, themself, has more than once had to rely on the ethnic minority expertise of individuals in the policy team to fill in the gaps. She winces every time a young ethnic minority policy analyst expresses frustration about 'tokenistic' processes, not only with Māori but also with Pacific and ethnic minority peoples. Increasingly she tries to ignore her misgivings about potentially tokenistic practices, as well as the complexities that go along with the word "intersectionality" that everyone keeps talking about so calmly. Wryly, she reflects, hearing from diverse ethnic minority communities is hard enough without worrying about other dimensions of identity.

Gaps, challenges and opportunities

As Tan, Akiki, Sylvia and Raven's stories attest, there are numerous barriers that contribute to a policymaking process that does not adequately account for young ethnic people's intersectional identities, lived experiences, interests and needs. Recent research and policy reports provide further context to some of the challenges but also point to significant opportunities as we highlight below.

The Policy Gap

Context: Ethnic communities comprise approximately a fifth of Aotearoa New Zealand's population, nearly one million people.[2] Aotearoa New Zealand's refugee resettlement program recently doubled its annual intake, a significant proportion of which comprise young people. These communities are incredibly diverse and, accordingly, have diverse needs.

Challenge: These demographic trends signal the pressing need to:

1. develop safe and engaging approaches that encourage young ethnic people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to participate and
2. to support a system that responds to their needs.

Opportunity: Through connecting the dots between ethnic young people and policymakers, there is a great promise to further fulfil Aotearoa New Zealand's aspiration of becoming "the best place in the world for children and young people."[1]

Barriers to Participation

Context: Young people from ethnic migrant and refugee backgrounds contend with additional complexities to have their voices heard and meaningfully accounted for. These barriers include adult-driven processes,[3 - 5] variable levels of English literacy, financial difficulties and potential cultural clashes with Western value systems.[6 -10] Consequently, many policy decisions that have major implications for their lives are made without a good understanding of their experiences and interests – thereby further widening the policy gap.

Challenge: Despite good intentions to include ethnically diverse young people's voices in the development of policy and the design and delivery of services, significant barriers to participation remain.[11 - 14]

Opportunity: At the time of writing this report, several important policy developments were occurring, including the Ministry of Social Development's Social Cohesion Framework and the Ministry of Justice's National Action Plan Against Racism. These shifts underscore the importance of effective engagement with an increasingly diverse population of young people to ensure that policy addresses entrenched inequalities and improves their lives.

Acknowledging Diversity and Lived Experience

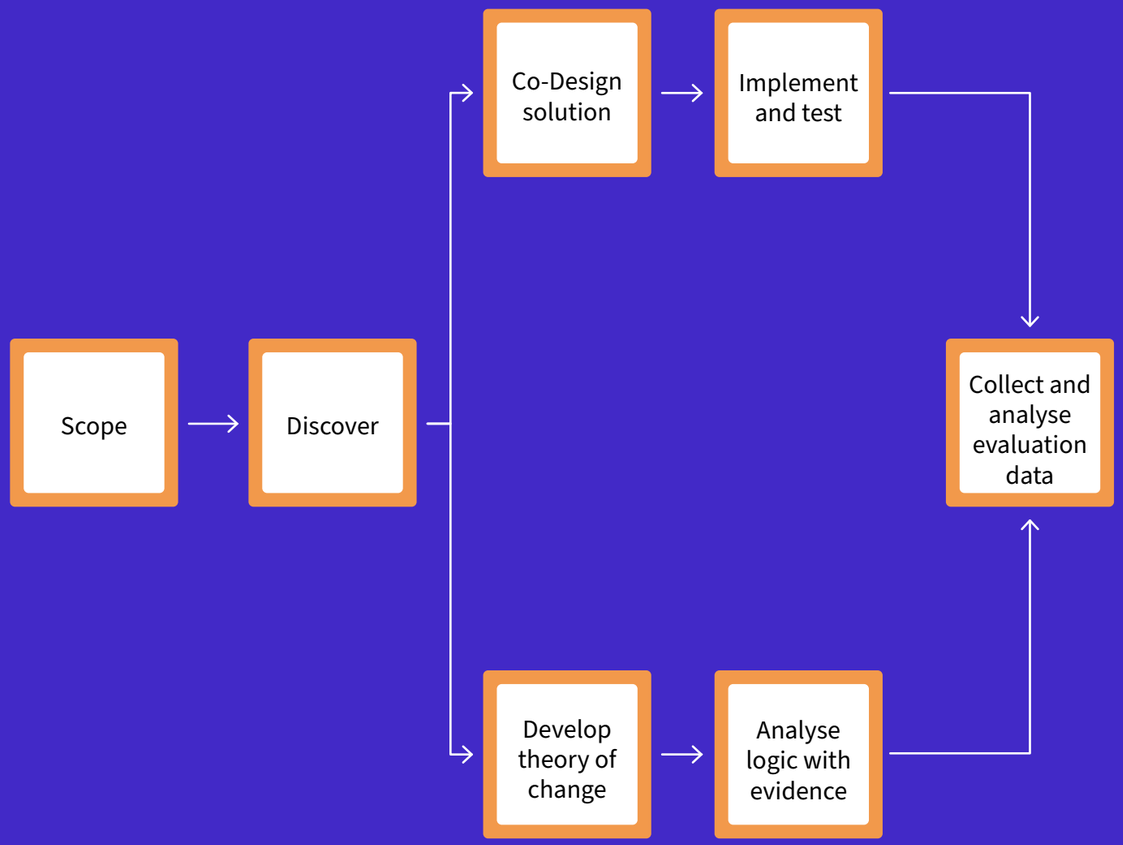
Context: Broad categorical labels and related policies that amalgamate diverse groups of people together (e.g., "Asian" and "refugee") mask other important identity dimensions and can feel denigrating.[15 -17] This lack of nuance and recognition reduces the effectiveness of service provision because specific needs are likely to be overlooked. Further, the connections between policymakers and migrant and refugee background communities are often tenuous,[13, 18] making it difficult to build trust and create engagement to understand people's lived experiences in related policy decisions. [8,17] Notably, the chronic confrontation of both covert and overt discrimination and racism in the daily lives of many young ethnic people contributes to their sense of exclusion.[7, 14, 15, 19]

Challenge: Many young ethnic people continue to feel unheard, unseen and unvalued in society. Developing trust with these communities requires time and resourcing alongside approaches to engage with and garner young people's perspectives. This work involves an appreciation of their histories and experiences beyond one dominant identifier.

Opportunity: Building relationships with diverse communities that incorporate an intersectional appreciation of people's histories and identities provides a basis to develop policy that is connected to young people's voices, experiences and aspirations. Making these connections could help support positive processes and outcomes related to service delivery, livelihoods and an overall sense of belonging to Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Project Journey

Across 18 months, we worked with young people and policymakers in virtual and face-to-face spaces and synthesised research literature to understand and improve ethnic youth engagement in the policy development process as illustrated below.



- The initial phase involved **scoping** the general parameters of the work by establishing what success would potentially look like in relation to responding to the gaps, challenges and opportunities, who would be involved and how we would work as a team.
- The **discovery phase** focused on ascertaining insights through empathy interviews with 13 policymakers about their experiences of advocating for young people's needs in the policy generation process; and then through four community engagement hui that involved more than 50 young people, community leaders and government workers. We used the discovery insights as the foundation to start co-designing an innovative solution that would address some of the roots of the challenge.
- The **co-design phase** included 14 ethnically and age-diverse young people, two adults working in policy, one adult community leader and six project team members, two of whom were youth facilitators. In addition, a challenge team, consisting of 17 additional government workers, community leaders and ethnic young people were involved to offer constructive insights to the co-design team about their prototype ideas.
- The evaluative aspects of the project began in parallel with the co-design phase. Careful attention to the design decisions made during prototyping allowed us to construct a **theory of change** that provides a visual explanation for how the co-designers thought the prototype would produce outcomes and the factors that would help or hinder its success.
- Following this we conducted a **logic analysis** to assess the assumptions of the theory of change against existing evidence and to identify additional strategies that could improve the innovation's impact.
- Concurrently, an **implementation team** was established. The implementation team was tasked with refining the prototype and moving it to the pilot stage. Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono joined the team as a community partner to oversee the implementation phase with support from Black Creatives Aotearoa and Innovation Unit. The coordination and delivery of three pilot test events were led by a "Fun Committee", the youth-led arm of the implementation team consisting of nine ethnically and age-diverse young people supported by one adult facilitator.
- Based on input from the co-design team, we designed a mixed-method **evaluation survey** to collect data from people who took part in the pilot about their experiences.
- A **synthesis of the information** collected across all project phases allowed us to produce the **key recommendations**, including the *Framework for Ethnic Youth Participation in Policymaking*.

The Discovery Phase

A critical component of this work was understanding processes, insights and experiences from the perspective of young people and community leaders, as well as people involved in the policy decision chain.

Empathy interviews were undertaken by two members from Innovation Unit with 13 policymakers across central government in Sep/Oct 2021. These interviews were then synthesised through a reflexive thematic analysis and used as a foundation for insight generation.

Three community hui with ethnic young people, community leaders and people in a range of government roles produced further insights about the challenges of meaningfully involving young ethnic people in policymaking.

Journey Maps

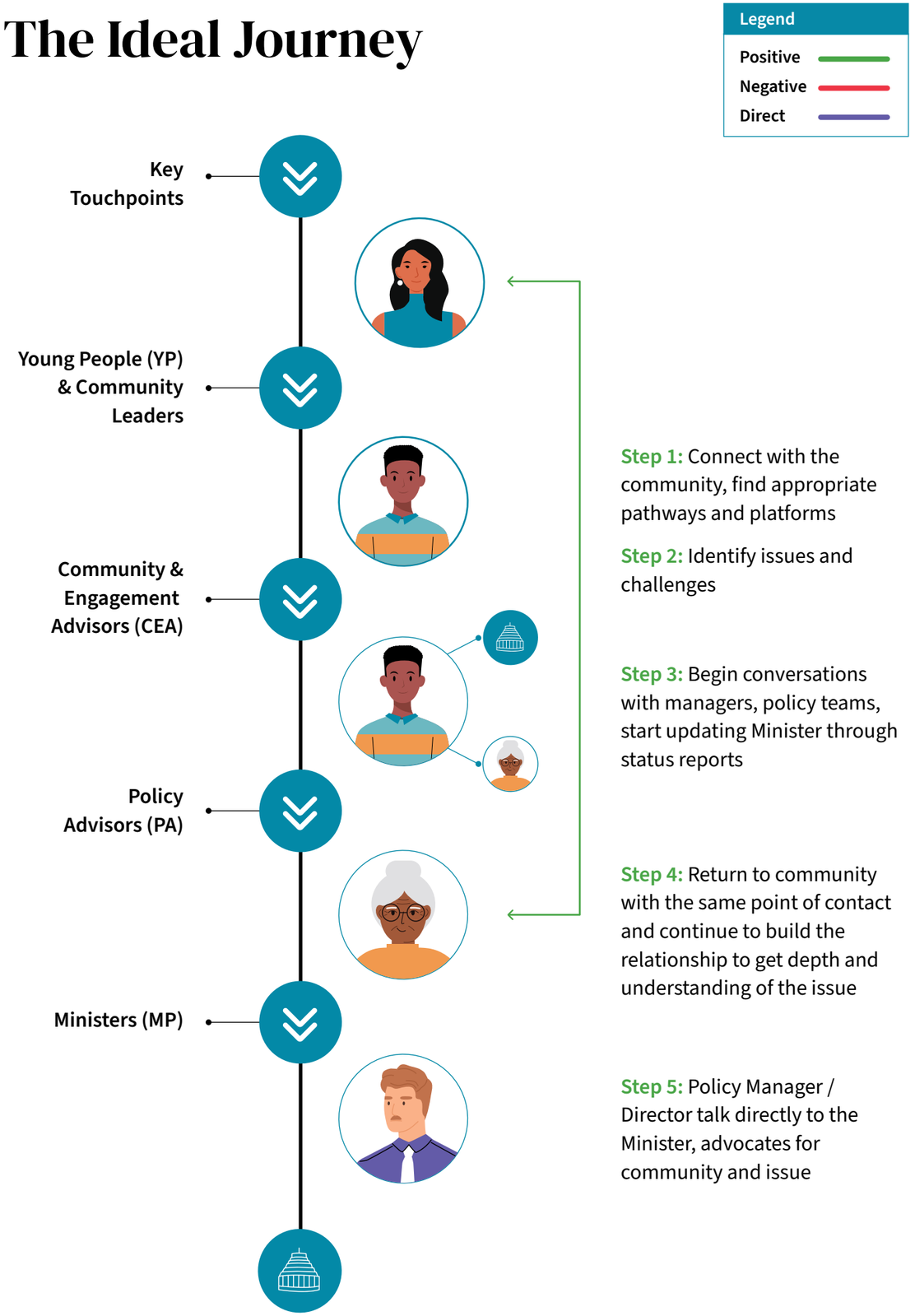
Following the empathy interviews in the discovery phase, a few journey maps were also developed alongside the discovery insights. These journey maps visually depict the various positive (or negative) experiences of an ethnic young person liaising and engaging with key touch points across the policymaking process in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The ideal journey: Reflects the journey in an ideal context, where every key touchpoint is a positive experience. The process is clear, transparent and the issues raised by the young person are not diluted or distilled.

The actual journey: Reflects the reality of the journey and how fraught, convoluted and frustrating it is for the ethnic young person who is keen to raise issues to inform policy change.

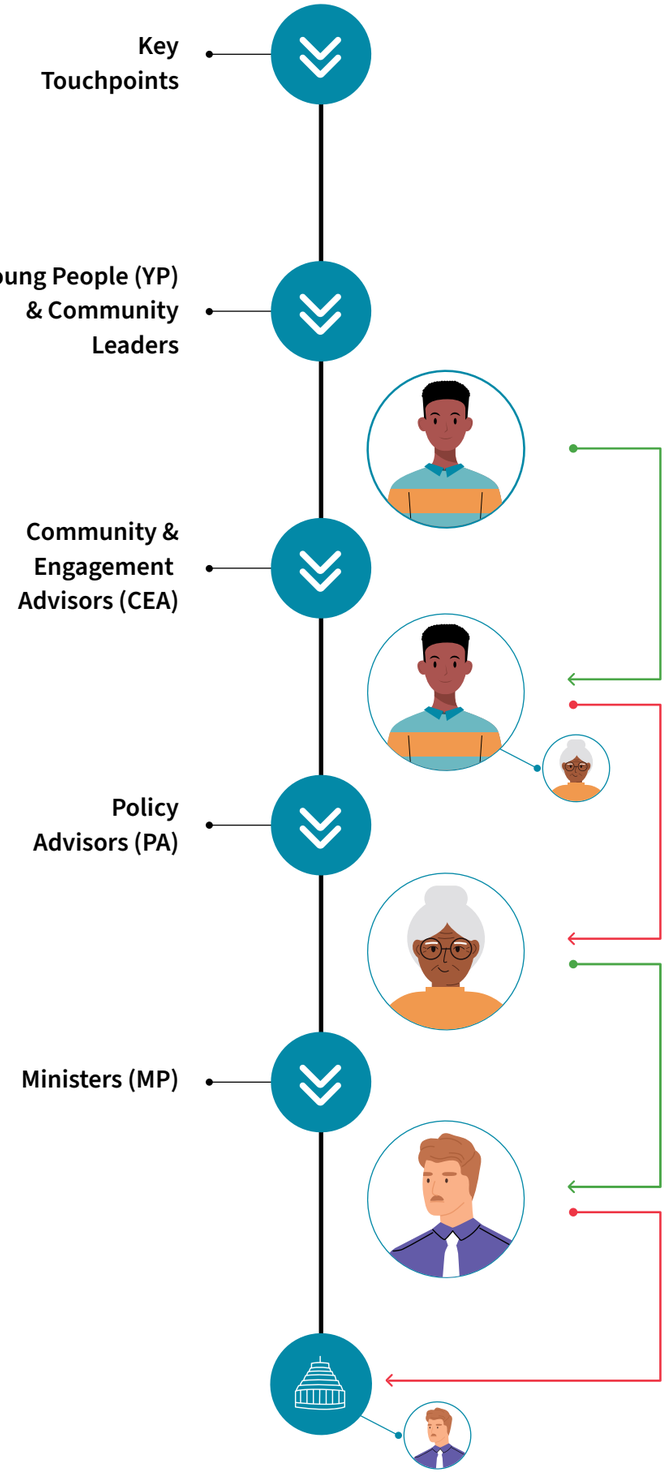
The quickest journey: Reflects both journeys, but there is an additional direct pathway of engagement with the Minister for Youth. While surpassing the various key points is not ideal and undermines the current system and structures in place, a few policymakers themselves recommended this as an alternative pathway to expedite the necessary action needed at a ministerial level to enable the policy change that the young person is seeking.

The Ideal Journey



The Actual Journey

Legend
- Positive
- Negative
- Direct



Step 1: Community and Engagement Advisors raise an issue after engaging with community

Step 2: Summaries of issues are sent to Managers, Policy teams, status reports for Minister

Step 3: Policy teams refine information. Sign off by Policy Managers, nuance is lost; limited re-engagement with the community

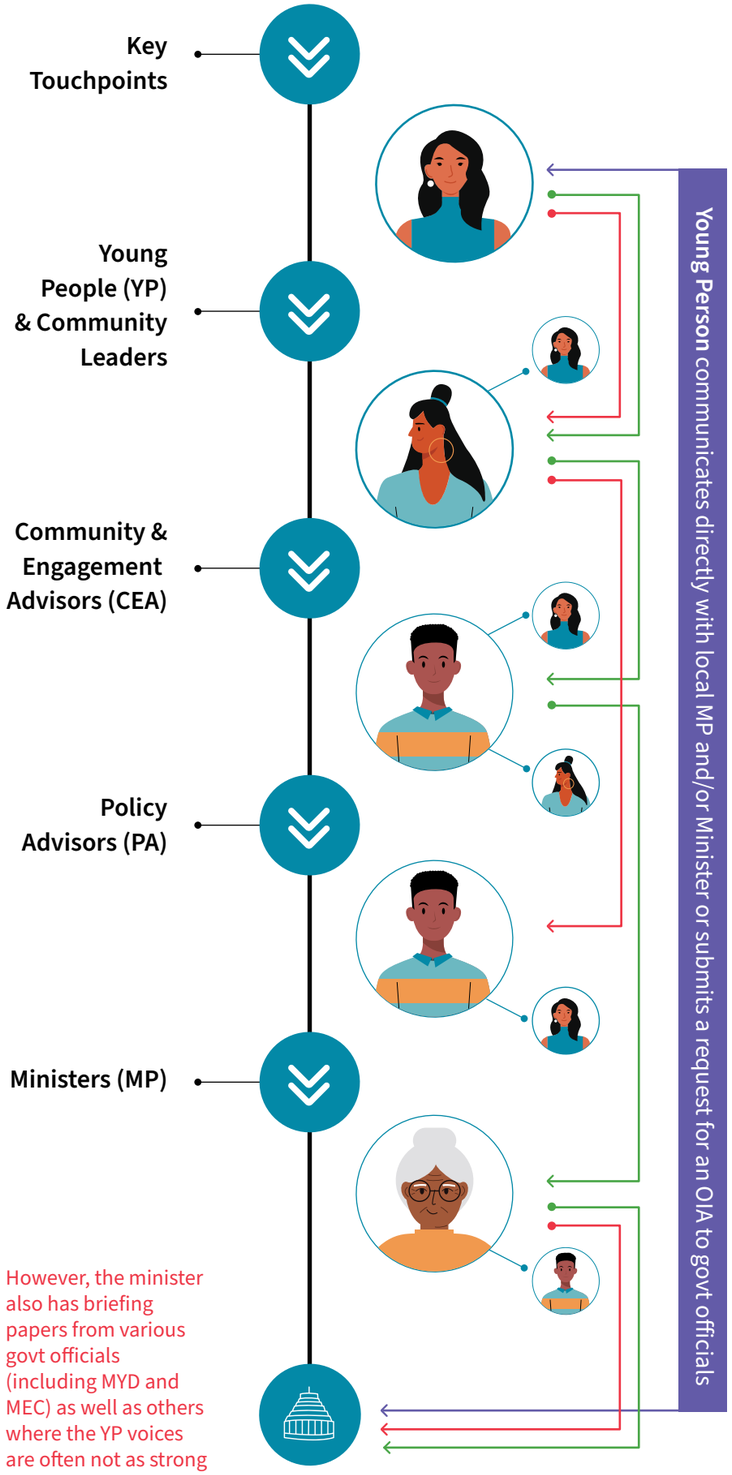
Step 4: Policy Director Sign-off

Step 5: Ministry is informed of a key issue

(however, in the process, policy has reduced potentially large and complex issues into tidy summaries)

The Quickest Journey

Legend
- Positive
- Negative
- Direct



However, the minister also has briefing papers from various govt officials (including MYD and MEC) as well as others where the YP voices are often not as strong

Young Person feels motivated to make a difference and create change

Young Person talks to Youth and/or Community Leader

Community Leader talks to Youth and/or Community encourages and supports YP to connect directly with CEA

Community Leader gate-keeps and does not support connect with community engagement advisors

Community Engagement Advisors connects well with YP (& Community Leader) and communicates internally with PA to create change

Community Engagement Advisors connect with Community Leader, unfortunately YP is bypassed and their voice is not heard or taken on board

Policy Advisors are often short on time (and/or not given the mandate) to engage with Community Engagement Advisor, Community Leaders and/or YP

Minister for Diversity, Inclusion and Ethnic Communities ideally heard directly from Ethnic YP

Discovery Insights

In total, we constructed eight key insights by synthesising the information obtained from these discovery efforts. Each insight is described below and includes selected quotes to provide additional context.

Insight #01

Ethnic young people are brimming with the desire to create change

Ethnic young people are passionate, articulate, empathetic, resilient and driven to create change for themselves and their communities. They see themselves as unique individuals, digital natives, stewards of multiple cultures and able to move between different worlds seamlessly. They bring knowledge, culture and context to any situation and are committed to being a part of the change they want to see.

"I might be young but I know I have so much to offer. I've been volunteering for almost five years now, have held multiple leadership positions and am close to finishing my university degree in international relations and law. I'm here to make the change, I want to contribute and Aotearoa New Zealand is my home."
- Ethnic Policy Analyst, 23 year old (she/her)

Insight #02

Ethnic young people's voices are not prioritised

Despite their enthusiasm, effort, commitment and potential, there is little opportunity to prioritise, value and integrate the ideas of ethnic young people within the central government policymaking process. Experiences of microaggression (subtle but aggressive behaviours) can have an erosive effect on the stamina and mental health of ethnic young people.

"Getting a seat at the table [as a young person] is a big win but unless you're listening to what we can do and taking it forward, it's just token actions."
- Ethnic Young Person, 16 year old (he/him)

"Being a young ethnic person at a table with leaders, it's hard to be taken seriously. For example, after a presentation the other leaders in the room will often bypass me, ask my manager questions and defer to them - despite the fact that I'm the one who did the work and know the subject material intimately."
- Ethnic Policy Analyst, 25 year old (she/her)

Insight #03

The community engagement process is flawed

Community Engagement Advisors are seen to have little agency and even less power to facilitate necessary change. There appears to be little communication between engagement advisors who are the direct links to the community and policy analysts who are responsible for creating and changing policy. From a young ethnic person's perspective, these fractured relationships create accessibility, communication and accountability barriers. Over time, feelings of disappointment and frustration whittle down the desire to be civically engaged and reinforce the idea that participation in policymaking processes is tokenistic and at best, mediocre and inadequate.

"Good community engagement advisors are people that are really listening and really get it, who will champion for one particular group; talk to other community engagement advisors/ manager. But do these people even exist?"
- Ethnic Young Person, 17 year old (he/him)

"There are lots of examples of experienced ethnic community members struggling to make sense and meaning of initiatives (such as social cohesion); (the language is very ambiguous and technical)"
– Ethnic Community Leader, 30 year old (she/her)

Insight #04

The central government policymaking process is convoluted

Multiple factors contribute to a highly convoluted, cumbersome, reactive and ineffective policymaking process. For policy analysts, pressures from the Ministers, a lack of cooperation between agencies, conflicting agendas and limited ethnic analyst staffing can contribute to an overwhelming sense of futility. Many policy analysts feel overworked, under-resourced and have neither the time nor energy to delve into nuances of community matters. Some analysts view the work of community engagement advisors as beneath them. In general, policy analysts often function in isolation from the community for whom they are creating change. Relationships between the policy analysts, community engagement advisors and the community are strained and/or non-existent. Overall, there is a general feeling that it is just too hard to shift the gears of government machinery.

"Policy tends to define the problem with the community, but not define the solution with the community."
– Ethnic Young Person, 22 year old (she/her)

"My role is a policy analyst - it's not my place to be engaging with the community."
– Ethnic Policy Analyst, 24 year old (she/her)

"It's not just Ministerial buy-in, there are budget bids and competition to who can get the most money out of treasury. Ministers need to get other ministers on board."
– Māori Policy Analyst, 40+ year old (she/her)

Insight #05

Building meaningful allyship is vital

During this engagement process it was often reiterated how central government (and other research-led organisations) utilise highly extractive approaches that leave little opportunity for contributions to the process or the final product. Both community partners and ethnic young people referred to meaningful allyship as an essential aspect of having an equitable and healthy relationship. Effort needs to be made on the part of central government to explore what allyship looks, sounds and feels like.

"We don't want to be tokenised and used because we're the only ethnic young person around - why do you want us on this project?"
– Ethnic Young Person, 21 year old (she/her)

"We need accountability and appropriate feedback processes built in the project design, so community partners and youth participants feel supported and listened to during the process."
– Ethnic Policy Analyst, 24 year old (she/her)

Insight #06

Alternative pathways to creating change are necessary

The current pathways for ethnic youth engagement in policymaking are fraught with obstacles and free and frank conversations are needed to generate change. The long-term solution is to rebuild the system in mana-enhancing and uplifting ways for all involved. Developing alternative pathways that create the change that everyone wants to see requires a willingness to start from scratch. These alternative pathways must be freed from the rules and regulations that delineate the current process and allow new ways of thinking and exchange to take place that are outside the limits of the current conventions.

"We need to foster a level of willingness and desire before we start to engage - people need to be convinced that it's really important to engage these voices."
– Ethnic Young Person, 16 year old (she/her)

"If I don't see the government care more about racism, what's the point of trying to support ethnic youth? There are a million bills to submit on, we just become another item on the list."
– Ethnic Policy Analyst, 27 year old (she/her)

Insight #07

Ethnic policymakers feel ethnic-related concerns are not prioritised

Ethnic policymakers in central government highlighted that the current stratification of priorities and needs (often Māori, Pasifika and then different ethnic populations) did not serve the interests of ethnic communities in an equitable manner. This opinion was not echoed by ethnic community partners or ethnic young people. Perhaps this view is the result of ethnic analysts having worked in government and acknowledging that, while there is still '200 years of catching up to do', it does feel that Te Tiriti o Waitangi needs to be revisited in order to be more inclusive.

"It's not to take it away from Māori and Pasifika, but there's just 200 years of catching up."
– Ethnic Policy Analyst, 28 year old (she/her)

"Relationships with Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi come from a sense of obligation… not necessarily because it's a good thing and so the rest of the ethnic lens can sometimes get a bit lost."
– Ethnic Policy Analyst, 26 year old (she/her)

Insight #08

Ethnic young people are exhausted

The mental, emotional, spiritual and physical toll on ethnic migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand (irrespective of how long they have been here) is a recurring and concerning factor that shapes the experience of belonging and inclusion in Aotearoa New Zealand. To enhance belonging and self-worth, ethnic young people often engage in code-switching and constantly fight to be seen as more than a 'migrant' before they open their mouth.

"I'm so tired of fighting against racism and being the token ethnic person at the table - it would be so good if someone else actually spoke up but that rarely happens."
– Ethnic Policy Analyst, 25 year old (she/her)

"It's been so good to share my thoughts with two other women of colour, it's not often the interviewer is ethnic."
– Ethnic Policy Analyst, 22 year old (she/her)

The Innovation Phase

After synthesising the insights from the discovery phase, a group of ethnic young people and people working in government came together in three interactive online workshops to co-design a solution that would address some of the barriers to involving young ethnic people more effectively and visibly in policymaking.

Co-design is a design-led process that uses creative participatory methods. There is no one-size-fits-all approach nor a set of checklists to follow. Instead, there are a series of patterns and principles that can be applied in diverse ways with different people.

Co-designers are not just a consultative group or committee, instead they collectively make decisions about what needs to change. In this way, co-design is an approach that helps centre the needs of the users and, in so doing, it can challenge entrenched power imbalances over who makes important decisions about other people's lives.

The Co-Design Process

The eight discovery insights were used to develop specific **dramatic scenarios**. Like the personas presented earlier, the scenarios were informed and inspired by the empathy interviews and shared with the co-designers along with the journey maps and the eight insights so they could connect more deeply with the lived experiences of the discovery phase participants.

The next step was to develop ideas to address the situation based on the discovery insights. Generating ideas is improved when prompts for ideation are provided that are not too broad to be overwhelming or too specific to be overly constraining. The co-designers used **How Might We (HMW)** questions to develop these ideation prompts. HMW questions can draw together key insights to provide a foundation for how these elements can be addressed to solve a problem. HMWs are necessarily specific and, as such, only cover select aspects of the problem context; however by utilising a range of HMWs we provided a range of opportunities to identify solutions. The co-design team developed six HMWs.

How might we...

1. create channels for ethnic young people to contribute to policymaking?

2. ensure that young people understand the realities and limitations of the policymaking process, so they do not become cynical and mistrusting?

3. create mana-enriching experiences of allyship between ethnic young people, policy analysts and community leaders, because people often burn out and need to be well supported to produce change?

4. bridge the reality gap between ethnic young people and policymakers about their diverse needs without tokenising or exhausting young people in the process?

5. support ethnic minority policymakers with the space and tools they need to effectively advocate for ethnic minority young people, as they are often leading this work?

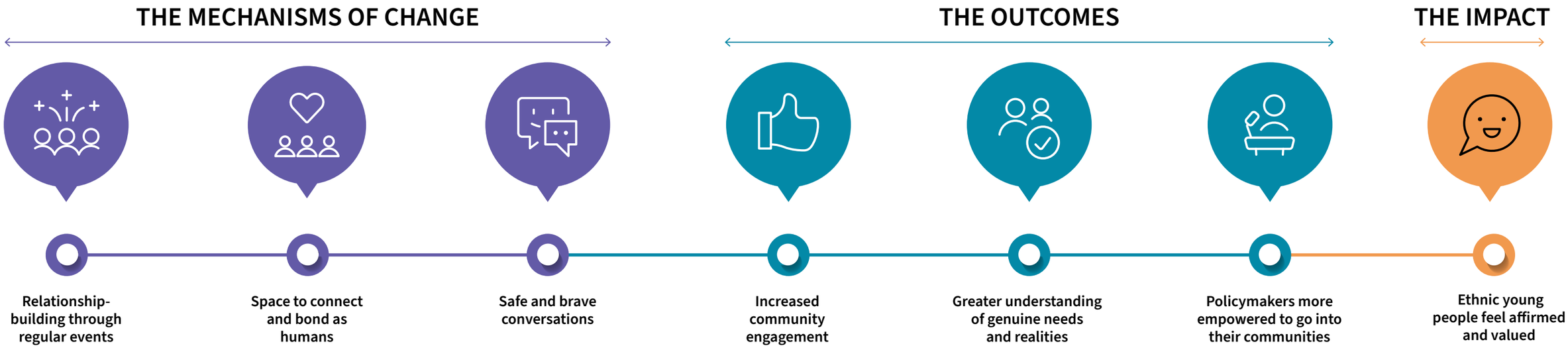
6. provide a clear line of sight from community input to policy output?

The HMWs discussions created a launchpad for ideation of possible solutions. Through rapid team-based brainstorming, feedback loops, interrogation and decision-making processes, numerous potential solutions were whittled down to four ideas that progressed to the rough prototyping stage. The four initial ideas included
a) a cross-school special interest policy club with educational workshops;
b) specialised training on social power for policymakers;
c) incentivising policy outcomes that demonstrate involvement of young people in the policy generation process; and
d) fun, monthly meet-ups between young people and policymakers.

Eventually, two ideas were refined, "relationship-building monthly meet-ups" and "incentivising brave conversations" and selected to pitch to the Challenge Team. The Challenge Team consisted of young people and policymakers who had not been involved with the project, but expressed interest as relevant stakeholders. The Challenge Team provided critical feedback on the potential solutions to help maximise their utility to various stakeholders. Iterative conversation and valuable feedback from both the co-design and Challenge Team members led to consensus and further development of one prototype, which was eventually refined into the "Connect & Kōrero" pilot. The pilot was primarily based on the "monthly meet-ups" idea but also incorporated the "brave conversations" aspect of the other idea.

The Theory of Change

The theory of change for Connect & Kōrero outlines the rationale for how this solution is thought to address the design challenge we were tasked with, as shown below.



THE SUCCESS FACTORS

Genuine youth-adult collaboration and co-design

The first part of the theory of change provides an overview of the key features of the innovation and the mechanisms of change leading to immediate, intermediate and, eventually, longer-term outcomes.

The theory of change highlights assumptions that:

- events that occur in a fun, easy-going and apolitical environment where the focus is on building relationships first will help break down barriers to trust
- the events create space to connect without the typical power dynamics that create difficulties for perspective-taking

Balanced structure

- this enables courageous conversations to occur during points of connection
- once trust is established via events that are not exhausting, community engagement should increase and young people and policymakers should develop a better understanding of each other's lived realities and their needs
- in the intermediate term, the expectation is that this would help young people and policymakers form mana-enhancing allyships and policymakers would feel more empowered to visit their communities to engage directly with young people

Frequency of engagement

- in the long-term, continued meaningful engagement and allyship would affirm young people's sense of belonging and would help them feel more valued and heard

Importantly, the links in this theoretical rationale connect to several of the six HMWs provided on page 33, along with the long-term vision of creating a solution that impacts young people's sense that their views matter in government policymaking and that they belong in Aotearoa New Zealand society.

At the same time, the theory of change presents the co-design team's logic of how Connect & Kōrero should work under ideal circumstances. It is also helpful to consider factors that would likely help or hinder the innovation's success in real-world circumstances.

Participant mindsets and power dynamics

The Challenge Team supported the co-designers to consider a range of facilitating and impeding conditions, in addition to the enablers and barriers to youth participation in policymaking identified in the discovery process. The success factors the teams identified included:

- **genuine youth-adult collaboration and co-design** to plan and implement events and to ensure they are engaging, relevant, accessible and impactful for all involved and that they can be effectively promoted
- **balanced structure** to allow a fun and relaxed atmosphere but also meaningful interactions and flexibility to attend at times that fit with other personal commitments
- **the frequency of the events** need to occur regularly enough to build relationships but not so often that they become burdensome and exacerbate exhaustion
- **participant mindsets and power dynamics** need to be well-managed so that negative or limiting attitudes and communication tensions across same and cross-age cultural groups do not compromise engagement, inclusion and emotional and cultural safety
- **mentoring support** from positive same and cross-age role models and allies enables participation of both youth and adults; an approach that embraces ako (mutual and reverse mentorship of adults by young people) help to showcase young people's strengths and expertise
- **representative participation** from young people and government workers with a diversity of lived experiences and characteristics requires attention to a range of access barriers, the quality and reach of promotional materials and relevant incentives
- the amount of **time and resourcing** invested will determine the innovation's success; too much or too little can compromise its sustainability

Mentoring support

Representative participation

Time and resourcing

The Logic Analysis: Insights from the Research Literature

We know from evaluations of many social initiatives that assumptions about what works to produce change are sometimes incorrect – they can be biased or altogether wrong.[20]

A logic analysis assesses existing evidence to verify the logic of a theory of change.[20] A logic analysis allows designers and developers to see if studies of similar initiatives or experiences support or conflict with the assumptions of the innovative solution. This approach to reviewing existing evidence can generate useful insights that affirm ideas or that point to areas where change or further refinement might be needed to enhance impact or prevent risk. In this way, a logic analysis can prevent misuse of time and resources and help identify potential unintended consequences that could produce harm.[20]

We reviewed 86 different policy and research documents, produced in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and overseas, to assess how likely the features of Connect & Kōrero would produce the desired outcomes and if the factors identified as influencing the success of the innovation were likely to make a difference. Our logic analysis drew on evidence produced from research about the settlement experiences of new migrant and refugee background young people, as well as youth participation initiatives with them. We also reviewed research about general youth participation practices used in different types of youth programming, civic engagement and policy development initiatives and youth participatory action research. As we summarise next, focusing primarily on the literature involving ethnic migrant and refugee young people, this analysis affirmed many of the ideas captured in the Connect & Kōrero theory of change. The logic analysis also allowed us to expand our understanding of processes, outcomes and success factors that should be carefully considered in progressing the Connect & Kōrero pilot to a sustainable model.

Research Insights

Young people appreciate and benefit from a “relationships-first” emphasis

The co-designers’ emphasis on young people and policymakers needing to focus on whakawhanaungatanga and build relationships as a first step towards meaningful participation is consistently reinforced by existing research.

- Mana Taiohi, a bicultural youth development framework for Aotearoa New Zealand, recognises whanaungatanga as a core pathway to enhance youth development [21] and this relationship-building principle is supported by international and national youth development evidence.[22, 23]
- A relationships-first approach requires trust, an ethic of care and a setting where young people feel comfortable and not judged when communicating their ideas, emotions and experiences. [7, 24 -25]
- Time for relationship-building is essential for building a cohesive youth-adult team[24] and meaningful cross-age and cross-cultural interactions can reduce negative mindsets that are often a barrier to effective youth-adult partnerships.[26]
- Spaces to connect with and share their culture and experiences with like-minded peers and adults can reduce the sense of isolation many ethnic and other marginalised young people feel and these connections can increase help-seeking.[17, 27 - 29]
- Places that foster meaningful connections can create platforms for networking, building social capital and access to additional resources and opportunities that can have a transformative impact for ethnic young people and their families’ behaviours.[17, 30 - 31]

Regular engagement in structured activities balanced with fun and relaxation is conducive to impactful youth participation

As proposed by the co-designers, meaningful youth-adult partnerships happen when partners come together regularly and over a sustained duration. Fun activities help to reduce the sense of discomfort that young people and adults commonly feel when brought together for the first time and a mix of structured, goal-focused activities with unstructured time for informal cross-age interactions allows progress towards a shared vision while creating additional opportunities for impactful connections.

- Regular intergroup exchanges (between people from different ages, cultures, status groups, working environments, etc.) builds mutual understanding and supports the creation of impactful relationships and progress towards shared goals.[13, 32, 33]
- It is normal for unfamiliar young people and adults to feel a sense of disconnect and awkwardness when they come together.[34, 35]
- Fun and purposeful relationship-building, through rituals, shared meals, songs and games in the spirit of celebration, facilitates social cohesion and active participation and is valued by young people [10, 16, 34, 36]; these activities are especially important in breaking down barriers for young people who are suspicious of government agendas and find speaking out through formal consultation methods daunting.[34]
- A lack of structure and support to find common ground can be debilitating for young people when working towards a shared goal, whereas providing a general framework with space for youth agency gives useful direction and facilitates progress that generates a sense of accomplishment.[36]
- Unstructured time to relax and connect informally offers different kinds of opportunities for participation and for different youth strengths and needs to be recognised[4, 10, 37]; however, adults need to intentionally step into those ad hoc opportunities and encourage young people to do the same or opportunities will be missed.[32]

Unequal power dynamics and limiting mindsets must be addressed upfront

The concerns about the need to create emotionally and culturally safe spaces and to manage power dynamics among young people and between adults and young people, are well-founded. Unfortunately, one of the most consistent barriers to effective youth participation is adultism, a limiting mindset that results in adults having difficulties genuinely sharing power with young people.

- Features of adultism include attitudes and behaviours that communicate (sometimes unintentionally) that adults are superior to young people because of their greater experience and knowledge; as a result, adults may believe that young people need protection and adults to make decisions for them.[24, 38, 39]
- Adultism indicates a lack of respect for young people's abilities and lower valuing of their opinions; consequences include dismissing young people's contributions, limiting or controlling their participation and internalisation of these beliefs by young people, which negatively influences their confidence, sense of autonomy and willingness to seek help.[32]
- Adultism is sometimes hard to recognise because it is masked by romanticised views or age-blindness, meaning that differences in adult-youth knowledge and capabilities are ignored and support is not provided by adults when it is needed.[39, 40]
- Unequal power dynamics between people from different ethnic groups and different genders within the same ethnic group due to intergroup histories and cultural values can also restrict some participants' sense of safety and levels of engagement.[8, 10, 41]
- Some young people have high levels of mistrust towards government representatives or adults in general because of tokenistic prior experiences or past trauma from historical interactions with authorities; this mistrust can limit their willingness to engage in participation initiatives if not acknowledged and addressed.[8, 17, 34]
- Successful strategies to manage unequal power dynamics have included setting and reinforcing clear expectations and creating space to regularly reflect and debrief about challenging interpersonal dynamics so they are brought to the surface and addressed in a safe manner through skilled facilitation.[13, 38, 40, 41]

Youth-adult collaboration is key to success

The focus on having ethnic young people, community leaders and policymakers all involved in the planning, coordination and implementation of Connect & Kōrero aligns with existing research. A growing body of evidence on youth–adult partnerships demonstrates that successful youth participation initiatives require genuine collaboration.

- Genuine partnerships meaningfully involve both young people and adults, weaving together their expertise to make joint decisions within a co-governance structure.[30, 32, 42]
- All young people and adults are recognised as equals where each person has valid opinions, agendas are relevant to all involved and shared expectations and goals are agreed to.[17, 24, 32, 43]
- In effective partnerships, adults let go of full control and share power; they actively listen to and consider young people's ideas and contribute as guides through a "scaffold and fade" approach; this involves providing a structure, direction and capability building support when needed and stepping back to allow young people to take leadership when ready.[5, 30, 38, 40]
- Regular contact with influential decision-makers and systems that incorporate feedback loops so young people understand how and why their input was used increases the likelihood that shared goals are feasible and achieved and young people feel respected, heard and valued for their contributions. [13, 24, 37, 40, 42, 43]

Young people and adults benefit from skilled mentoring and facilitation support

Consistent evidence also supports the assumption that involving mentors and peer allies can enhance the success of participation initiatives. Mentors can provide bridging and translation support to improve the accessibility of information and participation opportunities. Adults, as well as young people, typically require capability-building support from skilled mentor facilitators to forge effective youth–adult partnerships.

- Peer education and advocacy and "buddy" systems have been effectively used to broker access and orient ethnic migrant, refugee and other seldom heard young people to services, influential networks and participation opportunities.[9, 24, 29, 43 - 46]
- However, mentoring and facilitation approaches can be harmful to new migrants and refugees if they are not culturally appropriate and trauma-informed. [9, 13, 47]
- Features of culturally appropriate mentoring include reflective discussions about the impact of discrimination and oppression, provision of food, translation support, incorporation of cultural ideas, involvement of family and group mentoring models.[9]
- Young people who have experienced trauma may also need opportunities to debrief and obtain emotional support from skilled mentors.[48, 49]
- Training that deepens young people's understanding and knowledge of civic issues and cultivates leadership, communication and other technical skills that can transfer to other contexts and grows young people's confidence and capabilities in impactful ways. [17, 18, 50]
- Adults commonly lack the knowledge and skills needed to effectively partner with youth; training in participatory processes, Positive Youth Development, cultural responsivity, anti-adultist approaches and trauma-informed care that is run jointly by expert staff and ethnic young people can build the necessary capabilities.[13, 46]
- Skilled facilitation includes active involvement to work alongside partner members; role modelling of desired behaviours; mindfulness of power imbalances; and the ability to manage challenging group dynamics, create safe spaces for meaningful dialogue, build trusting relationships and motivate participants to progress towards a shared vision.[10, 47]

Lack of diverse representation is a persistent challenge

The theory of change rightly acknowledges that the impact of youth participation initiatives will be limited if they do not reach a diverse range of ethnic young people and policymakers. Across the globe, people have difficulty engaging young people who represent a diversity of characteristics and contexts.

- Representation of male and female genders and a diversity of ethnic groups is often an intentional focus but there is consistent under-representation from gender and sexually diverse, disabled and out-of-school or low-achieving young people, as well as those who are involved in care and protection and justice systems and from forced migration backgrounds.[18, 43]
- The commonly used term “hard-to-reach” implies the problem lies with the young people rather than in the approaches adults have traditionally used to engage youth; this has led to researchers using the term “seldom heard” to characterise these groups instead.[43]
- If seldom heard groups are not able to access participation opportunities, inequities between advantaged and disadvantaged can be reinforced because seldom heard groups continue to miss out on the developmental opportunities that come with involvement and services and policies continue to overlook their needs and interests.[30, 43]
- New migrants and refugees are often excluded from opportunities because they lack English language proficiency and cultural knowledge, or they resist information because of discrimination, government distrust and services that are not culturally appropriate.[7, 12, 18, 44, 51]
- Information that is translated in the target groups’ native languages and shared by ingroup members who can contextualise the information and address apprehension assists with reducing access barriers for new migrants,[12, 18, 44] as does peer outreach in schools and communities and efforts that include young people’s family members.[9, 10, 44, 48]
- Arts-based approaches have also been successful in providing avenues for young people with English language difficulties and other seldom heard groups to meaningfully express themselves without compromising their self-efficacy and esteem.[9, 43, 44]
- Some initiatives have been successful in reaching seldom heard groups through a blend of online social media that are relevant to the target group alongside in person recruitment by relatable peers or trusted non-migrants who can bridge sociocultural and language gaps.[12, 18, 44]

Time and resourcing greatly affects the quality of participation opportunities

The uneasiness expressed by some co-design and challenge team members about the need to volunteer time outside of work alongside other important commitments to plan and attend regular events is well-justified. It is short-sighted to implement an under-resourced participation initiative as it risks making young people feel tokenised and further alienated and can exacerbate burnout for both young people and adults.

- Financial compensation commensurate with each individual’s role, responsibilities and level of expertise is needed to reduce burnout, turnover and to address access barriers for both the young people and adults who are involved on an ongoing basis.[10, 13, 17, 48]
- Flexible timing of opportunities that is responsive to young people’s other commitments increases likelihood of engagement.[3, 17, 18, 44]
- Opportunities that concurrently address new migrants’ immediate needs to support their families, grow their social capital and life skills and facilitate their access to further education and employment can incentivise participation,[17, 18, 37, 44] but this depends on ongoing commitment and adequate resources.
- Sustainable participation initiatives require long-term government investment to build durable relationships with decision-makers, ensure resources are easily accessed and initiatives are evaluated, feedback loops are incorporated and systems support progress towards long-term impact.[13]
- The quality features of effective participation initiatives described in the above section also necessitate intensive resourcing – i.e., a setting and an approach that are culturally appropriate and comfortable for ethnic young people, the employment of skilled facilitators, capability-building support, accessible and engaging promotional materials and outreach efforts to involve seldom heard young people.

The Implementation Phase and Pilot

The logic analysis interfaced with the establishment of an implementation team that was tasked with further developing the prototype into the Connect & Kōrero pilot. The pilot testing followed three iterations over a three-month timeline and aligned with a co-design approach that seeks to maintain momentum and test ideas quickly to obtain timely insights that can be fed into further development and subsequent iterations. Before the first Connect & Kōrero hui, insights from the logic analysis were shared with the implementation team for consideration in their design and development process. Building in effective youth-adult collaboration and mentoring support were identified as priorities that could be incorporated at this early stage of the innovation's development.

The Implementation Team

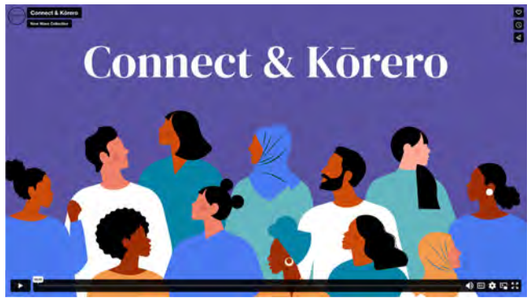
To facilitate the implementation of this prototype and to grow connections with the communities for whom this innovation was designed to support, we brought in a community partner organisation, Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono (IACT) to help oversee the implementation and support the recruitment of young people and policymakers.

IACT is a nationwide community-led organisation working to create an inclusive, Te Tiriti-based future for Aotearoa New Zealand. IACT is working towards an Aotearoa New Zealand where the collective futures of communities are front and centre and aims to support these communities in identifying and implementing solutions that work for them across sectors.

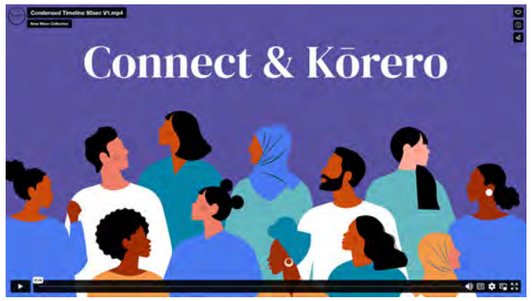
IACT used their expertise to help engage with community groups, recruit young people and policymakers for the hui and to oversee the delivery of the three Connect & Kōrero hui.

In collaboration with IACT we developed a youth-led arm of the implementation team to drive and deliver the Connect & Kōrero pilot, which the young people called the "Fun Committee".

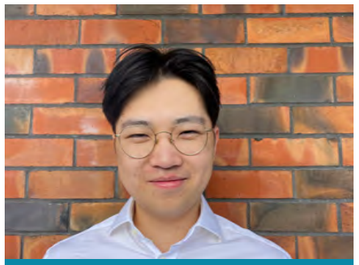
Overall process video



Highlights video



Fun Committee

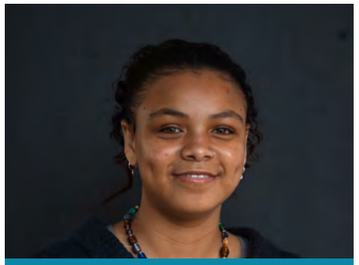


Andy Kei

CVR Shastry

Jasrose Kaur Mallhi

Karan Kalsi



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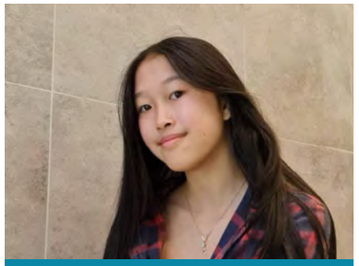
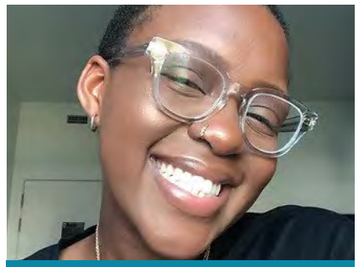
Leticia Alvarez



Rebecca Huang

Samuel Eraso-Diaz

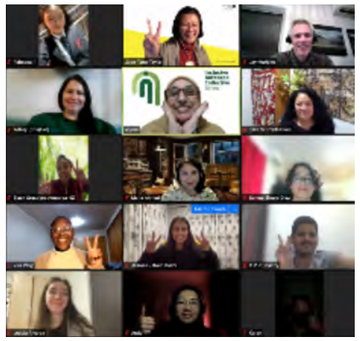


Vira Paky

Nine young people from the co-design phase volunteered to be on the Fun Committee, whose task was to decide on the activities for each Connect & Kōrero hui that would create spaces where young people and policymakers could build trust and understanding. This committee met weekly and was supported by a staff member from the Innovation Unit with a strong background in community development, positive youth development and the use of the arts. This committee represents one of the key elements to the success of the Connect & Kōrero prototype.

Together, the implementation team comprised members from the Fun Committee, Innovation Unit, IACT and the University of Auckland. This group also met weekly and their task was to look at the practical implications of realising the Fun Committee's vision of these hui.

Black Creatives Aotearoa was another community partner who was invited to support Connect & Kōrero with the creation of the digital assets including photography and videography.



Three Hui

We tested three Connect & Kōrero hui and took critical learnings from each to inform subsequent deliveries to design and improve the piloting of these events iteratively.

Connect & Kōrero Hui 1 - July 2022:

Face to face at the Grid/AKL Futures Lab, Wynyard Quarter, Auckland – 15 young people and eight policymakers participated. The first hui was arranged at a central location in downtown Auckland on a Saturday. It was planned as a longer interaction, starting from midday till late afternoon (12 p.m. till 4 p.m.). Ethnic food was also arranged for the participants and games were hired to make it a fun time for the participants. The open space plan of the venue gave maximum opportunity for engagement and collective participation in the activities. Many people in the implementation team met in person for the first time after a long online engagement during the different phases of the project. Young people especially appreciated the opportunity of being physically present in a beautiful interactive space. In the first hui, participants had honest and open discussions about what Kiwi culture means to them and how they feel about major issues that are urgent in our times like climate change, peace and wars, poverty and wealth distribution. Young ethnic people also discussed how having an opinion about these issues affects their relations with their older generation who may have a different world view based on their experiences of different cultures.

Connect & Kōrero Hui 2 - August 2022:

Online via ZOOM - 14 young people and two policymakers participated.

To test a different format and to ensure maximum outreach of the initiative to the ethnic young people in different parts of New Zealand, the second hui was online and a comparatively shorter interaction was planned. It was arranged on a Sunday afternoon from 1 p.m. till 3 p.m.

This hui encouraged ethnic young people and policymakers to reflect on myths and misunderstandings that hinder the meaningful information sharing and relationship building between ethnic young people and policymakers.

Connect & Kōrero Hui 3 - September 2022:

Face to face at the Fickling Centre, Mt Roskill, Auckland Central - 21 young people and five policy makers participated. In the third hui, learnings and feedback from the implementation team was considered to further test the impact of the factors such as time, venue and incentives on ethnic youth participation. Therefore, instead of weekends, the third hui was arranged on a weekday in after-school hours (4 p.m. till 7 p.m.) to facilitate the participation of school-going ethnic young people. Moreover, the venue was also shifted closer to a suburb of Auckland with a high ethnic density population. Assistance with transportation and koha for participation was also provided to the participants along with a light pizza dinner.

This hui was focused more on envisioning change by the ethnic young people and what positive changes they want to see in their schools and in the wider society to feel confident in actively and meaningfully participating in the civic life of Aotearoa New Zealand. Ethnic young people were committed and enthusiastic about continuation of these conversations.

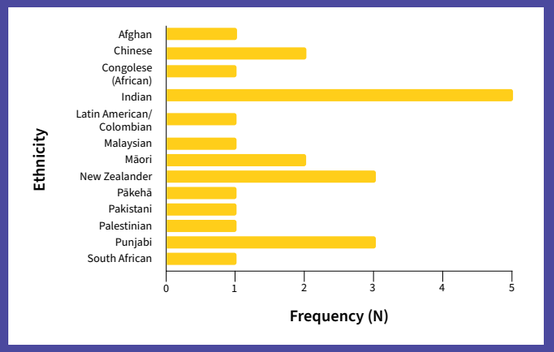
Overall, all three Connect & Kōrero hui provided opportunities for developing connection and understanding between ethnic young people and policymakers. Activities and interaction were designed and facilitated to provide insights into policymakers' and young people's lives and work.

As new participants were expected to join in every hui, each hui was designed to have a good balance of icebreakers to build initial comfort before facilitating activities to build understanding and develop insights. In all group activities, it was imperative that each group had a good mix of policymakers and ethnic youth participants, to allow relevant knowledge exchange and building of connections. Events were hosted and moderated by young ethnic people from the Fun Committee, to empower ethnic young people during the process and to help them feel in control during the conversations so as to address the power issues related to youth-adult interaction dynamics.

The Evaluation

Earlier on in the process, the co-designers helped shape the focus and approach to the evaluation so we could collect data to further improve the pilot. A voting process with the co-designers resulted in us prioritising the following evaluation questions:

- How accessible are the events to a diverse range of ethnic young people and government officials?
- How representative of a diverse range of ethnic young people and government officials are the participants who attend the events?
- How effective are the events at increasing young people and government officials' understanding of each other's realities and needs?



Number of ethnic groups represented

The co-designers also suggested that an anonymous online survey completed after the final hui would reduce participant burden and result in more honest responses.

All hui attendees (N = 44) were sent a link to the survey and invited to respond to closed and open-ended questions about their characteristics and the hui they attended. 20 attendees (44.45%) participated in the survey. 50% of the survey participants attended two or more hui. Not all participants answered all survey questions, therefore, the number of responses per question varies. Nine participants each identified as male and female; two did not respond to the question. One identified as rainbow and another identified as a disabled person.

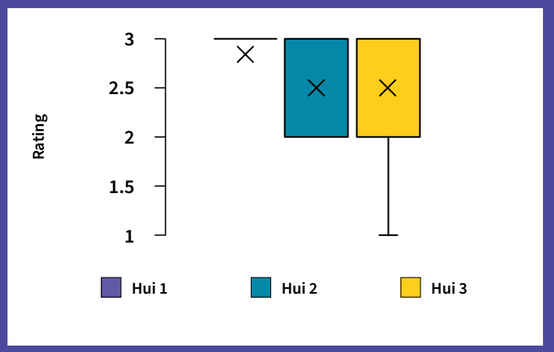
Overall, participants were ethnically diverse and four identified as a refugee. Five had lived in Aotearoa New Zealand for less than 10 years, eight for 10-19 years and six for over 19 years.

Participant age ranged from 16 to 38 years. Overall and across each hui, most participants were under 25 years of age (n=13).

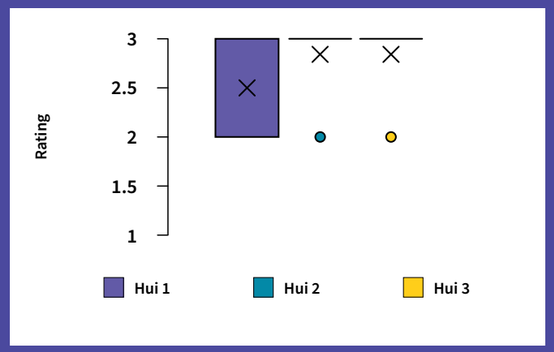
Young participants' prior engagement with policymaking varied. For four young people, the hui provided their first opportunity to engage in policymaking. Most reported being a little to somewhat involved and some reported high levels of prior involvement in policymaking. Because many of the adult participants were government workers, all but one reported previous involvement with policymaking.

Opportunities for youth and adults to participate in activities and discussions

For each hui they attended, survey participants used rubric-based responses to indicate to what extent youth and adults participated in hui activities and contributed to the discussions (1 = very few, 2 = about half, 3 = many). Open-ended questions provided opportunities for hui participants to further explain their ratings.



Level of youth participation



Level of adult participation

Although ratings across all three hui showed, on average, at least half or more of the young people participated in the hui activities, youth participation was lower at hui 2 and 3. In addition, at hui 3, some reported that very few young people participated in this hui. Qualitative comments revealed hui 2 and 3 were dominated by one or two individuals, as noted by one person at hui 3, *"The facilitator was doing most of the talking so we didn't really get a chance to share."*

Strategies that facilitated youth participation included equal distribution of youth and adults, the use of examples by facilitators, breaking into smaller groups and an emphasis on having fun as one young person noted, *"It was difficult to not participate and I think most wanted to because there was emphasis on having fun. Having fun was a great way to make people more comfortable."*

When compared with youth participation, ratings of adult participation showed an opposite pattern. At hui 1, participants reported lower participation among adults compared to hui 2 and 3. The open-ended responses showed that across all three hui, participants said there was limited opportunity for adults to contribute:

"More adult should be given a chance to speak and voice their opinions." **(hui 1)**

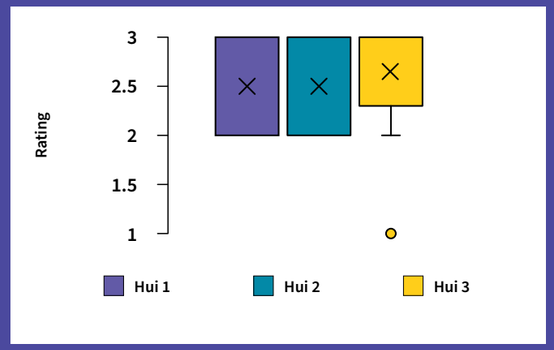
"Adults couldn't provide their ideas and didn't have the opportunity to take things further." **(hui 2)**

"Strangely, adults spoke but didn't have ample opportunity to really drive conversations and encourage younger people to participate." **(hui 3)**

However, as one young person noted, adults who listen (rather than inform) create more space for young people to participate, *"The adult participants seemed to take a lot of the things that young people had to say on board and came with a very open mind. They liked to listen rather than to inform, which I as a young person really appreciated."* The role of adults in creating spaces where young people felt comfortable was echoed by others across all hui.

Opportunities for youth and adult interactions and connections

Participants also used rubric-based responses to indicate the amount and quality of youth and adult interaction and connections during each hui (1 = didn't interact and connect, 2 = had some interactions and connections, 3 = had a lot of interactions and connections).



Level of youth-adult interaction

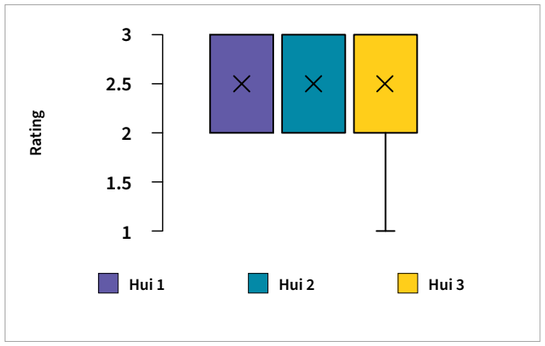
Participants indicated, on average, youth and adults had a lot of opportunities to interact and connect across all three hui. However, one person at hui 3 reported that there were little if any connections between youth and adults at this hui.

The qualitative comments were favorable, with one adult participant at hui 1 sharing *"I connected with a lot of youth and a lot youth connected with me."* As noted previously, icebreakers and breakout rooms / small group discussion not only facilitated youth participation, but also adult-youth connections.

However, one participant who attended hui 1 noted that *"… some questions and things said felt insensitive and disheartening"* while a hui 3 attendee felt *"…the people that attended were not very diverse, I was expecting people from other parts of Auckland and the country but the hui hadn't reached other areas."*

Opportunities for youth and adults to have meaningful conversations and share perspectives

Finally, participants reported on the extent to which the hui provided opportunities for young people and adults to meaningfully share perspectives on topics that were important to them (1 = did not create opportunities, 2 = created a few opportunities, 3 = created opportunities for most).



Level of youth-adult conversation

Participants indicated that the hui did create opportunities for most youth and adults to connect and share their perspectives because participants felt safe, comfortable and encouraged (but not forced).

However, it is important to note that for hui 3 a few participants rated this hui lower indicating that this hui did not create an opportunity for meaningful conversation. Interestingly one attendee noted *"I wish we had a little bit more time! I think it took a little while to get into the discussion and we needed maybe an extra 15 minutes to really dig into some meaningful kōrero."*

Qualitative feedback from the fun committee

In addition to providing feedback about the events via an anonymous survey, the Fun Committee met virtually online a week after hui 3 to reflect on their experiences. Fun Committee members commented on how coordinating, hosting, leading and facilitating the Connect & Kōrero hui was an enriching experience. They developed new skills, formed connections with others (young people and adults) and felt valued, *"I liked showing these conversations matter, acknowledging people's experiences by creating these spaces."* Others shared how the hui were life changing and enlightening and how they will use the skills and knowledge gained in the future: *"I will try to be a better voice for Rangatahi aspirations and hopes"* and *"…really try to encourage conversations about deeper topics with my friends".* One person commented on the importance and value of getting *"more young people excited about policy"*. Many were sad the pilot was finished and wondered if they would continue, the impact they might have on Aotearoa New Zealand and if the government would do anything with what had been started.

Summary of opportunities

In brief, the evaluation insights indicated:

- The hui seemed accessible to a diverse range of young people and government workers – for some young people these hui were their first opportunity to engage policymakers. However, participants would have liked to have seen more adults attend and greater representation of young people from across the country.
- The participants were ethnically diverse. However, there was under-representation of those who are seldom heard – only four identified as a refugee, one as rainbow and one as a disabled person.
- The findings indicate that by creating a fun, safe and welcoming space, the hui likely facilitated young people and adults to understanding each other's realities by providing opportunities for some or most youth and adults to interact and connect; and have meaningful conversations and share perspectives.
- There was an interesting pattern between adult and youth participation in activities and discussion. When youth participation was high, adult participation was lower and vice versa. These findings might indicate that adults need support in how to work collaboratively and genuinely share power with young people.
- Although the hui were a positive experience for most, some felt at time that the questions were insensitive and disheartening, while others indicated that at times one or two individuals dominated the conversation leaving little opportunity others to contribute. These findings point to the importance of ensuring communication challenges and power dynamics are addressed and facilitators are given the opportunity to develop the necessary skills to lead future hui.
- The hui achieved their aim of bringing together ethnic young people and policymakers to forge new relationships and build an understanding of each other's perspectives and experiences through brave conversations. Importantly, four of the young people who participated in one or more of the three hui had little or no prior engagement in policy-relevant initiatives.

Further development of the Connect & Kōrero initiative should invest time and resourcing in enhancing the strengths, attending to the shortcomings and continuing to evaluate its effectiveness and impact.

Bringing it all together: Key learnings and recommendations

A wealth of information and rich insights were produced through each stage of this project. These insights clearly signpost numerous opportunities and specific actions to help amplify ethnic young people's voices in policymaking in safe and inclusive ways.

Next we outline features that are critical to enhancing the impact and effectiveness of initiatives that support ethnic young people's involvement in policymaking based on a synthesis of insights generated. Although the project focused on ethnic young people and participation in government policymaking, we expect these to transfer to other target groups and youth participation contexts.

Five features to enhance ethnic youth participation in policymaking

1. Support authentic youth-adult partnerships

- Adults share power with young people, creating space for their input at all project stages and scaffold their leadership in their areas of expertise
- Adults also provide meaningful input, support knowledge and skill development for young people in areas that fall within the adults' expertise
- Young people and adults collaboratively determine principles and expectations for engagement and shared goals
- Decision-makers genuinely consider all feedback from youth and adult stakeholders
- When decisions are made, they are transparently communicated to all those who have been involved in participation initiatives, including how and why their input was or was not addressed
- All stakeholders understand how to inquire about or further comment on decisions that have been made; inquiries and comments are considered and responded to

2. Ensure capability building for adults and young people

- Adults and young people involved in partnerships are supported to develop relevant knowledge and skills that enable them to work in a safe, inclusive and effective manner
- Adults and young people receive training on:
  - Positive Youth Development principles
  - Participatory processes
  - Cultural humility and responsivity
  - Implicit bias and adultism
  - Trauma-informed care
- Young people are provided with opportunities for further networking and life skill development

3. Incorporate skilled peer mentors/facilitators

- Positive peer role models are available to support youth and adults involved in partnerships
- Skilled youth and adult peer mentors co-facilitate partnership discussions and decision-making processes
- Youth and adult peer mentors are available for independent group debriefs and to facilitate conversations to address challenging group dynamics
- Young people are provided with opportunities to share their wisdom and expertise and act as reverse mentors for adults
- More experienced youth and adults act as allies and support access to and during participation opportunities for new individuals, particularly those from seldom heard populations

4. Use diverse and proactive outreach pathways

- Promotion of participation opportunities use both online and in-person pathways
- Young people and adults conduct outreach in schools, communities and government organisations to draw interest from a wide range of individuals
- Promotional materials and individuals with shared backgrounds and/or shared lived experiences communicate information in accessible ways to reach seldom heard young people and policymakers who are disconnected from youth populations
- Young people's families are included in outreach efforts and some participation opportunities

5. Provide adequate resourcing and time

- All members involved in planning, implementing and decision-making are appropriately compensated for their expertise and time commitment
- Resourcing supports regular engagement of the group for planning and implementation and high-quality engagement events that are fun and incorporate appropriate cultural protocols
- Access barriers (e.g., language, transport, disability, etc.) are addressed through sufficient resourcing
- Partnership roles and responsibilities are incorporated within position descriptions and partner organisation employment agreements

A Framework for Ethnic Youth Participation in Policymaking

Connect & Kōrero represents one innovative opportunity, grounded in young ethnic people's expressed interests, to address ethnic young people's needs to feel better connected, heard and valued by the New Zealand government.

The implementation team provided essential infrastructure that made the hui possible; however, the successful aspects of Connect & Kōrero depended on a well-supported and youth-led Fun Committee that disrupted adult-driven agendas and approaches and created space for young people to collaborate meaningfully with adults, step into leadership roles and showcase their strengths. While not anticipated, the establishment of the youth-led Fun Committee is a second distinct innovation, produced organically through this iterative co-design process and another impactful product of this project.

Bringing the two innovations together with the five above-listed evidence-based features creates a promising framework to support ethnic young people's meaningful participation in policymaking.

Our core recommendation is to invest in the further development of this youth participation framework and to evaluate its effectiveness and impact across different regions of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Overall framework to amplify refugee and ethnic migrant youth voice in Aotearoa New Zealand policy

Steering group for Connect & Kōrero at the centre

Implementing quarterly Connect & Kōrero hui that bring wider groups of young people and policymakers together

Steering group based on co-governance and co-facilitation structure

Roles and expectations are clear, goals are shared, youth and adults are equally valued and all members compensated

Hui are guided by clear principles and expectations and feedback is used to inform future hui and policymaking

Steering group members are responsible for documenting and disseminating insights to decision-makers and demonstrating accountability by closing communicating loops

Youth and adult co-facilitators receive training and have lived experience

Enables an approach based on ako, positive youth development and participatory principles, cultural humility and responsivity and trauma-informed care.

Steering group members act as mentors during hui to support participation and facilitate new relationships

New (both adults and young people) participants require support to overcome access and participation barriers and benefit from having an ally alongside to help bridge cultural divides

Steering group meets weekly to plan quarterly hui and engage regularly with decision-makers

Consistent engagement maintains momentum and feedback loops with hui participants and youth voice has resonance with decision-makers

Steering group members co-design and conduct outreach to engage a diverse range of youth and policymakers in upcoming hui

Promotional materials are co-designed, accessible and engaging and steering group members are actively involved in online and in-person recruitment

Youth and adult steering group members have independent branches for reflection on power dynamics and adultism

Peer-based safe spaces supported by experienced facilitators are needed to process, debrief and collaboratively address communication tensions

Conclusion

The cornerstone of this project was the pressing recognition for greater inclusivity and amplification of migrant ethnic and refugee background young people's voices to inform relevant policy. As this report illustrates however, a range of challenges may prevent policymakers from effectively including young people's experiences and perspectives.

The Connect & Kōrero and the Fun Committee innovations, grounded in a robust co-design process, provides an exciting avenue to effectively respond to the associated challenges through supporting authentic youth-adult partnerships, by providing:

- Capacity building for adults and young people on empowering collaborative practice
- Skilled mentors and facilitators to foster effective and equitable inclusion and process
- Guidance for proactive outreach to prioritise and include a diverse range of young people
- Recognition of the requirement for appropriate resourcing, including for young people

We encourage all policymakers interested in engaging with ethnic migrant and refugee background young people to develop a plan about how Connect & Kōrero can be effectively supported in their contexts. Such plans may require building trust with local and national ethnic and migrant youth groups and organisations. Recruitment must recognise the need to include young people who are often excluded from processes, especially those with intersecting identities (e.g., Māori, Pacific, Disabled, Rainbow, etc.). Once established, ongoing evaluation using similar tools and approaches to the ones utilised in this report are essential to ensure and develop the quality of this tool.

The opportunities for addressing the gap between young people and policymakers are immense. This report provides a youth-led and empowering framework to help realise this potential and ensure that young people's voices and aspirations are reflected across the policy generation process. Providing there is systems level support and adequate resourcing of this initiative, these innovations offer promise to further New Zealand's aspiration of becoming "the best place in the world for children and young people."

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