



Leaders for Equity Unconference 2026 Summary

Brought to you by Leadership Lab in partnership with Christchurch City Council



LEADERS FOR EQUITY UNCONFERENCE 2026

Friday 18 September | 9:00AM - 3:00PM



TIME	Ground Lvl: Oceania Room Stream 1	Lvl 1: Europe Room Stream 2	Lvl 1: Europe Room Stream 3	Lvl 2: Asian Room Stream 4	Lvl 2: Antarctica Room Stream 5
9:00 AM	Karakia, Welcome & Social Cohesion Scene Setting (Level 1: Europe Room)				
9:45 AM (Session 1)	Building Public Trust Through Better Communication <i>How can organisations strengthen their relationships with the public when their work is misunderstood?</i>	Treaty-Led Multiculturalism <i>What does multiculturalism look like in a Treaty ground?</i>	Authentic Youth Participation <i>How do we move beyond engaging young people to genuinely sharing power with them?</i>	Building Equitable and Adaptable Organisations <i>What would an equitable organisation look like in practice?</i>	Queer Inclusion, Neurodiversity and Mental Health <i>How can we create environments where people with diverse identities, minds and experiences genuinely belong?</i>
10:30 AM	Morning Tea (Level 0: Oceania Room)				
11:00 AM (Session 2)	Pasifika Participation and Leadership in Ōtautahi <i>How do we create greater safety, confidence, visibility and participation for Pasifika communities?</i>	From Diversity to Belonging <i>How do we move beyond celebrating diversity to creating genuine belonging?</i>	An Economy for People and Nature <i>How do we build an economy that delivers wellbeing for people and nature?</i>	Financial Capability as a Wellbeing Issue <i>Should financial capability be considered a core part of health and wellbeing?</i>	Slow Productivity + Love as Systems Change <i>Rest, self-discovery, and a full cup as the antidote to our polarised, growth-obsessed world</i>
11:45 AM (Session 3)	AI, Social Cohesion and Community Voice <i>How can Māori, Pacific, ethnic, rural and underserved communities meaningfully shape the future of Aotearoa?</i>	Bridges Through Food: A Blueprint in Rescued Food, Social Inclusion, and Empowerment in Multicultural Communities <i>How can sharing a meal transform a neighborhood?</i>	Critical Thinking, Democracy and Voting <i>How can we strengthen critical thinking and meaningful participation in democracy?</i>	Diverse Voices, Shared Decision-Making <i>How do we ensure the people most affected by inequity have genuine influence over decisions and system design?</i>	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: From Representation to Real Change <i>What would a future where everyone has genuine opportunity look like, and what needs to change to get there?</i>
12:30 PM	Lunch (Level 0: Oceania Room)				
1:15 PM	Do Labs - Action Based Session (Level 1: Europe Room)				
	Afternoon Tea (grab & go)				
2:45 PM	Collective Synthesis & Reflections (Level 1: Europe Room)				
2:55 PM	Karakia & Close (Level 1: Europe Room)				

Level 2 Africa Room: Quiet Space



Special thanks to:

MCs - Erica Austin and Wikitoria Kurene
 Council team - Rose Crossland, Danielle Endacott and Viviana Zanetti
 Event team - Cooper Sides and Sooze Harris
 Do-Lab Facilitators: Stephen McConnachie and Chris Jansen
 Social Cohesion Scene Setting Video: Shamubeel Eaquib
 Caterers - Share Kai Cooks Collective
 Photographer - Jonny Knopp, Peanut Productions Photography

Leaders for Equity Unconference 2026 - Stream 1

Session 1: Building Public Trust Through Better Communication

How can organisations strengthen their relationships with the public when their work is misunderstood?

Notes by Stephen McConnachie

Facilitator: Sophia Davis

Intentions for session:

1. Defining trust and how it might be established and maintained
2. Exploring why trust may be difficult to instil and what barriers there may be
3. Discussing initiatives that have & have not worked
4. Challenging and building on each other's ideas and experiences
5. Brainstorming how we could solve this complex issue

Notes:

- Managing perceptions of what we do - as well as the intentional comms
- Rebuilding trust - how we communicate is key
- Different purposes for the information affect how accessible to different audiences
- Mutual benefit - instead of posing it as "environmental good"
- Open to new information, open to receiving and learning - not coming from a place of mistrust
- Clarity vs ambiguity, especially across languages/cultures
- Balance - lots of info vs not too much but all info available
Easy path to follow if people want to learn more
- Duplicity of messaging / positioning -
values, what we're trying to do; and
Systems, frameworks, institutions that we must work with / within
- Positive comms to balance out the complaints vs. propaganda - pretending everything is fine (which can be received as inauthentic / out of touch)
- Publishing long term plans to keep people informed - giving the community an early heads up
- Often the first contact is when something has gone wrong - first contact comes via complaint
- "Here's what we have in progress, here's where you can see the finished projects"

- Value-based framing & communication - would that be more effective than just presenting statistics and facts?
- Simplicity, visual graphics, understandable, engaging, gets attention
- Getting through the noise
- Helping people to understand why we're really there - there to help them too
- Timing - the earlier a positive interaction/comms can happen, the easier to build trust & relationship
- Kai
- Where does the key message sit?
- People complain to peers but may not know how to raise it in more appropriate / helpful channels
- What is the authentic value in connecting? Why are we wanting people to connect? Value for us? metrics? Value for them?
- Figuring out what communication methods & channels they would be comfortable with
- Sharing before & after - to celebrate progress
- Using trusted faces to share messaging - the importance of relationship in building trust - kanohi kitea
- Sharing the good news - Getting PEOPLE to share - building the ally base
- Using the platforms that are available - digital social media - balanced with equity/access considerations for people who don't use those platforms & channels
- Difference between consulting & engaging - can community actually influence decisions?
- Consultation opportunities - people want to feel seen and heard
- Citizen responsibility

Session 2: Pasifika Participation and Leadership in Ōtautahi

How do we create greater safety, confidence, visibility and participation for Pasifika communities?

Notes by Wikitoria Kurene

Facilitator: Wikitoria Kurene

Pacific rangatahi are one of the biggest cohorts of rangatahi in Aotearoa.

What is important for belonging, connectedness, and where do rangatahi feel comfortable to contribute their voice?

- Church
- Sport
- Pacific community

- Some in schools
- Social spaces online
- Increased comfort with sharing voice in Uni spaces

Idea: Support pathways into university. How do more rangatahi get into Uni?

Idea: Ask what young people themselves say the barriers are. Pasifika young people are multicultural. How do we create spaces where they can show up as all of who they are?

Themes – barriers and observations

1. Time-poor in Pasifika community

How do we get Pasifika into spaces to have their voice, because they are needing to earn money for their family?

Idea: Take services and spaces to young people already doing awesome mahi e.g. the taking a smoke free event, and wrapping it around a young person doing a tapa cloth display.

2. Elders coming together with Pasifika young people

Capture stories before they go

Hear stories

The value of whakapapa — having it means you can just be, not having to explain yourself. This helps them step out more boldly.

Spaces to speak in their own language

Idea: Link kura with rest homes and marae building visibility and whanaungatanga

3. Accessibility

Transport is an issue — how can we reduce barriers?

4. Population growth areas e.g. Ashburton, Oamaru

Growth is happening in these areas because of employment opportunities e.g. meatworks, factories, fruit picking. These are the "doorways" into communities so what is needed next? Curiosity re what is happening population wise in other areas such as Waimakariri

Idea: Explore bridges to help integrate these populations into the community. Marae can be important bridges. Pasifika food into the New World etc is important.

5. Leadership

Examples of leadership for Pasifika rangatahi are largely in the church, with a few in schools.

How do we shift this?

What does it look like to support leadership development for these rangatahi?

Who can support the best?

Idea: Explore not just Pasifika leaders supporting leadership development in rangatahi but non pasifika also

Idea: Invest in adults so young people have role models of what is 'normal' to look up to; educate to liberate.

Idea: Explore tuākana - teina wisdom to support this.

6. Moana Va

There's an issue of non-Pacific people not wanting to overstep — how do non-Pacific people shift this? This keeps Pasifika and non pacific apart.

Idea: Go and invite people in. Pasifika into all spaces, non-pasifika into Pasifika spaces. Actively inviting people into your space creates visibility and safety.

Idea: Need people to help non-pasifika navigate spaces

Session 3: AI, Social Cohesion and Community Voice

How can Māori, Pacific, ethnic, rural and underserved communities meaningfully shape the future of AI?

Notes by Wikitoria Kurene

Facilitator: Lautalie Schmidt-Geen

Notes

- How can community, specifically older Pacific adults use AI safely and understand it in a way that is useful and helps them navigate the digital waters.
- Community need to feel comfortable to question AI, they need to know where their data is going
- Using AI with cultural and data safety - sovereignty
- What does placing 'Power' around AI back into communities look like?
- What does protection/ the safeguarding of culture, data, IP, people, social look like in a world increasingly held by AI tools?
- How can communities govern or own AI, where applicable?
- Mahi AI - a great example of merging cultural/ indigenous and data sovereignty for communities, organisations.
- Many people using AI in different ways, mostly for work - apps like copilot, claude, then personal, ChatGPT, canva AI etc.
- When using the AI tools, using to condense reports, help get reports started, taking notes/minutes in meetings.

- Discussion around the importance of knowing what prompts to put into AI, then also importance in cross-checking AI and asking for links to sources that AI uses to collate and provide information.
- Need to make sure we are keeping the 'human' elements alongside AI - Important to be reflective, be critical.
- AI seen as a tool to help increase human discernment, not the discerning for humans.
- Used as a practical tool
- Authenticity in AI - where does this sit within community & organisations? How can we influence this?
- There is a need for policies to make sure AI is being used for good, to create more access to learning, creating etc.

Leaders for Equity Unconference 2026 - Stream 2

Session 1: Treaty-Led Multiculturalism

What does multiculturalism look like on Treaty ground?

Notes by Viviana Zanetti

Facilitator: Viviana Zanetti

The underlying question appears to be:

How can a Treaty-led approach to multiculturalism create genuine connection and belonging for everyone, rather than becoming a tokenistic exercise or a source of division?

Several themes keep recurring.

Theme 1: Te Tiriti should be wider than a Crown-Māori relationship

- Te Tiriti is not just between the Crown and Māori.
- Te Tiriti is naturally multicultural
- Unity in the country.

While Te Tiriti appears to be fundamentally an agreement involving Māori and the Crown, it is not and its implications shape the society that everyone lives in, including migrants and ethnic communities.

The idea seems to be: a Treaty-led multiculturalism should help create a shared national identity and social cohesion, not simply be understood as a bilateral relationship that sits apart from the experiences of other communities.

Theme 2: "Us and them" is the main barrier

There is a recurring concern that communities become siloed. Comments include:

- "Us vs them."
- Each community cares about themselves.
- Fearful as a white person to approach and connect.

The notes suggest that people perceive barriers between:

- Māori and non-Māori
- Established New Zealanders and migrants
- Communities and institutions
- Different ethnic groups

The challenge being identified is a lack of connection.

Theme 3: Migrants are dealing with their own settlement journey

This is one of the strongest themes. The discussion identifies that migrants:

- Arrive and must navigate a new society.
- Face their own barriers.
- Need to establish themselves.
- Have little mental space left for learning other complex cultural systems.

A key insight appears to be: *for many new migrants, engaging with Māori culture and Te Tiriti is not necessarily a rejection. It is often a matter of capacity, timing, and competing pressures.*

Theme 4: Existing approaches are often tokenistic

The word "tokenistic" appears more than once. The concern seems to be that:

- Māori culture is acknowledged.
- Basic training is delivered.
- Colonial history is mentioned.

But people are not helped to move from awareness to action. "After the training, how to implement?" The criticism identifies that organisations stop at training and symbolic recognition.

Theme 5: Education is viewed as the success story

Education is by far the most consistently positive example.

- School principals and teachers creating bicultural environments.
- More multicultural schools.
- Children bringing learning home.
- Education as the foundation of the new generation.

Schools are succeeding where many organisations struggle because they create everyday exposure, normalisation, and relationship-building.

Participants appear to believe that:

- Children learn bicultural values naturally.
- Those values influence families.
- Social change happens through generations.

"Changes are generational and come from the children."

Theme 6: New Zealand is still working out its identity

One interesting line is: "NZ is still trying to find its own identity."

New Zealand is navigating:

- Bicultural foundations.
- Increasing ethnic diversity.
- Migration.
- A changing understanding of nationhood.

In this view, Treaty-led multiculturalism is not yet settled. The country is still figuring out what it means in practice.

Theme 7: Gatekeeping is seen as a barrier

Several comments focus on gatekeeping:

- Access to te ao Māori.
- "Do not approach."
- "You do not know the process and tikanga."

The concern appears to be that some people want to engage but feel uncertain, intimidated, or unwelcome. The question being raised is: "How do we create bridges?"

Theme 8: Historical knowledge matters

Another identified barrier is:

- People do not understand colonialism.
- People do not know history.

Participants appear to believe that meaningful Treaty relationships require historical understanding. Without that understanding, engagement remains superficial.

What I think the session was really about

If I were summarising the discussion in a few sentences, I would write:

Participants explored how a Treaty-led approach to multiculturalism can strengthen unity and belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand. They identified barriers such as siloed communities, lack of understanding of history, tokenistic engagement with Māori culture, fear of making mistakes, and perceived gatekeeping. Migrants often face significant settlement challenges that leave limited capacity for engaging with biculturalism in the early years. Education was highlighted as a successful model, with schools helping to create bicultural and multicultural environments that influence future generations. A key challenge remains how to move beyond awareness and training to practical relationship-building and bridge-making between Māori, migrants, and wider communities.

What stands out to me most is that the dominant concern is not opposition to Te Tiriti or biculturalism. Rather, it is the question: *How do we make Treaty-led multiculturalism accessible, relational, and practical for people who genuinely want to participate?*

Possible Do-Lab Actions

Teach Te Tiriti at a structure for coexisting.

NWO: education about social responsibility as being a good partner.

How to connect migrants with organisations that can educate/engage newcomers on Te Tiriti (how to bypass internal gatekeeping):

- Find organisations that support the work
- Bring into communities, community centres, schools, libraries, etc.

Opportunities for staff and community to understand and learn about the Tiriti and how can be implemented, workshops & activities.

Create Landing spaces to learn. Create interaction opportunities.

Community centre: use the spaces to mobilise politically.

Going local. Mobilise your community. Connect with local marae and opportunities (such as support Māori business ...)

Notes by Viviana Zanetti

Facilitator: Somia Tasneem

Participants moved beyond simply celebrating diversity and focused on the deeper questions of identity, participation, power, inclusion, and authenticity.

Theme 1: Belonging is Relational, Not Individual

Defining belonging:

- Feeling comfortable bringing your whole self.
- Being authentic.
- Feeling part of something.
- Being seen but not judged.
- Knowing that a space was designed with you in mind.

"Belonging is a relational thing."

This shifts belonging away from:

- self-confidence
- cultural pride
- individual behaviour

and towards:

- relationships
- systems
- community acceptance

The question becomes: *What relationships exist in a place that make someone feel they belong?*

What belonging looks like

Participants identified belonging as:

- Being seen.
- Being respected.
- Being involved.
- Being part of the future.
- Being included in decision-making.

This is significant because belonging was linked not only to social acceptance but also to **participation and influence**. People belong when they have a stake in shaping the community.

Theme 2: Authenticity Versus Fitting In

Do people belong because they can be themselves, or because they learn how to fit in?

Several comments point toward authenticity:

- Bring your whole self.
- Safe to be authentic.
- Be authentic.
- Create safe spaces.

But there is also recognition that people often feel pressure to adapt: *Fear of losing connection to your culture when blending into the new reality*. This suggests a common migrant and minority experience:

- wanting to belong
- while not wanting to lose who you are

The underlying tension is:

Belonging Through Assimilation	Belonging Through Authenticity
Fit in	Be yourself
Blend in	Be recognised
Adapt to majority	Contribute your difference
Minimise differences	Value differences

The group appears to be leaning strongly toward the second model.

Theme 3: Identity is Complex and Layered

Another major idea is that identity is not singular. Participants noted:

- Diversity is multilayered.
- Ethnicity is only one element.
- We all belong to many things.
- Cross-pollination of identities.

There is a rejection of reducing people to:

- ethnicity
- race
- nationality

Instead, people hold multiple identities simultaneously.

This leads to the question: *How do we cross-pollinate our cultures?*

It suggests moving beyond:

- separate cultures existing side by side

towards:

- mutual influence
- shared spaces
- learning from one another

The notes propose: Create opportunities to learn about other cultures. The desired outcome is not cultural separation but interaction.

Theme 4: The "Us and Them" Problem

Another major concern is social division. The notes explicitly refer to: "Us vs Them" narrative.

The proposed response is:

Create safe spaces

For:

- people to be who they are
- difficult conversations
- dialogue across differences

There is also a note that: *The majority culture has a responsibility.*

This suggests participants did not see inclusion as solely the responsibility of minority communities.

Instead:

- newcomers participate
- institutions adapt
- dominant groups create room

In other words: Inclusion is a shared responsibility.

Major Barriers Identified

The group identified several obstacles to belonging.

1. Systemic barriers

People face barriers that go beyond individual attitudes.

2. Lack of representation

People struggle to belong when they cannot see themselves reflected in:

- leadership
- governance
- decision-making

3. Tokenism

Several references point to tokenistic approaches.

This seems less about hostility and more about superficial inclusion.

People are invited in but not genuinely empowered.

4. Racism

Racism is explicitly identified as a barrier to belonging.

5. Lack of cultural capability

The note:

We might not know how to be inclusive.

is surprisingly important.

Rather than assuming bad intentions, participants recognised that many people simply lack the knowledge, confidence, or skills required to create inclusive environments.

6. External constraints

Including:

- funding
- policies

The suggestion is that even organisations with good intentions can struggle because of institutional limitations.

The Action Discussion

Build equity, Not equality.

The note specifically says: Equitable opportunities for all. The example given is leadership. The aspiration is: Leadership from all backgrounds and walks of life. This suggests belonging should be visible through sharing influence and power.

Personal behaviours

Participants identified several personal practices:

- Be curious.
- Be present.
- Be authentic.
- Be willing to discuss diversity.

These are relatively simple but focus on relationship-building.

Create safe spaces

Safe spaces are proposed as places where people can:

- speak honestly
- discuss difference
- hold difficult conversations
- bring their authentic selves

The Missing Concept: Power

The fourth page provides what may be the most important insight of the entire session.

Participants discuss:

- moving beyond food and dancing
- intergenerational dimensions
- intersectionality
- creating leadership
- long-term impact

Then someone wrote:

Power-sharing is the missing word.

Throughout the discussion participants talked about:

- belonging
- representation
- equity
- leadership
- participation
- inclusion

All of those concepts ultimately connect to power. The argument appears to be: Belonging is not achieved simply by being welcomed into existing structures.

Instead:

Belonging happens when people have genuine opportunities to influence decisions, shape institutions, exercise leadership, and share power.

In short

Participants explored belonging as a relational experience rather than an individual feeling. Belonging was defined as being able to bring one's whole self into a space, be respected, participate in decisions, and see oneself represented in the future of the community. Major barriers included systemic inequities, racism, tokenism, lack of representation, and limited cultural capability. Participants questioned the tension between authenticity and fitting in, arguing that inclusion should not require people to leave parts of themselves behind. The discussion moved beyond celebrating diversity to considering how cultures interact, how identities cross-pollinate, and how institutions create genuine inclusion. Ultimately, the conversation concluded that the missing element may be power-sharing: belonging becomes real when people not only participate but also influence, lead, and shape the systems they are part of.

Session 3: Bridges Through Food: A Blueprint in Rescued Food, Social Inclusion, and Empowerment in Multicultural Communities

How can sharing a meal transform a neighbourhood?

Notes by Viviana Zanetti

Facilitator: Margaret V Fernandes

Food as a Connector

- Food is a conversation starter and helps build relationships.
- Food allows people to experience different cultures.
- Food sovereignty and culturally appropriate food were identified as important considerations.

Food and Culture as a Pathway

- Food and dance can act as a "doorbell" into deeper engagement.
- Cultural activities can provide opportunities for storytelling, learning, and relationship-building.
- There was some questioning of whether these approaches can become tokenistic if they remain at a surface level.

Community Development and Capacity Building

- Community food initiatives (e.g. food rescue, food boxes) were discussed as examples of practical community action.
- Building capacity within communities was seen as important.
- Neighbourhood-based activities were identified as a way of strengthening connections.

Sustainability Beyond Events

- Participants asked: *What happens after the event finishes?*
- The focus should be on creating long-lasting impact rather than one-off events.
- Suggested outcomes included:
 - Developing community leadership.
 - Building ongoing networks and capacity.
 - Potentially opening pathways into business and economic opportunities.

Intersectionality and Intergenerational Perspectives

- Participants noted that communities are shaped by both intergenerational and intersectional experiences.
- Cultural engagement should recognise these complexities.

Key Insight

The discussion slowly moved from food and cultural activities toward a conversation about leadership, participation, and ensuring communities have genuine influence rather than simply being invited to take part.

Leaders for Equity Unconference 2026 - Stream 3

Notes by Danielle Endacott

Facilitator: Rebecca Inch

Barriers to Participation

- Fear of standing out, uncertainty, and lack of confidence.
- Perceptions that young people lack experience or credibility.
- Social media comparisons creating unrealistic expectations.
- Generational misunderstandings and limited empathy for current youth challenges.
- Youth are often treated as one group, overlooking diverse experiences and needs.
- Financial, geographic ("postcode lottery"), visa/residency, and civic barriers.
- Lack of awareness, encouragement, or direct invitations to opportunities.
- Young people are seen as "future leaders" rather than leaders today.

Barriers Once Youth Are "In the Room"

- Consultation without genuine influence or decision-making power.
- Limited onboarding, preparation, and confidence-building opportunities.
- Use of jargon and inaccessible processes.
- Lack of reciprocal value for participants (e.g. mentorship, skills development, career advice, mātauranga).
- Not always being supported by the right professionals.
- Limited options for participation beyond traditional speaking formats.

Emerging Challenges

- Growing divide between generations.
- Increased reliance on digital communication, making some in-person interactions more challenging.
- Different generations engage with and understand social media differently.
- Perception that young people "have it easy" because of AI, technology, and internet access.

Key Enablers

- Authentic engagement that avoids tokenism and shares power.
- Mentorship, encouragement, and invitations into meaningful spaces.
- Equitable access to civic participation and leadership opportunities.
- Multiple ways for young people to contribute (speaking, writing, creative expression).
- Partnering with organisations already supporting youth.

Actions / Next Steps

- Upskill older generations (e.g. employers, leaders, HR) to better understand and engage with youth.
- Ensure engagement is authentic, reciprocal, and has real influence.
- Provide onboarding, training, and mentoring to build confidence and capability.
- Involve trusted, trained, and relatable professionals in youth engagement.
- Create opportunities for young people to practise leadership and decision-making in safe environments (e.g. youth councils, mock parliament).
- Recognise and empower young people as leaders in the present, not just the future.

Session 2: An Economy for People and Nature

How do we build an economy that delivers wellbeing for people and nature?

Notes by Danielle Endacott

Facilitator: Paul Dalziel

Key Themes

- Communities have a strong history of collective action and driving change (e.g. Nuclear Free NZ).
- Economic and environmental wellbeing are deeply interconnected and should not be considered separately.
- Many people feel economic decisions are made "to them" by government and other institutions, rather than with them.

- The term *economy* can feel abstract, intimidating, or disconnected from everyday life. Framing it as *healthy, thriving communities* may be more relatable.
- Greater transparency is needed around the environmental impacts and trade-offs of economic decisions.

Community-Led Solutions

- Supporting local, sustainable initiatives such as:
 - Repair cafés
 - Clothes swaps
 - Waste reduction workshops
 - Local produce schemes
 - Conservation and restoration projects
- Building local resilience by strengthening access to essentials such as food, shelter, and energy.
- Creating spaces that foster human connection, volunteering, and community participation in an increasingly AI-driven world.
- Encouraging lifelong volunteering through practical, community-based action.

Challenges

- Environmentally friendly and locally focused businesses can struggle to remain financially viable.
- Dominant economic models and assumptions are rarely questioned.
- Community-led solutions often exist, but communities may not recognise the power and influence they already have.
- Limited public understanding of economics and taxation can make meaningful participation in economic discussions difficult.

Key Reflections

- The goal is to find a balance between economic systems that enable both people and the planet to thrive.
- Communities should have greater influence and ownership over the assets, systems, and decisions that affect them.
- Local action can strengthen social, environmental, and economic resilience simultaneously.

- Language and framing matter when engaging communities in conversations about economics.

Actions / Next Steps

- Raise awareness of existing community-led initiatives and successful local models.
- Improve public understanding of taxation and its role in shaping community outcomes.
- Create space for broader discussion and questioning of dominant economic paradigms.
- Reframe economic conversations in ways that connect to people's everyday experiences and aspirations.
- Support local initiatives that build resilience, sustainability, volunteering, and social connection.
- Explore opportunities to return greater decision-making power and ownership to communities.

Session 3: Critical Thinking, Democracy and Voting

How can we strengthen critical thinking and meaningful participation in democracy?

Notes by Danielle Endacott

Facilitator: Melissa Renganathan

Key Challenges

- Disinformation and difficulty assessing the reliability of information sources.
- Limited understanding of how government decisions affect people's daily lives.
- People often do not understand the rationale behind policy decisions, even when intentions are positive.
- Accountability is often focused on election periods rather than throughout the full government cycle.
- Civic and political education is lacking, particularly within compulsory school curriculum.
- Unequal access to information and political messaging, with visibility often influenced by funding and resources.

- Reduced attention spans can make critical engagement with complex issues more difficult.

Barriers to Participation

- People experiencing hardship or crisis may have limited capacity to engage in political discussions.
- Political discussions can feel unsafe, confrontational, or polarised.
- People are not always equipped with the skills to have respectful/safe conversations across different viewpoints.
- Untrue or misleading statements are not always robustly challenged.
- Lived experiences shape perspectives and influence how people interpret information and events.

Key Reflections

- Critical thinking requires context, history, and an understanding of how information is communicated.
- Curiosity is a valuable tool for exploring different perspectives and challenging assumptions.
- Political purity can be counterproductive; compromise and consideration of multiple viewpoints are important in a healthy democracy.
- Conversations are often more productive when they begin with shared values and what people care about.
- Democracy relies on ongoing participation and accountability, not just voting on election day.

Actions / Next Steps

- Strengthen civics education and improve understanding of democratic processes.
- Create opportunities for safe, respectful conversations about political and social issues.
- Encourage people to critically evaluate information sources and claims.
- Help communities understand how national policies and decisions affect everyday life.
- Foster curiosity, empathy, and openness to differing perspectives.
- Support ongoing civic engagement and mechanisms to hold decision-makers accountable between elections.
- Equip community groups, families, and social networks to navigate complex conversations confidently and constructively.

Leaders for Equity Unconference 2026 - Stream 4

Session 1: Building Equitable and Adaptable Organisations

What would an equitable organisation look like in practice?

Notes by Rose Crossland

Facilitator: Sarah Eichler

- Sarah wanted to discuss equity within organisations and how hard it can be to make this happen when values don't align and/or what is legally required or promised is not delivered.
- There was a lot of acknowledgement that the 'system' has been designed to keep things the same.
- Decision makers need to understand the benefit of having different viewpoints. A diverse range of people/voices need to be in the room and part of the conversations before decisions are made. It can be too late otherwise.
- A point was made about DEI – sometimes it can create more issues – there needs to be simplicity and understanding about what it means and what (for example) the qualities of a good manager are rather than focusing on differences.
- A common agreement was that values are an important element to the issue being discussed. To bring these into the workplace to influence decisions can be hard when an organisation's values don't align in reality. Many orgs state they believe in and have processes to deliver equity but the reality can be different – very often they may follow their own processes rather than following the law/regulations. Having strong values can help when pushing through to make change.
- *A solution for local participation- Develop equity into civic development and participation, work with different demographics and people with often little influence and who are disconnected from resources to see pathways to have their voices heard and opportunities to be civic leaders.*

Session 2: Financial Capability as a Wellbeing Issue

Should financial capability be considered a core part of health and wellbeing?

Notes by Rose Crossland

Facilitator: Dante Fyfe

- An issue Dante often faces in his financial services business is poor financial literacy within the Pacifica community. It is widely acknowledged that financial issues affects all elements of people's health and wellbeing. His key question - 'Why is financial health not considered within the makeup of an individual and society's holistic health? What would this look like when financial health was included?
- People in the room shared their own diverse experiences around developing their financial health - a common factor was the role modelling of their immediate whānau. This factored strongly into whether they had good or poor habits around budgeting and financial management.
- Thoughts centred around how important it is to speak openly about this early on within a whānau – "Let's normalise talking about money". The government introducing compulsory financial literacy in schools was considered a positive move.
- Discussion focused on cultural differences both in Aotearoa generally and also some specific cultures. The expectations from extended whānau to receive financial support often places significant pressure on whānau who are often struggling to get by. How does this change? Is it leadership from within e.g. leaders having workshops in a safe space to talk about these issues and/or courageous conversations between individuals that helps communicate the difficulties faced by these expectations.
- *Ideas: have equitable access to financial literacy information that is easy to find and understand. Additionally, begin to normalise kōrero about financial literacy and have more courageous conversations*

Session 3: Diverse Voices, Shared Decision-Making

How do we ensure the people most affected by inequity have genuine influence over decisions and system design?

Notes by Rose Crossland

Facilitator: Fuatino (aka Flo) Lokeni

- Flo's main kōrero was that she is concerned about how, when decisions are being made, there are voices missing in the room. She said decisions need to be made where people are instead of (for example) in Wellington. Sometimes, it's only when a disaster happens

like the mosque shootings that people affected get pulled into the conversation. Why should it take a disaster for voices to be heard?

- There was a lot of discussion about power-sharing, the need for decision makers to sit alongside people they are making decisions about to ensure they're making the right ones. There is often a disconnect between people they serve, sometimes they're not listening and conversations have often already taken place without including people who are on the receiving end of the decision.
- The reverse is also true. Often organisations want people to engage and people won't – why is that? Is it that they don't know they can? Don't feel it will make a difference? Thoughts we shared about how to communicate this effectively – e.g. putting a plant on a chair to demonstrate how a decision will affect nature, an empty chair to think about future generations, those not yet born
- Kōrero was shared about the burden some people already carry when they care about an issue. It's hard to people to feel they have to represent a whole demographic. It takes a lot of time to contribute, the time it has taken to build strong relationships to bring to the table to discuss issues that matter. It can be tiring, physically and emotionally. This needs to be recognised.
- It is important to remind people of the power we have with decision making. We have a responsibility to look at ourselves and the decisions we make in life, to question, have critical thinking.
- *A solution: to be aware that change is possible, you can have a voice – an individual and collective voice. We need to break down barriers and silos and co-exist with decision makers and other voices with different opinions and perspectives to make decisions together so we can accept differences and trust each other.*

Leaders for Equity Unconference 2026 - Stream 5

Session 1: Queer Inclusion, Neurodiversity and Mental Health

How can we create environments where people with diverse identities, minds and experiences genuinely belong?

Notes by Cooper Sides

Facilitator: Sara Cornish

Key themes of conversation:

What does true belonging look like/feel like to people here?

- Unconditional support, being included, feelings of comfort and mutual respect
- Not having to internally question whether it is safe to share your experience or opinion
- Being able to be present rather than worried that you're being undermined or shut down or having to worry if it's okay to exist
- Feeling like you're contributing
- Being accepted as your true self: feelings, sensitivity; not being judged
- Belonging is energizing rather than draining

What might an ideal inclusive/supportive space look like?

- Designated quiet spaces available, removes anxiety to find somewhere safe when needing space (incl. something soft to sit on)
- Shared activities: something for folks to do with their hands and focus on when nervous (that isn't their phone); being involved in the same activity allows natural rather than forced social interactions. Bonus if it is an activity that makes you feel like you are contributing to the community. E.g. condom packing, tea-towel-tonga
- Fidget toys
- Whakawhanaungatanga: warms you into a space and allows us to see similarities instead of focusing on assumed differences
- Having someone you know, or safe, to speak to if need to
- Stating it's a judgement-free zone: you're welcome no matter who you are

Group acknowledgement that when people come in with racism etc., it's hard not to judge that person and to ensure the space is still safe for everyone present:

- Must hold basic human principles of how to treat others - if they don't respect it, we don't have to give them space to have that voice
- It's important to understand that people can come with ignorance and leave educated

Ideas generated for Do-Lab:

- What does inclusion look like when there are diverse people there?

Session 2: Slow Productivity + Love as Systems Change.

Rest, self-discovery, and a full cup as the antidote to our polarised, growth-obsessed world.

Notes by Cooper Sides

Facilitator: Kai J. Lee

Key themes of conversation:

What does a full cup, knowing and ease feel like?

- Balance
- Actively finding time to rest
- The process of having a break/giving space before returning
- It's okay to have days where not much gets done
- Experiencing joy, being present, having the ability to lean towards what is there and might be challenging (easier with a full cup)
- Movement
- Spending time with friends & whānau
- Not skipping ahead because you're too busy

Common themes in groups

- If the world had it's way, we would be working 24/7. It can be difficult with an expectation to go fast and do as much as you can. This can make it hard to find the balance of overworking vs not getting things done. Recognise that some things are optional, figure out what is important and carve the time for yourself and your priorities.
- Chronic issues can make sustaining ourselves more difficult. This can be eased by getting to know ourselves and not putting too much on our plate
- Understanding that our lives evolve: different things are important during different times of our lives. One day social events are great, while other days having no plans is also great. It's never one particular need at any time. Slow down, listen to your body and its needs.
- Slowness isn't always stagnation, and can create energy. Find presence.
- Consistent practices or routines help ground us to be present. Daily prayers, morning runs, weekly check-ins with friends. Repetition helps us stick to who we are.
- Different outside forces in life can make it harder or easier to keep our cup fill. The filling of one's cup is different for each individual - knowing what keeps YOU going is so important.
-

Discernment/prioritising. Individuality, tuning it in yourself and honouring others

Daily/often practices/rituals help ground

Checking in with self, friends, partners regularly

If you show up with your cup half empty, at 10% - how are you helpful to those around you? But you have to carve the time to be able to show up at 90%

We really want to give it our all 6-7 days a week but we must carve out time to recharge

1. How have distractions and burn out held you back from health and happiness?
2. When did you last experience full awareness and presence? How did that feel/look like?

- Often distracted by social media, doesn't help my health move forward
- Feel better equipped to soldier on, confronting having to break that
- Wasn't doing the things that I enjoyed, was exhausted and apathetic
- Stepping out of the moment and reviewing needs and reconnecting with friends
- Hard to learn to leave work at work,
- Learning what isn't working, and when that is happening focusing on being back at home (base)
- Had all social media shut down, felt like a recovering addict, why is it impacting my life/bothering me this much?

Being somewhere that isn't at home, and on adventure (the anonymity of not knowing people, being able to be someone new - peace and calmness)

- Balance between passions and hobbies, also mahi and school - it's a fine line. A lot of things outside of mahi blurs the line between mahi and enjoyment, can lose the joy. Find the joy again and finding outlets that aren't related
- Taking stock of the little things that help your day to flow.
- When encounter the build up of havoc, the whanau/partner will encounter the worst of it. Balance out the burn out. Forcing in space for your own time. making time for yourself to be present
- Balance together time with alone cup filling time
- Different ways we find presence - movement of the body and also allowing time for all the stuff to settle within ourselves. Difference between disciplined actions (habits), and balance between acknowledging little moments in the day when you feel present and stay in that.
- Social media can be a massive distraction and blind from one's own health, needing to recognise when to take a step back. Working and separating work and life and knowing when to be in the work zone and when to live your life.
- Even the micro moments of taking dog out for walk, looking out window seeing sunset or a bird, take those moments (easier in good weather when things are going well, but always important to find that time)
- Setting and holding boundaries. Knowing your role (mahī, whānau role) and to do it well you have to take care of your own tinana (which is a full-time job in itself). How to take those moments where we take stock.
- Watch people put kids first and burn out often. What happens when something goes bad (e.g. sickness), what happens then?
- Healthy selfness, knowing yourself, slowing down and communicating your capacity
- Everyone's context is different.
- In men's group, encourage people to take radical care of selves

Session 3: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: From Representation to Real Change

What would a future where everyone has genuine opportunity look like, and what needs to change to get there?

Notes by Cooper Sides

Facilitator: Ethan Cullen

What barriers currently exist and what actions/pathways can we take for pathways to participation (incl civic)

Key themes of conversation:

- What barriers do we think exist in society or feel too hard to change alone?
- Understanding that we all have unconscious bias that sit within us, educating people that we all have these and in reality, looking internally (not blaming society/way raised → embrace the changes) → teaching people what unconscious bias is
- Knowing that there is plenty that we don't know about people, don't just go on base assumptions
- Importance of empathy and relationship. Come up against the problem of unwillingness and not wanting to get to know people who might be different than them. These barriers keep us in our box. Needs to be spaces to bring people together to confront those things
- Meeting people where they are and slowly building up from there. Not assuming that everyone is great at things and able/not able to do things.
- The onus is on you.
- Not putting the bar too high and going in openminded. You will get some tension and be willing to not directly tackle that tension but work beside it.

- War of nutrition. Being willing to stand there until that erosion happens and they are willing to make the change. Requires your people/solidarity from behind you to have that strength.
- Need for spaces where all of who you are is safe (intersectionality) so that you can go out into the world and tackle other spaces easier
- Importance of solidarity. All come from unique backgrounds and should celebrate everyone's mixed experiences, openness to understanding of the journey of where they are at. Not everyone has the best experiences. Realising and space to network with people so that you know who you can reach out to get access to other spaces knowing that they have the ability to have empathy and support. When we are trying to challenge systems it is difficult, but realising that there is a community behind us (may not be experiencing the same thing) it makes it easier
- Having friends and colleagues, when there is an issue that affects us deeply - may not affect them but know that they will support us (especially when it is hard for us to speak/articulate this ourselves). Trying to learn to bring up conversations with people who may not see the world the same way as me. Even learning about how unconscious bias works, not talking about the issue e.g. racism, inclusion, but the base level of what bias are/how they impact, so there is space to review internally and go away with the potential to develop. Ways to discuss tough topics without turning them off
- Inclusive empathy
- Who is already getting it right? How can we learn those skills instead of learning from mistake where we have done hurt/damage
- Learn from people who have best practice. Talk to those people, they will often be willing to share.
- With inclusion it is everyone's responsibility to embrace it. Holding a lot of events and participation around the motu. Do you feel like you are a part of any culture and inclusive of others - it has to be bi-directional. Double empathy
- Te tiriti o waitanga was framed between tangata whenua and tangata tiriti - TT aren't any one group, it is everyone who isn't maori, we need to see the jewels of each us and honour that before we can actually engage with tangata whenua
- Pakeha isn't just white, important that we all realise that we are here to honour the treaty whether we are from elsewhere, as people to honour Te Tiriti
- Te tiriti provides a blueprint, it is a relationship approaching agreement.
- Important to acknowledge and understand power differentials which is a big barrier around representation - who holds the power in society and designs these systems (which work for people with power). How do we break this down and dilute it so that we have representation. Solidarity is the key, being able to support each other even if we aren't facing the same experience/issue, but understanding the collective experience of being othered or oppressed by those in power
- Name it to tame it. E.g. This is racism, sexism, discrimination 'because' gives power to push it back to where it belongs. Again comes back to solidarity, and when you articulate something and someone saying 'i agree'
- People may have different idea of racism/homophobia, pointing out this is 'that' helps them to realise and get away from that

- There is a lot of unconscious bias but also strategic othering for the purpose of maintaining power. Even representation is under threat (maori wards, treatment of people in parliament e.g. violence, so they can't stay), so part of the response in this kaupapa is - how are we strategic in our solidarity with each other and standing up against the violence of power and authority?
- Tactical. It doesn't always look the same. The way you have to address in different contexts will always look different. What can be the best way of making a difference in the long term? (there are different ways, some top-down and aggressive in their approach, I can't do that and focus on the long game - go to spaces that are deeply uncomfortable, befriend people (know that you won't see the change yourself and have to meet them where they are). Lean in to your strengths.
- Empathy and engagement
- People have been immersed in hostility and aggression and have been changed by someone who has reached out, shared meals etc.
- You may be right, call them out in an aggressive way, but that might not hit/make a difference
- Behavior changes principles to move towards a goal. Can be both genuine and have a goal.
- "I didn't even bother to try work with them, they won't change their views" when you meet, be friends, trust and mutuality starts to develop but there is a space now to have those challenging korero.
- If you have a clear view of something, what is going to work? Someone yelling it at your face or coming to you gently.
- There is no silver bullet.
- Helps to have a common goal that is different from the contested issue. People need to know that you're not just in it to use someone.
- Conversations around hopes for children or mokopuna and level space.
- There are a lot of short term views and concerns about resources. Future generations thinking. You're kaitiaki for now, who will be in the future? Shifting from immediately vitality to kaitiaki based
- How do we go from representation to real change? The govt doesn't want us to look at the big picture long term, systems thinking - who is working in what spaces in each community. Okay you have that, maybe I can come in here and check in. Focusing on connecting.

Ideas generated:

- Come together as small groups and see what other people are doing/supporting changes to what we want to see, how can we support them? (use our voice, share on social media?)
- What are the barriers that you work with are meeting - that I may have not thought of but I may have a voice to effect that space. Little communities connecting up.
- Who has what skills that we can benefit from

- Flooding the zone, in perpetual reactive state because so much is happening (classic far right e..g. Passing legislation under urgency so we are reacting and not responding - if you are in a collective space, know someone is on it and you can put it down and manage your area of the garden)
- Trust and connection to lean back on your network, what can we like on social media?
- Value alignment and being good allies to each other. Hearing other people's experiences so we can tautoko.
- Differences are connected like a bridge to each other.
- Understanding the repercussions of introducing change, are we prepared for the fight back?
- Values we all share, having empathy and an empathetic mindset towards people who have unconscious bias to create meaningful change - give people space and capacity to develop and change their learned behaviours
- When we go about things in a defensive or aggressive manner - creates response for defense and aggression in return.
- Allowing space for people to realise that their values and real behavior may not align.