

Energising Our Tribal Movement

From the Critical Few to the Committed Many

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Summary

This paper aims to support a wānanga amongst ngā Papatipu Rūnanga:

When: 21st November 2025 (day prior to Hui a Tau)

Time: 10am- 4pm

Where: Waihao marae

Why: to create solutions for one of our shared priorities (increasing the active participation and pulse within our Rūnanga) and present recommendations to Hui a Tau the following day.

Introduction

This paper has been prepared to spark collective thinking about one of the most important tribal issues of our time — the strength of our tribal collectivity. While much of our recent focus as an iwi has rightly been on economic development, institutional design, and government engagement, the vitality of our collective life has received less deliberate attention. Yet everything we aspire to achieve as Ngāi Tahu relies on the health of that collective — on our people feeling connected, engaged, and part of something bigger than themselves. It is timely for us to take a joint approach to strengthening that sense of movement and belonging across our PapatipuRūnanga. This paper recognises the immense contribution of those who already carry the kaupapa and invites us to think together about how we can grow the circle — from the *critical few* who hold the rope to the *committed many* who feel the call to act for the collective good. This paper invites open kōrero about how, as Ngāi Tahu, we might intentionally rekindle that collective pulse — to turn belonging from a feeling into an everyday practice.

Our Legacy as Movement Builders

Every Rūnanga, every marae, every whānau group across our iwi is kept alive by people who give their time, energy and aroha — often quietly, and often for many years. This paper is written in recognition of that work, and to spark collective thinking about how we grow the circle of people who feel connected and compelled to contribute.

Ngāi Tahu — like Māori more generally — were master movement builders. Our tīpuna organised vast networks of people, ideas, and resources across landscapes that demanded collective coordination and enduring trust. Every great migration, every trading route, every kāika, pā and wharenuī was a manifestation of our collective capacity to move together — physically, politically, and spiritually.

The essence of our identity is anchored in collectivism. It is not a romantic notion of unity, but a lived practice of contribution — of people recognising their role in the collective and acting on it. This capacity for coordinated movement has always been our superpower.

Even now, that ability is still alive in us. We see it when our people rally during crisis or celebration — floods, tangihanga, protests, kapa haka, Te Matatini, or the rapid mobilisation of COVID responses. In those moments, our whakapapa-based operating system comes back online. The *many* move as one. Every rūnanga carries this spirit differently — shaped by place, people, and rhythm — yet the heartbeat is the same.

Yet, outside those bursts of collective motion, our everyday reality looks very different. Marae participation is low. Responsibility rests on the shoulders of a *critical few*. The same people turn up, organise, decide, and deliver — again and again. And we often explain that by saying we have a *capability problem*.

But perhaps that's not true.

Is the Real Challenge: Connection, Not Capability?

If we look honestly at our whānau, Rūnanga, hapū, and iwi, perhaps capability is not the real barrier. We have the people, the skills, and the knowledge to deliver almost anything. The challenge is not one of capacity — it is one of connection.

Somewhere along the way, the threads that once bound us in daily collective life have loosened. Our systems for weaving people in — through whakapapa, whanaungatanga, responsibility, and reciprocity — have thinned. The result is that a small group holds the rope for the many, while the many stand ready but there is a river to cross to gain their contributions.

Reweaving those threads — creating belonging and connection in a way that feels alive and relevant to our people — is perhaps one of the most important works of our time.

Rekindling Movement in a Changing World

To rebuild movement, we will need to learn again from what we used to know and combine that wisdom with the realities of today. We live in an age where *influencers* often have more convening power than institutions, where people follow energy, authenticity, and purpose more than hierarchy. If we are to reach and inspire our dispersed whānau, we need to learn to move in those spaces too — with the same authenticity that has always bound us.

If our tīpuna were the master weavers of tribal networks, our task now is to become the master weavers of digital, emotional, and social networks — the modern fabrics through which belonging and participation flow.

Energising our tribal movement is about reconnecting the many, rekindling shared purpose, and rediscovering the joy of doing things together. It's about moving from dependence on the critical few to mobilisation of the committed many — not by asking for more work, but by building more connection.

Why This Matters Now

Across the iwi, we are making significant progress. Our PapatipuRūnanga and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu are engaged in ambitious work — shaping government policy, driving economic development, building organisational capability, and designing institutions that can sustain our collective aspirations for generations.

This is the hard and necessary work of iwi-building. But it rests on something more fundamental — the **vibrancy of our collective life**.

All of our development — economic, political, and organisational — ultimately relies on having a living, breathing iwi that people want to be part of. The strength of our marae, the reach of our Rūnanga, the energy of our wānanga, and the legitimacy of our tribal voice all depend on whether our people feel connected and compelled to move with us.

Yet the context in which we are building this movement has changed profoundly. Our population has grown — dramatically. We are now a large, diverse, and dispersed iwi, with more of our people living outside of our traditional takiwā than within it. This *diaspora* is both a challenge and a gift: it expands our reach, but it also stretches the threads of belonging. Maintaining connection across geography, generation, and daily life requires deliberate effort and new forms of engagement.

The rhythms of modern life — mobility, digital communication, and individualisation — mean that the natural connective tissue that once bound us together through marae, whānau, and hapū life no longer operates as our primary organising structure. Many of our people identify proudly as Ngāi Tahu, but have limited pathways to participate in iwi life in ways that feel relevant or accessible.

At its heart, iwi-building is people-building.

To sustain and deepen the gains we've made, we need to rekindle a **sense of tribal movement** — a collective current that pulls people in, motivates participation, and makes belonging feel meaningful. But movement doesn't just happen. It must be cultivated. We will need to be deliberate about how we invite, connect, and mobilise people — how we move from dependence on the *critical few* to the energy of the *committed many*; how we build a sense of belonging that can travel across cities, generations, and platforms.

That is the purpose of this session: to design an **action plan to energise a sense of movement** within and across our PapatipuRūnanga, so that our collective identity becomes not just something we speak of, but something we feel and enact — wherever our people may live.

We already know how to make things happen. This kōrero is not about starting from scratch — it's about lifting our collective energy and finding new ways to bring more of our people along with us.

Weaving Movement: How We Might Rekindle Collective Energy

Rebuilding a sense of tribal movement will not come from one campaign or event — it will come from *how we weave*. Our tīpuna knew that collective action was not commanded; it was cultivated. It grew from a rhythm of invitation, reciprocity, and belonging.

To mobilise our people today, we may need to think less about *getting people to do things* and more about *creating the conditions in which they want to move*.

This requires a thoughtful balance of **push and pull**, of **structure and freedom**, and of **collective purpose and individual meaning**.

Below are a few prompts to guide our thinking as we design the next phase of movement-building. The following ideas are not instructions, but sparks — starting points for wānanga and local adaptation.

1. Push and Pull: Finding the Right Rhythm

Strong movements are sustained by both *push* and *pull* factors that work in harmony.

- *Push* factors are the calls to responsibility — the sense that our collective wellbeing depends on each of us doing our part. They activate duty, reciprocity, and pride. This sense of responsibility has always been one of our deepest sources of strength: it anchors belonging in action and gives meaning to contribution.
- *Pull* factors are the rhythms that keep that responsibility alive — the habits, rituals, and everyday enactments of participation that make showing up feel natural. They draw people in through familiarity and repetition: the regular moments where collective life is lived, not just spoken about.

Together, *push* and *pull* form the rhythm of movement — responsibility provides the moral spark, and habit turns that spark into enduring warmth.

Some pātai:

- How can we strengthen the rhythms that keep our collective responsibilities alive?
- What regular practices — small or large — could make contribution feel natural, satisfying, and sustaining for our people?

2. Triggering Intrinsic Motivation

People stay connected when they feel that their contribution matters and aligns with who they are. This activates *intrinsic motivation* — the inner spark that moves people from interest to involvement, and from involvement to ownership. When people can see themselves reflected in the kaupapa, when their values and talents are affirmed, participation becomes not an obligation but an expression of identity.

Some pātai:

- How might we design opportunities that speak to people's passions, skills, and identities — rather than simply asking for help?

- How can we make it easy for everyone to find a place where their natural energy fits?

3. Creating Genuine Spaces for People to Belong

Movements are sustained not by structures alone, but by spaces — spaces where people feel seen, useful, and connected. These spaces might be physical (marae, wānanga, events) or relational (teams, online communities, working groups).

The key is that they are *genuine*: people feel that their presence matters and that there is space for them to act on their sense of responsibility. Belonging is deepened through *enactment* — through the small, repeated moments where whānau contribute, help, host, or learn together. In that repetition, belonging becomes lived, not just spoken about.

Some pātai:

- Where in our iwi ecosystem are the spaces that genuinely nourish belonging and purpose — and where are the gaps?
- How might we design new spaces (on the ground or online) that invite people to participate in ways that feel both natural and mana-enhancing?

4. Sequencing and Momentum

Movements rarely emerge from a single moment; they are woven step by step. In Whiria Te Muka Tangata, we talk about *sequencing*: starting where energy already exists, building early wins, and layering effort to create growing waves of momentum. Momentum grows when responsibility and belonging are practised regularly — when there are steady rhythms of participation that keep people connected between major events.

Some pātai:

- What small actions could we start with that will build visible energy and confidence?
- How do we pace our movement so that it grows sustainably, rather than burning brightly and fading fast?

5. The Role of Story and Celebration

People don't join movements — they join *stories* that inspire them. Celebrating progress, telling stories of contribution, and showing visible signs of collective pride are powerful accelerants for participation. Stories remind people that their small actions matter, and that together they form part of something larger. They turn responsibility into pride, and participation into legacy.

Some pātai:

- What stories of movement are we telling about ourselves?

- How can we celebrate our people in ways that feed the collective sense of pride and possibility?

Re-energising our iwi movement will not be about creating new structures — it will be about *re-humanising* them. It is about finding the balance between design and emotion, between invitation and expectation, between legacy and imagination. Our task is to weave spaces, stories, and experiences that make participation feel not like another demand, but like a return — a coming home to our collective purpose.

Making it real—What is our current state

To strengthen and energise our tribal movement, we need a sound understanding of our current state that we can wānanga on the 21st. To support this exploration, we set out some practical questions about what is going on at home.

Participation and Engagement

- Rough estimate of how many members regularly participate in hui, wānanga, or kaupapa.
- Examples of activities or events that have drawn strong participation.
- Areas where participation is low or where energy has waned.

Communication and Connection

- How you currently communicate with whānau (e.g. pānui, social media, hui, direct contact).
- What communication or storytelling approaches seem to work best.
- Any examples of how your Rūnanga celebrates or acknowledges whānau contributions.

Momentum and Opportunity

- Identify 1–2 kaupapa or moments that have created energy and excitement in recent years — and what made them successful.
- Note any upcoming opportunities that could act as a platform to build movement (e.g. wānanga, commemorations, projects).

One Aspiration and One Barrier

To help shape our collective action plan, please be ready to share:

- **One aspiration** — what you most want to see for your Rūnanga or the wider iwi in terms of connection and participation.
- **One barrier** — what you see as the biggest thing holding back broader movement or engagement.

Building the Future—Vision and Action

To support building shared vision and approach to our tribal movement building, we also invite you to consider the following exploratory questions:

The Nature of Our Movement

- When you think about Ngāi Tahu moving as one people, what does that look or feel like to you?
- How do we know when our iwi is *in movement* — when our collective energy is strong and flowing?
- What are the warning signs when that movement slows or stagnates?

The Foundations Beneath Our Development

- We are making great strides in economic development, institutional design, and government engagement — but all of this depends on the vibrancy of our iwi collective.
 - How does the wellbeing and participation of our people shape the strength and legitimacy of our iwi systems?
 - What risks do we run if our institutional and economic progress outpaces our collective engagement and connection?
 - What would it look like if our organisational and economic success was matched by a powerful sense of tribal movement?

From The Critical Few to the Committed Many

- Who are the “critical few” in your Papatipu Rūnanga or community and what sustains their motivation and commitment?
- How can we support our ‘critical few’ in ways that keep the flame alive — without letting it burn them out?
- What would it take to shift from keeping the loop small to creating spaces for the many?
- Who are our “committed many” — those who care deeply but are not yet actively involved?
- What stops people from participating — time, confidence, disconnection, opportunity, invitation or something deeper and more complex?
- What might draw people in — pride, belonging, purpose, fun, or the sense that they are genuinely needed?
- How can we reframe participation so that it feels like an opportunity for contribution rather than an obligation to serve?

Rekindling Connection and Momentum

- What sparks connection and momentum in our iwi? When have you seen people rally, act, or show pride?

- What is the modern equivalent of the old ways we gathered and acted together — and how can we make those experiences accessible?
- How might we blend the wisdom of our whakapapa-based systems with the tools of our time — where influencers and digital energy can mobilise people faster than institutions?

Leadership and Invitation

- How do we grow and support leadership that invites others into movement?
- What are the most powerful ways we can *invite* people to step into iwi life?
- How do we ensure that every whānau member, no matter where they live, feels there is a place for them in the movement?

The final reflection pātai is:

If our tīpuna were here today, what would they recognise in how we move — and what would they tell us to rekindle?

Conclusion

Our aim for the wānanga is to co-develop an **Action Plan to Energise Tribal Movement** — grounded in insight, guided by whakapapa, and focused on action. If we can do that together, the energy of Ngāi Tahu will be unstoppable — carried not by the few, but by the many, moving as one people again.