

Community Research Evaluation 2021

"Something in me is genuinely excited to see internet technology bring Te Ao Māori to the fore." Pakeha woman

By Jeph Mathias |
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The Questions

This evaluation was floated in late 2020 to answer the question, "How effective are Community Research's webinars?" As we discussed the evaluation question and how it would be used, the following purposes iteratively emerged:

- To offer an opinion on how effective Community Research is (including webinars and other tools)
- Gather demographic data to obviate the need for the usual survey
- Discover if Community Research is perceived as being Treaty-based
- Offer a structure for Community Research to strategically choose what to (and not to) do in the short and medium term to follow its vision.

The Philosophy

For me, significant evaluation data is not what an organisation does in its own action space. Organisations can easily collect that important data themselves. Outcomes (changes of behaviour, attitude, relationships or policies, of those with whom an organisation engages) are what count for me. My challenge was to gather statistically sound and qualitatively deep data to give an understanding of what people all around Aotearoa New Zealand are doing - informed by their engagement with Community Research - and what they might do with other approaches.

"About 2018 I noticed the difference. We started fighting for this in 2015...things started to shift in 2018. Cabinet office made a change and ministers started to talk to us. More recently an appetite for that level of engagement across the board...." Māori participant

The Process

For a broad view of who engages with Community Research (and who doesn't) and what participation means now and what it could mean in the future, we co-designed a three-step process:

- **Online Survey.** This was a tick box survey on demographics and changes in behaviour, attitude, relationships or policy in participants' homes and workplaces.
- **One to one Interviews:** To add depth and nuance to survey data, I emailed participants who indicated they were willing to be interviewed and called those who replied. Respecting participants' time, I limited calls to 15 minutes. I was particularly interested in outcomes (new behaviour, attitude, relationships or policy) and how they had arisen. I was also interested in Community Research's contribution and its significance.
- **Focus Groups.** To take possibilities and ideas further, I arranged Zoom focus groups with willing participants. I tried to facilitate participants discussing with each other what Community Research meant for them and how it might evolve.

"I had been asking myself how to get people home. In meetings I'd get blank looks...How to get our people to come home? It wasn't webinars related to cultural things, it was getting people connected to the land. Webinars inspired community projects. We started connecting to the land. Family came home to be involved with that... we had the marae but people came home to work in the wetlands. Young people love to get their hands dirty. Then they sleep here, listen to stories." Rural Māori woman



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The Analysis

This was a mixed methods evaluation. The 536 completed surveys were analysed on Excel and in a quantitative/qualitative research platform (Dedoose). I used standard statistical tools in Excel and Dedoose to collate distribution and numbers of participants, where changes are happening, and what people think of Community Research being treaty-based. I used qualitative research techniques with interview and focus group transcripts - coding them, highlighting and grouping outcomes, and looking for patterns related to demographic descriptors.

Summary of Findings

This evaluation found Community Research is used across Aotearoa New Zealand, in rural and urban locations of the North and South Islands, by both pakeha and Maori (21% of respondents versus 16.5% in the 2018 census). People who access Community Research were in Government service, the voluntary sector and Māori led organisations – and mostly from the social service, health and education sectors. Community Research has a database of over 10,000 and 536 responded which indicates significant influence. Evidence from the survey for outcomes, at both personal/whānau level and informing workplaces and organisational thinking and practise, was backed up by qualitative evidence. Changes are really emerging in many locations, bringing different ways of knowing and world views to private and professional life across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Outcomes were varied and surprising: For both Māori and pākehā, major themes included attitude shifts, with increased confidence in incorporating *tikanga Māori* into personal life and work culture and feeling connected to others on the same journey. Behaviour changes included people in work sites listening to and discussing webinars; officials including *hapu* voice in decisions; a pākehā teacher taking children to visit their *maunga*; and even Community Research as “the missing piece of the puzzle” in setting up a community pantry. Relationship changes were equally unpredictable and varied. One participant talked about people developing a relationship with *whenua* and each other while replanting a wetland, another of changing the way she related to disabled clients. There were many others. Policies have been influenced too, from research agendas in Government departments to mental health policy and ethics in architecture. The search for outcomes in this evaluation was rich and fruitful.

“Decided this year we’d take kids and whānau to their *maunga*, sometimes they drew them”. Pākehā primary teacher

The strongly positive summary - Community Research as a highly relevant and a significant contributor to change in homes and workplaces across Aotearoa New Zealand - makes me ask how outcomes might become more widespread. The data begs questions about - from those who responded - why younger people engage less with Community Research, why men are underrepresented, Pasifika and other ethnic minorities are barely visible and whether other sectors and spaces can be entered - e.g. the private sector, science technology, religion and sport. A few students and academics engage, but in a far smaller numbers than might be expected for an organisation publishing and discussing research. How might such groups be reached?

A second qualification relates to the content and to what is presented. Webinars were relevant and of high quality so most people listened to more than one. However, there was an appetite for content wider than ideas and concepts. Practical tools on how to engage with the world in a different way were requested as was research strategically bundled into “kete”. Participants wanted to use Community Research proactively for what is coming up in their world (e.g. upcoming policy) as well as reactively as a lens to look at what has happened. In terms of form, there were positive comments about webinars but also requests for podcasts, discussion fora, exchange fora, downloadable “How to PDFs” and even “daily soundbites”.

So What?

"I'm very much a 'normal everyday pākehā' .. reo and tikanga Māori. This helps me understand Māori view, become a more complete New Zealander". Professional pākehā woman, 20s.

Core to my philosophy is that evaluation must be useful. This evaluation provides evidence for what Community Research is, who is reached and what participants find useful. I also listened for where participants thought Community Research might go. It is not for me to recommend: I simply offer ideas and suggestions based on qualitative and quantitative data about possibilities, without recommending which should be followed. Community Research needs to consider what new initiatives to offer; what they might cost; and strategically select a suite of activities that together give the best gains for available resources. The simplified diagram shows Community Research starting with its own identity, creatively taking that into its action space, actively and continuously seeking feedback from its participants' action space and episodically asking if those outcomes contribute to its vision. Some possibilities in the Community Research action space are:

- Collated community research collated into specific research "kete" targeted to upcoming policy
- Online discussion fora with *Kaumātua*,
- A *Hui* where Community Research participants gather, talk and share ideas
- A page where participants upload their own stories of change and comment on each other's
- A specific webinar series with downloadable resources that together make up a certificate in *Te Ao Māori* centred change
- A "Māori Identity in Action" course with downloadable resources
- Face to face training events
- Support and resources for workplace cultural engagement
- A narrative space - participants upload stories and themselves discuss what happened and how.

These ideas give a flavour of the possibilities this evaluation threw up. There are many others. Central to the structure is Community Research as an action reflection organisation: continuously developing and testing new activities; monitoring its participants for whether these activities are a significant contribution to their outcomes and whether those outcomes together deliver changes it dreams of. Nimble management continuously probes the action space with creative, possibly risky, new ideas and initiatives, puts more resources into activities that contribute to outcomes and reduce less fruitful ones. Getting to that point is a challenge for Community Research's organisational culture and management style.

The Evaluator

Jeph Mathias is a New Zealander whose family arrived from India in 1970. He has degrees in medicine, philosophy, ecology and development. Jeph designed and evaluated projects in Asia, Africa and Latin America, before returning to NZ from the Indian Himalayas in 2020. He chairs the International Outcome Mapping Learning Community. His website is www.unpredictable.co

"Didn't change my view.. what it did was connect me with others thinking similarly...confirmed and gave me confidence. Gave me a reference point. That is so valuable." Urban Māori woman

"For community consultation we'd go in with our questions expecting answers. Listened to webinars and changed- trailed going in and saying 'what are your questions?' It was a really powerful experience." Pākehā woman

"Really nice to be in an intellectual space where people engage and care. Ideas from a place where I am at." Rural pākehā woman

How can we get this out to broaden the audience...Our team listened [to webinars] in the boardroom...The person who looked after food systems took away that... became a bridge to forming a community pantry... Webinar was the missing piece of the puzzle that brought it all together... ideas and action...if we can keep kids bellies full we can." Pākehā woman.



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A proposed Action-Reflection Theory of Change

