WAIKATO

The funding landscape

An analysis of grant funding across the Waikato region.

fundsorter

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FOREWORD

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Waikato funders have for a long time taken a collaborative and connected approach to funding. Across the region, philanthropic organisations collectively contribute millions of dollars each year to support community wellbeing and while individual funders have insights into their own grantmaking, there has been limited visibility of overall funding across the region.

While funding decisions are made every day, it is often difficult to see the bigger picture. Understanding where funding is flowing, which priorities attract investment, and where gaps may exist helps both funders and community organisations make more informed decisions and identify opportunities for greater impact.

This report was commissioned by a collaborative group of Waikato funders to provide a clearer understanding of the region's funding landscape. It offers insights into how philanthropic resources are actually distributed across communities, demographic groups, causes, priority areas, activities, sectors, and geographic places, creating a shared evidence base to inform discussion, strengthen collaboration, and support strategic decision-making. This data allows us to gain a more complete understanding of funding patterns across the region.

We hope this report will be a valuable resource for funders and the communities of the Waikato.

Fundsorter exists to make funding better, reducing the administrative burden on community organisations, increasing equity, and strengthening the sector's collective insight. We believe that greater transparency, and regular, accessible data on where grants are going, helps everyone make better decisions. Funders can be more informed and strategic. Community organisations can advocate with stronger evidence. And together, we can develop a clearer picture of how funding is being prioritised across Aotearoa.

This report is part of that commitment. It offers a snapshot of funding priorities and flows in the Waikato region right now, and forms the foundation for tracking how those patterns shift over time. Data allows us to move beyond anecdotes and see the bigger picture - who is being funded, who is not, and what that reflects about our collective values and priorities.

We are pleased to be partnering with seven funders in the Waikato Region on this report. We are grateful for their support in making this work possible. As you read this report, we invite you to consider what the findings mean for your own organisation.

INTRODUCTION

There is a lack of accessible, aggregated data in the community sector, particularly about funding: where it goes, what funders prioritise, and how those priorities align with community need. **Greater transparency enables more informed decision-making.** It allows us to see how challenges shift over time, whether funding responds to those shifts, and where persistent gaps remain.

This report surfaces that picture for the Waikato region by examining both stated funding priorities and actual grant distribution over a 12-month period. It provides an independent evidence base to:

- Inform funding strategy across the region
- Support more coordinated and complementary regional philanthropy
- Equip community organisations with credible data to strengthen advocacy
- Surface inequities not visible at an individual grant or organisational level

Aggregated regional analysis creates shared intelligence and shared intelligence strengthens the wider ecosystem.

The analysis focuses primarily on contestable funding — funding distributed through an open or semi-open application process — and offers an aggregated view of where those resources flow in the community sector. It is not a definitive account of all investment: proactive funding, impact investment portfolios, and informal giving are not well captured here, and we have undoubtedly missed some funds in our data collection. Nevertheless, this report provides more information than we have had before, and gives us a starting point for discussion.

For community organisations, this report offers a stronger foundation for advocacy — whether that means seeking additional funding, highlighting gaps, or questioning allocation patterns. It may provide a basis for greater collaboration across the sector, grounded in shared evidence rather than anecdote.

For funders, the findings present an opportunity to reflect. We encourage you to:

- Understand funding trends in your area and position your work within the wider landscape.
- Regularly review whether funding decisions align with stated strategic priorities, and address any gaps between intent and allocation.
- Communicate clearly about both funding intentions and actual distribution. Greater transparency supports better-aligned applications and stronger coordination across funders.
- Ensure that stated priorities are matched by meaningful investment.

This report is intended as a contribution to shared understanding, not a judgement. Over time, consistent and openly shared data will build a more complete picture of funding flows and trends, and help us create a more equitable funding landscape.

A note on anonymity: we haven't named individual funders in these findings. We have reported by funder type and in aggregate, in order to describe the system.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was made possible through a collaboration of Waikato funders: WEL Energy Trust, DV Bryant Trust, SkyCity Hamilton, Momentum Waikato Community Foundation, Len Reynolds Trust, Trust Waikato and a funder that did not wish to be identified. Ngā mihi nui for your support.

In total, this report analyses 4,894 grants worth $82,692,649, across a regional population of about 532,100 — roughly $157 per head. We explored 120 funders operating in the Waikato region. Of those, 74 were active during the 12-month time period (April 1st 2025 through to March 31st 2026), and also funded organisations (rather than individuals, which is out of scope for this report).

We couldn't access detailed information for three in-scope funders — their grants, just over $500,000, are in our totals but could only be assigned to a general category, "all" due to lack of data. For three others, the available data didn't align precisely with our focus period, so we've used it as a proxy, on the basis that none had a change of leadership or strategy that would materially affect the comparison. And three further funders chose not to participate.

Philanthropic foundations (including family foundations, community trusts and community foundations) provided 29.5% of the money analysed. Energy trusts contributed a further 11.9%, with Class Four gaming trusts accounting for 27.4%. Central government and statutory funders supplied 18.5%, councils 10.9%, and iwi and corporate funders the remaining 1.8%. The vast majority of this funding was from contestable grants, with some input from proactive funders.

How to read the numbers

Each grant is categorised (tagged) by its focus, so a grant funding a teen sports programme is counted under both "sports" and "youth". Grants carry 2.45 tags on average. That means we can look at the data three ways. Each answers a different question, and none is more correct than the others.

The gap between reach and share of dollars is where much of the interest lies. A cause can appear in a great many grants and still receive very little money, or appear rarely and command a lot. Both tell you something useful about how a cause is funded.

We also report the average and the typical grant amounts. The average is the total divided by the number of grants. The median, or typical grant, is the midpoint — half of all grants were larger and half were smaller. The gap between them matters: the Waikato's average grant is $17,101, but the median is just $6,000, because a small number of very large grants pull the average up.

The three measures used throughout this report:

Reach

How often a cause appears – the share of all grants that touched on it. Grants carry multiple tags, so these overlap and sum to more than 100%.
eg. Sport: 23.9% of grants, about one in four

Dollars touched

The full value of every grant that involved the cause. This also overlaps, and sums to more than 100%.
eg. Sport: 19.2% of dollars ($16.1m)

Share of dollars

Each grant's value divided equally across its tags, so the total sums to 100%. This is our headline measure.
eg. Sport: 10.3% of dollars ($8.6m)

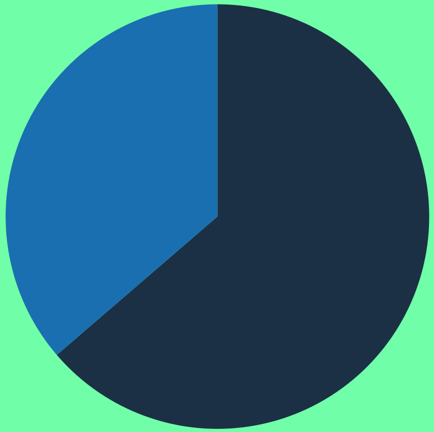
Where we say a category "received" a percentage, we mean the third measure

REPORT SNAPSHOT

Groups not explicitly listed as fund priorities consistently received less funding

The largest portion of funding - 28.2% of grants have a focus on children and young people

Sector capability building receives 3.05% share of funding with most grants sitting at around $40k



63.7%

Of all funding went to 10% of applicants

Relief of poverty was named by 6.7% of grants but received only 2% of dollars

Sport received a high volume of small grants 23.9% of grants, but only 10.3% of funds

Climate change is barely funded, receiving just 0.9% of all funding

$82.7

million total distributed

4,894

grants analysed

$6000

median grant

KEY FINDINGS

What the data tells us

Sport is first on every measure. It's the number one single category on reach (23.9% of grants), dollars touched (19.2%), and share of dollars (10.3%). Interestingly, the average sports grant was $13,721, below the regional average amount of $17,101. Sport gets a very large number of somewhat smaller grants.

Unlisted priorities receive little funding. Categories not explicitly listed as funding priorities consistently received low levels of funding. LGBTQIA+ communities, media and journalism, and democracy and civic participation were not named as a priority by any of the funds. All three received under 0.25%. The pattern is consistent: topics that aren't explicitly named doesn't get funded.

Children and young people are the biggest theme in the data. Combining tamariki and rangatahi shows that 28.2% of grants (1,378 grants worth $23 million) were focused on young people. No other theme in the Waikato is stronger.

Climate change is barely funded. Climate change was a priority for 3% of funds but received just 0.9% of Waikato funding dollars. Conservation, by contrast, received 5.3%, making it one of the region's better-funded causes, and waste minimisation 0.4%. The Waikato resources nature protection far more than climate change action. Class Four gaming trusts gave almost nothing to climate change.

Disability funding sits in its own silo. In the Waikato, disability is funded as a category on its own, not as something running through every community. Of 4,894 grants, disability was almost never tagged alongside other groups (like women or Māori, for example).

Funded often, but not generously. Disability and the arts both appear in around 10% of grants made across the Waikato, yet when it comes to dollars, disability received just 2.2% and the arts 3.3%. The average grant in each sits well below the regional average of $17,101 — $9,234 for disability, $11,610 for the arts. Funding in these sectors reaches a lot of organisations, in small amounts.

Capacity building support for the community sector is a good-news story. Only about 1.5% of funds name it as a priority, yet it receives a bigger share of the money than that figure suggests, and the grants are well sized (averaging around $39,000). Nearly all of this money comes from philanthropic trusts, who put about 6% of their funding here.

Several areas sit low against evident need. Of every dollar granted, housing gets 1%, relief of poverty 2%, family and sexual violence 1.24%, mental health 0.91% and women and gender equity 0.66%.

Māori receive fewer, larger grants. Only 7.5% of grants are tagged Māori — but those 368 grants are worth $15.6 million in total, or 18.6% of all dollars touched. The average grant involving Māori is $42,391, two and a half times the regional average.

Some causes appear to be one board decision away from collapse. Where a category depends overwhelmingly on a single funder, such as with biodiversity, a change of strategy could be dire — some sectors are very fragile.

Relief of poverty was named as a priority by 6.7% of funds, yet it received just 2% of the funding pool. Nationally, 14.3% of children — one in seven — live in material hardship, and about one in four tamariki Māori. Poverty relief is widely recognised in funder language (perhaps because it is explicitly named as a charitable purpose in the Charities Act 2005) and thinly resourced in funder practice.

Heritage and research priorities do not translate into money. Each was named by 7.5–9.0% of funds and each received under 1% of dollars. Where a category is widely mentioned but barely funded, it suggests funders do not prioritise such applications highly against competing requests, or that applications for those topics are not forthcoming.

This analysis is not definitive, but it provides a clear starting point. Regular snapshots of this kind, taken over time, could help track trends, test assumptions, and support more deliberate and equitable allocation of resources across the region.

Funding against population

Comparing funding shares to population shares is a blunt instrument. Not every community needs funding in proportion to its size, and some groups are supported largely through government services rather than grants. But it's a useful way of asking whether the funding record looks like the region it serves.

Māori. 25.2% of Waikato residents identify as Māori and 27.6% are of Māori descent, both well above the national average. Māori and tangata whenua funding combined reached 8.12% of dollars. This is well short of population share.

Low funding for social justice. Waikato funders are more likely to fund arts, sport and education than work with or for specific marginalised communities — such as disabled persons, ethnic and racial minorities, LGBTQIA+ communities, and homeless populations — whether that is direct service delivery or advocacy for change.

Older people. People aged 65 and over are around 17% of the population and that share is rising. Funding for older people and ageing was 1.53%, at an average grant of $15,586. While ageing is one of the few entirely predictable pressures facing the region, older people are also well supported through other government funding mechanisms.

Ethnic communities, migrants and refugees. While 12.2% of Waikato residents identify as Asian and 1.4% as Middle Eastern, Latin American or African, funding for these communities was 0.76% in practice, against 5.2% of funds naming it as a priority. It's concerning that the gap is this wide in a part of the population that's growing fastest.

Pacific peoples. 5.2% of the population; 0.19% of dollars across 33 grants. Pasifika communities were named as a priority by 2.2% of funds.

LGBTQIA+ communities. 4.8% of New Zealand adults identify as LGBTQIA+. Funding for this community in the Waikato was 0.16%, and we could find no regional fund that named it as a priority. Notably, the average LGBTQIA+ grant was $17,450, slightly above the regional average — so this is about the number of grants made, not their size.

The shape of funding

Most organisations received just one grant. 2,930 organisations received funding. 57.3% of those organisations received one grant. At the other end, the top 10% of recipients took 63.7% of the money, and two organisations alone received 31 and 25 grants. Does the money follow need, or grant-writing capacity?

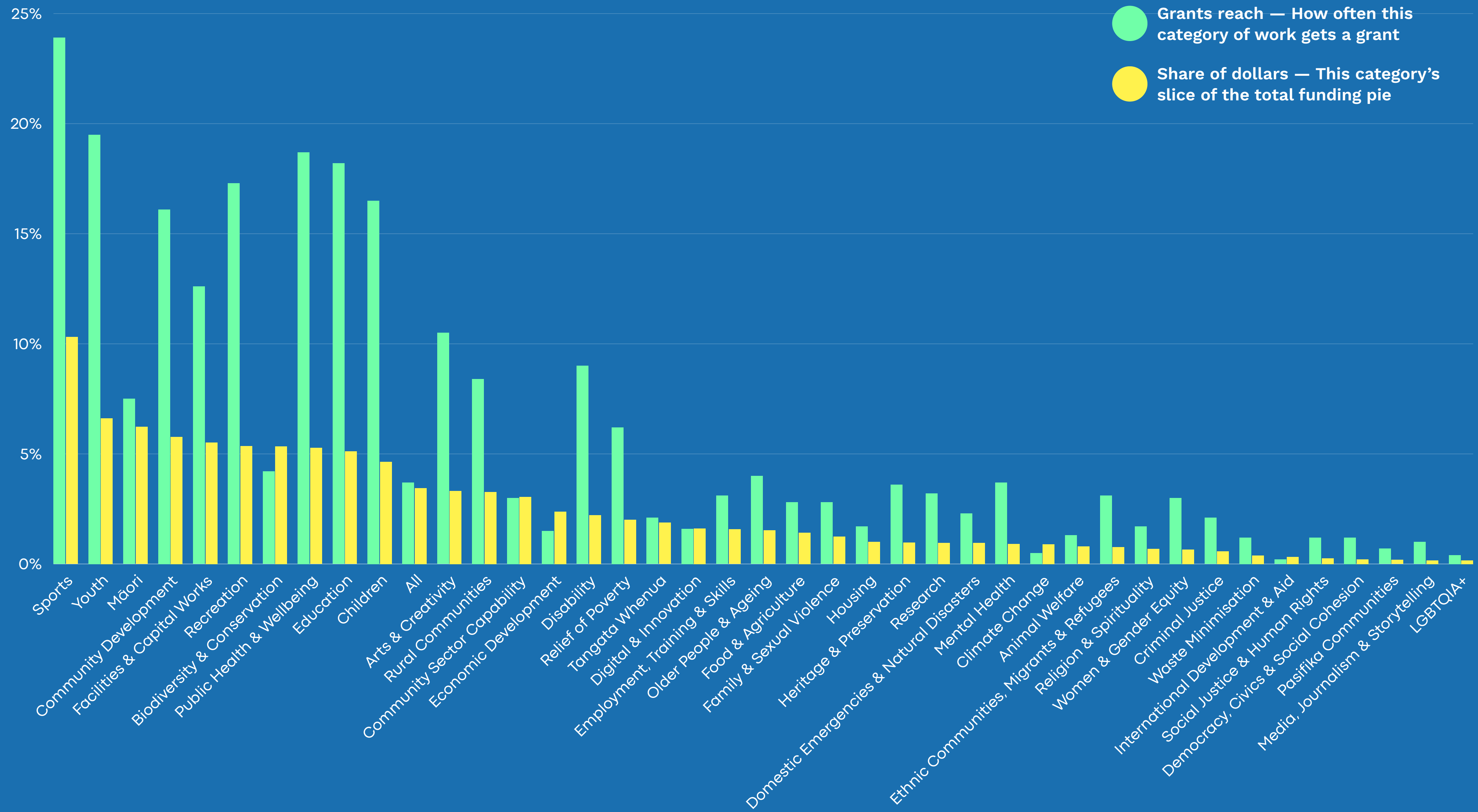
Multi-year funding is rare. Only 9.7% of the grants analysed were multi-year. The vast majority are one-off grants.

Grants are mostly small. Grants are mostly small. Fewer than 300 grants across the whole region were over $50,000, so most organisations will need several grants to fund anything substantial. Size also depends on who you approach. Councils give the smallest grants, with a median of $3,000. Philanthropic trusts are the most generous, at a median of $9,000. Central government and statutory funders sit in between, with a median of $5,000 — though their average grant is $41,316, because a handful of very large grants pull the figure up.

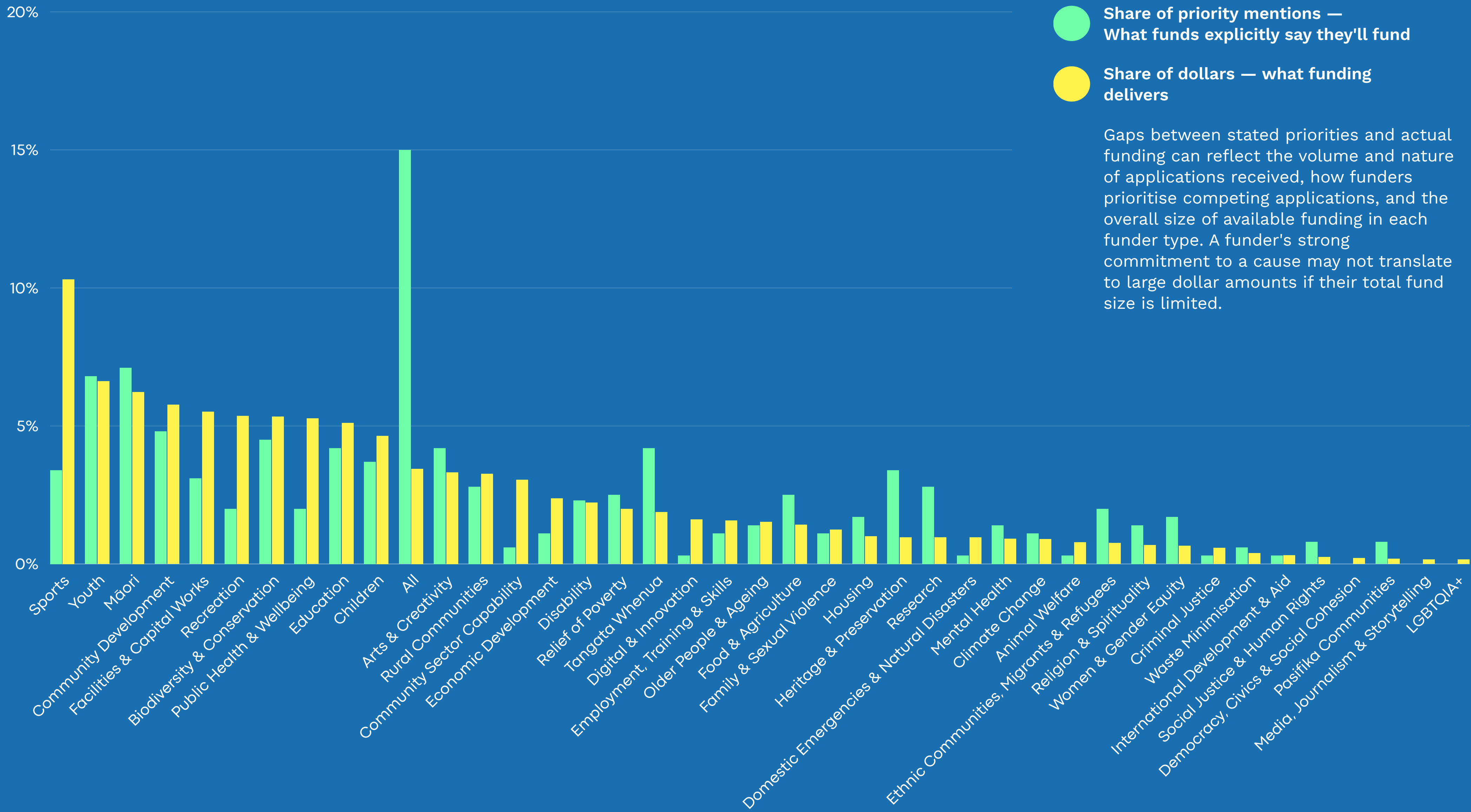
Grant size	% of grants	% of dollars
Under $1000	4.1%	0.1%
$1000 - $5000	33.9%	5.2%
$5000 - $10,000	21.0%	7.7%
$10,000 - $50,000	35.5%	38.4%
$50,000 - $100,000	3.3%	12.0%
$100,000 +	2.2%	36.5%

**there are 2703 registered charities in the Waikato region, however this only includes registered charities whose physical address is located within the region. Many organisations that work in the Waikato are either incorporated societies of based outside of the geographic area.*

REPORT SNAPSHOT
THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE: GRANTS REACH VS DOLLARS



REPORT SNAPSHOT
THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE: PRIORITIES VS DOLLARS



Gaps between stated priorities and actual funding can reflect the volume and nature of applications received, how funders prioritise competing applications, and the overall size of available funding in each funder type. A funder's strong commitment to a cause may not translate to large dollar amounts if their total fund size is limited.

Assumptions

Availability and accuracy of information. The report assumes that publicly available documentation and information provided by funders accurately reflect actual funding practices. Where information is incomplete or unclear, reasonable interpretations have been made.

Stability of funding objectives. It is assumed that the stated objectives of contestable grant programmes have been broadly stable over the period examined, and that any minor changes do not materially affect the overall purpose or intent of the funds.

Categorisation notes

"All" grant funding. Some funders have very broad strategies that encompass any work that is beneficial to the community. These are so broad that they cannot be allocated to more specific categories. An example of this would be the Pelorus Trust, which "funds for charitable, philanthropic and sporting purposes." On the grants side, "all" appears as a category when a funder has not provided adequate detail on individual grants.

Māori versus Tangata Whenua. These are two distinct categories in our funding data. Māori is funding tagged for outcomes benefiting Māori, or for projects led by Māori or kaupapa Māori organisations. Tangata Whenua is funding that is specifically for hapu or iwi.

FUNDING CATEGORIES

Fundsorter, in consultation with those working in the community sector, have created a list of funding categories that broadly represent the work carried out by the community or for-purpose sector. We understand that these categories are not perfect, but believe they are a good starting point for data analysis and conversations.

All. Funders with no stated cause, population, or kaupapa focus (e.g. discretionary community grants, general foundation rounds, community trust funds); used exclusively and never combined with other tags.

Climate Change. Climate change mitigation (emissions reduction, renewable energy, sustainable transport, carbon sequestration) and adaptation (community resilience, disaster risk reduction, climate justice), including related policy, research, advocacy, and education.

Biodiversity & Conservation. Protecting, restoring, and sustainably managing species, ecosystems, and genetic diversity, including predator control, ecological restoration, freshwater and marine health, and kaitiakitanga and mātauranga Māori conservation approaches.

Waste Minimisation. Reducing waste across the full hierarchy — source reduction, reuse, repair, recycling, composting, and resource recovery — including circular economy and landfill diversion initiatives.

Food & Agriculture. Access to nutritious food, sustainable food production, and healthy food systems, including community gardens, food rescue, food sovereignty, regenerative farming, sustainable fisheries, and mahinga kai.

Disability. Disability rights, inclusion, and practical support for disabled people and their whānau, including assistive technology, respite, supported employment, accessible infrastructure, the Deaf community and NZSL, and tāngata whaikaha.

Mental Health. Psychological, emotional, and psychiatric wellbeing across prevention, treatment, and recovery, including counselling, peer support, crisis response, suicide prevention, and kaupapa Māori approaches (hauora hinengaro).

Public Health & Wellbeing. Physical health services, health promotion, and population wellbeing, including disease prevention, clinical care, health education and equity, and kaupapa Māori models such as Te Whare Tapa Whā.

Children. The wellbeing, development, and protection of children and tamariki (pre-birth to age 12, sometimes 18), including early childhood education, parenting support, child protection, and hardship support.

Youth. Projects by or for young people and rangatahi (roughly ages 12–24, sometimes 35), including youth development, mentoring, leadership, cultural connection, and youth justice.

Older People & Ageing. Wellbeing, participation, and dignity for older people and kaumātua, including aged and palliative care, isolation and elder abuse prevention, and age-friendly and intergenerational initiatives.

Employment, Training & Skills. Building employment pathways, workforce skills, and economic self-sufficiency, including vocational training, job placement, social enterprise, financial capability, and support for people facing barriers to work.

Education. Learning across all life stages, from early childhood through tertiary and lifelong learning, including schooling, teacher development, educational resources, and kaupapa Māori settings such as kura kaupapa and kōhanga reo.

Digital & Innovation. Technology, digital systems, and social innovation as the primary focus, including AI for good, digital inclusion, civic tech, Indigenous data sovereignty (Te Mana Raraunga), and the testing and scaling of new social solutions.

FUNDING CATEGORIES

Economic Development. Growing local and regional economies and community wealth through entrepreneurship, small business support, financial inclusion, and Māori and iwi economic self-determination, with an economic-outcome lens.

Research. The generation of new, generalisable knowledge through original systematic investigation across all disciplines, tagged only where a fund explicitly supports research, study, or knowledge generation.

Māori. Outcomes benefiting Māori or projects led by Māori, iwi, hapū, or kaupapa Māori organisations across all domains, including any indigenous-focused fund Māori can apply to.

Tangata Whenua. Work specifically by or for hapū and iwi as distinct governing entities (iwi/hapū trusts, PSGEs), governed by tribal leadership or exclusively for members of a named iwi/hapū within a rohe.

Pasifika Communities. Initiatives led by or for Pacific peoples in Aotearoa across cultural, social, health, economic, and wellbeing outcomes, including language, arts, Pacific-led research, and MVPFAFF+ communities.

Ethnic Communities, Migrants & Refugees. New Zealand–based support for ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, and diaspora groups, including settlement services, cultural identity, anti-racism advocacy, and social cohesion.

LGBTQIA+. Supporting Rainbow communities' rights, visibility, and wellbeing, including community services, sexual and mental health, anti-discrimination advocacy, gender-affirming care, takatāpui, and MVPFAFF+.

Social Justice & Human Rights. Advancing equity, justice, and human rights through advocacy, movements, and systemic reform, including civil liberties, reproductive rights, racial justice, and Te Tiriti–based advocacy.

Women & Gender Equity. Initiatives where women, girls, or gender minorities are the primary beneficiaries or gender drives disadvantage, including gender-based violence, reproductive health, pay equity, and leadership, encompassing wāhine, trans women, and gender-diverse people.

Arts & Creativity. Artistic and creative expression across all forms, including individual artists, arts organisations, community participation, cultural events, infrastructure, toi Māori, and Pacific arts.

Heritage & Preservation. Protecting, restoring, and transmitting cultural, historical, built, and natural heritage, including historic buildings, collections, taonga, oral and language history, urupā, marae, and wāhi tapu.

Media, Journalism & Storytelling. Media production, journalism, and storytelling across all platforms, including public interest journalism, documentary, community media, media literacy, reo Māori broadcasting, and Pacific and ethnic media.

Domestic Emergencies & Natural Disasters. Relief, response, and recovery for New Zealand communities affected by emergencies and disasters, including immediate relief, civil defence, rebuilding, and preparedness and resilience.

Housing. Housing provision and support addressing unaffordability, insecurity, and homelessness, including social and affordable housing, emergency housing, tenancy support, home modifications, and papakāinga.

Relief of Poverty. Reducing poverty and material hardship through both direct assistance (food, financial help, budgeting) and structural work addressing the systemic causes of disadvantage, including colonisation and Māori land loss.

Criminal Justice. The criminal justice system, its reform, and the people affected, including prison reform, restorative justice, reintegration, and te ao Māori approaches such as Te Pae Oranga and Te Ao Mārama.

FUNDING CATEGORIES

Family & Sexual Violence. Preventing and responding to family, domestic, and sexual violence and child and elder abuse, including crisis services, recovery, prevention, abuse-in-care support, and kaupapa Māori approaches.

Rural Communities. Wellbeing, services, and infrastructure in rural areas and small towns, including rural halls, connectivity, farming families, the primary sector, provincial "regional" New Zealand, and rural Māori and papakāinga.

Community Development. Building community capacity, power, and self-determination so local people lead and decide, including community organising and participatory planning — not merely activities that happen "in the community."

Democracy, Civics & Social Cohesion. Strengthening democratic systems, civic participation, and social cohesion, including electoral integrity, civic education, peace building, countering disinformation and extremism, and Treaty-based participatory governance.

Community Sector Capability. Building the capability, sustainability, and effectiveness of community organisations and the wider sector, including governance, fundraising, systems, workforce, networks, and Te Tiriti partnership practice.

Facilities & Capital Works. The construction, renovation, and fit-out of community facilities and fixed infrastructure (halls, marae, clubrooms, accessibility and seismic works), excluding standalone portable equipment.

Sports. Organised sport and physical activity from grassroots to elite, including club and youth sport, disability sport, facilities, events, and initiatives addressing barriers for underrepresented groups.

Recreation. Voluntary leisure and recreational activities for enjoyment, connection, and wellbeing, including outdoor pursuits, hobby groups, events, and the tracks, trails, parks, and halls that enable them.

International Development & Aid. Work whose primary beneficiaries are communities outside New Zealand, including humanitarian aid, long-term development, global advocacy, and international partnerships, excluding NZ-based work.

Religion & Spirituality. Religious practice, faith community life, and spiritual wellbeing across all traditions, including worship, chaplaincy, interfaith work, sacred spaces, and Māori and Pacific faith traditions.

Animal Welfare. The welfare and humane treatment of domestic, companion, farm, and wild animals, including rescue and rehoming, anti-cruelty advocacy, farm animal welfare, and stronger welfare standards.

ABOUT FUNDSORTER

Fundsorter is a social enterprise designed to help community organisations reduce the time and effort spent finding and applying for grants.

The tool brings together a comprehensive database of funding opportunities, a smart matching algorithm, and an AI-driven drafting tool that continually learns and improves. After creating a profile, organisations share information about their funding needs. Fundsorter then identifies the most relevant opportunities and generates tailored application drafts for selected funds. Soon, the system will also be able to generate accountability reports, streamlining the entire grants process from start to finish.

Our kaupapa is focused on creating a more equitable funding landscape in Aotearoa. We do this by making the grant-seeking process more efficient, more equitable and accessible for all; by providing education opportunities to connect community organisations to the emerging tech paradigm and; by collating, analysing and disseminating data that can help funders and communities make better informed decisions.

We are a small New Zealand–based team with experience in the community sector, philanthropy, technology and research. We work closely with users and funders to make sure our tools are useful, accurate, and grounded in how funding actually works.

Thank you to everyone who supported this mahi.

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DV BRYANT TRUST
Enhancing wellbeing in the Waikato
Whakarei oranga i Waikato

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