

Social Investment – Frequently Asked Questions (Aotearoa)

What is social investment?

Social investment is a way of resourcing change. At its best, it means using funding wisely to back what works—guided by evidence, lived experience, and community priorities. It's about directing resources in a way that creates long-term wellbeing, not just short-term results.

But it's not neutral. Social investment is a political approach—it reflects choices about who decides, what counts, and what gets funded. That's why it matters how we do it.

What is Social Return on Investment (SROI)?

SROI is one way to measure the broader impact of your mahi. It compares what goes in (investment from a funder) with what comes out (the social, environmental, and economic value created) by assigning a monetary value to those benefits.

In practice, SROI tends to focus on the most significant outcomes that can be supported by available data and monetised. This can mean that more complex, relational, or long-term impacts are left out.

Tūhono Impact supports a broader approach to social investment—one that moves beyond the numbers and values context, contribution, and community voice. Using pūrākau, cultural insight, and a range of qualitative and quantitative tools, this approach helps funders and partners see your impact more fully—without losing what matters most to your people.

Is this just about cutting costs?

Sometimes it has been—and that's the risk. When driven by narrow economic goals, social investment can justify disinvestment from the very communities that need more, not less. But done well, it becomes a tool for equity: resourcing what truly matters, in ways defined with communities.

How does this relate to Te Ao Māori?

Te Ao Māori shifts the lens entirely. Social investment becomes less about performance metrics and more about whakapapa, collective wellbeing, and long-term responsibility. Values like *manaakitanga*, *whanaungatanga*, *kaitiakitanga*, and *tino rangatiratanga* reshape how we define value and who gets to decide.

Ka mua, ka muri — we walk into the future guided by the past.

What's happening nationally?

The government has re-established a Social Investment Agency and is developing a new funding approach focused on long-term wellbeing outcomes. For more information about this approach, click [here](#).

We're not sure if we 'do' social investment. Does it still apply to us?

If you're making values-based decisions, learning from your mahi, tracking progress, and sharing your story—you're already practising social investment, even if you don't use the term. The language may be new, but the principles are familiar.

How do we start if we're a small or grassroots group?

Start where you are. You're likely already doing it. If you're defining your intent, reflecting on what's working, and gathering signs of change—photos, quotes, hui notes, whānau kōrero—you're in the zone. The Toolshed has templates and low-stress resources to help you build on what's already growing.

What counts as evidence?

Evidence includes more than formal data. In Aotearoa, pūrākau, whānau voice, tikanga-based indicators, and community insights all count. If it helps you understand and communicate change—and if it matters to those you serve—it's valid. The key is choosing evidence that reflects both your kaupapa and the complexity of your mahi.

Does everything have to be measured?

No. Good social investment honours both stories and stats. It's not about counting everything—it's about tracking change in ways that reflect your kaupapa. Narratives, pūrākau, and tohu (signs of change) are just as valid as numbers, especially when working in relationship-rich, culturally grounded ways.

Do we need a fancy dashboard?

Absolutely not. A whiteboard, sticky notes from a hui, or a Google Doc can be just as powerful. The most important thing is that what you're tracking is meaningful, used, and shared. Simple can be smart.

Who are we accountable to?

Not just funders. Social investment reframes accountability as a circle—not a line. It's about staying true to your kaupapa, responsive to your community, transparent with your partners, and grounded in relationships of trust and reciprocity.

How can we show the 'invisible' stuff—like trust, confidence, or belonging?

Use pūrākau, quotes, creative expression, or tohu of change. Ask whānau what's different, what feels stronger, or what's shifted in how they see themselves and others. These are often the deepest signs of impact—just not the easiest to count.

How does this fit with the rest of Tūhono Impact?

Think of social investment as the soil that nourishes the garden. It supports your purpose, strengthens your roots, helps the sunflower grow, and fills your harvest basket. It's how you sustain the change you've planted, not just how you explain it.

Is this just for government funding?

No. Philanthropic funders, local councils, iwi authorities, and some community-led initiatives are also exploring values-based investment. Many now expect both strong outcomes and authentic stories. Tūhono Impact helps you bring both into view.