

Laying the Foundations: Building Resilience Against Disinformation

June 2024

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Executive Summary:

Overview:

This report discusses the initial findings of the "One-off Fund to Build Resilience to Disinformation" initiative administered by InternetNZ | Ipurangi Aotearoa for Te Tari o te Pirimia me te Komiti Matua (The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC)). This report encompasses general policy reporting, analysis of the funding panel, and anonymised case studies from the first phase of the fund. Please take note that this report was written before the end of our contract with DPMC.

Importance of Anti-Disinformation Funding:

Disinformation presents substantial threats to social cohesion and trust in institutions. Research indicates that disinformation disproportionately impacts marginalised groups. Sustained support for community initiatives is crucial to building resilience against disinformation and maintaining public trust in verifiable information.

Devolution of Funds:

The strategy of devolving funds to InternetNZ | Ipurangi Aotearoa facilitated enhanced engagement with community groups, particularly those hesitant to engage directly with governmental entities. It's crucial to highlight the value of having someone with established community ties, especially in light of the heightened challenges encountered by individuals already active in these areas. This approach met diversity objectives, with funds allocated to communities disproportionately affected by disinformation, including Māori, LGBTQIA+, seniors, Pasifika, recent refugees/migrants, and ethnic and religious minorities. The devolution model has proven efficacious in addressing diverse community needs and fostering trust.

Demand and Need:

We have identified an imperative need to address the proliferation of disinformation within New Zealand communities. This need was substantiated by extensive consultations with over 50 community groups in the application process for this fund. Our 2023 Internet Insights Report¹ revealed that 65% of New Zealanders harbour significant concerns regarding misleading online information. The overwhelming demand for the fund and the high quality of proposals highlighted a critical resource gap, necessitating further investment in combating disinformation.

¹ New Zealand's Internet Insights, 2023.

<https://internetnz.nz/assets/Uploads/New-Zealands-Internet-Insights-2023.pdf>

Funding Panel Process:

The funding panel process was meticulously designed to be inclusive and efficient, involving direct communication with community leaders and prospective applicants. Applicants were provided with guidance to ensure their proposals aligned with the fund's criteria. The internal panel employed an assessment matrix to evaluate applications. A member of the senior leadership team conferred final approvals, ensuring a comprehensive review process.

Approaches to Combating Disinformation:

The funded projects employed diverse strategies, including enhancing literacy through digital and information literacy programs aimed at improving critical thinking and awareness of disinformation. Additionally, projects focused on developing social media skills to empower NGOs and not-for-profits in countering disinformation effectively. Other initiatives provided support to individuals and communities already addressing disinformation and targeted specific categories of disinformation, such as those related to climate change and cultural contexts.

(As of 19th June)

Resources developed	Workshops	Individuals who engaged with the fundees resources	Online engagement in resources
13	36	341	Approx 60,000

Conclusion:

The Phase 1 report underscores the essential need for ongoing investment in combating disinformation. It highlights the successful devolution of funds and the diverse strategies employed by community groups. The report calls for sustained support to enhance resilience and preserve the integrity of information within New Zealand's communities.

We would like to thank DPMC for supplying this fund and all communities that expressed interest and submitted applications.

Most of all, we celebrate those working in this difficult field, *i orea te tuatara ka patu ki waho* (a problem is solved by continuing to find solutions).

The Importance of Anti-Disinformation Funding in the Current Disinformation Climate in Aotearoa

The New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) notes that rising disinformation in New Zealand has “demonstrated a way for foreign adversaries to leverage our social dynamics against our own security and interests” and that lower levels of trust in information and the Government create an environment where disinformation actors can gain traction.² Furthermore, the Hate & Extremism Insights Aotearoa (HEIA) Disinformation Trends in New Zealand report, funded by DPMC, notes that disinformation trends have particular implications for social cohesion and the rights of marginalised groups in New Zealand.³

Providing ongoing, continual support for community initiatives is critical to building and maintaining trust in information among marginalised communities. This is especially important given the particular impacts of disinformation on marginalised groups. Building confidence in the information environment now is essential to ensure disinformation actors cannot gain further traction in New Zealand in the future. With the rise of disinformation, continuous education and capacity building towards new techniques are necessary to counter evolving tactics. While one-time funding can address immediate challenges, it is not sufficient for addressing changing tactics in the long term.

We have continuously heard from community, academics, researchers, and civil society throughout this funding process that disinformation funding is exceptionally lacking and highly needed. Much research proves the increase of disinformation in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly for Māori and LGBTQIA+.⁴ The connection between people in disinformation networks and offline violence targeting diverse communities is evident.⁵

All of the successful applicants to this fund spoke about a lack of specific funding in the disinformation field and how difficult it has been for them to get funding for disinformation mahi through other channels. Many spoke to a specific discomfort by many funders, including the Government, to be aligned with anything related to disinformation due to the potential for an adverse or unfavourable reaction from a vocal minority. This has led to chronic underfunding in this space.

The feedback we heard was that funders, including the Government, must move past this trepidation of offending those who are often creators or distributors of misinformation and disinformation.

² NZSIS, 2022. Annual Report 2022.

³ C Wilson. Disinformation Trends in New Zealand, 2023. HEIA.

⁴ C Wilson. Disinformation Trends in New Zealand, 2023. HEIA.

⁵ The Workshop, 2019. Online Hate and Offline Harm.

We have also found that providing anti-disinformation funding via a community/grassroots model is the most effective way of creating meaningful resilience to disinformation across Aotearoa. Given that the proliferation of disinformation relies on mistrust of accurate information, there is clear research providing evidence to support community-level disinformation interventions, which are one of the most useful methods available to use, particularly for diverse communities.⁶

The Devolving of Government Funds to More Community-Connected Administrators

The devolution of funding to internetNZ | Ipurangi Aotearoa provided greater comfort for community groups engaging with the One-off Fund to Build Resilience to Disinformation. The success of this fund means this approach should be actively considered and implemented for future similar funds. Throughout Phases 1 and 2, we exceeded the diversity goals we established with DPMC regarding communities receiving funding. We prioritised outreach and engagement efforts to target funding towards communities most affected by misinformation and disinformation: Māori, LGBTQIA+, seniors, Pasifika, tāngata whaikaha, recent refugees/migrants, and ethnic and religious minorities.

As evidenced by the breakdown of community projects illustrated in the graph below, the majority of the funding was directed towards these targeted communities, a testament to the success of leveraging existing relationships. Our pre-established trust and connections within these communities made this success possible. Notably, many applicants expressed discomfort about engaging directly with Government agencies, citing safety and cultural concerns. This underscores the importance of devolving funding powers to organisations with established community ties, ensuring that funds are effectively distributed and impactful.

The benefits of devolution for community-level funding have also been noted in other contexts in New Zealand. The New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER) notes that devolution is an effective means of addressing the needs of diverse groups, enabling organisations to tailor how they work with these communities. NZIER also finds that smaller organisations are well placed to build trust and make people feel safe so they can openly share their needs.⁷

The Government needs to consider mechanisms to enable organisations with autonomy and trusted relationships to allocate funds. This approach ensures that hard-to-reach communities receive the support they urgently need to combat disinformation. By empowering organisations with positive community

⁶ The Workshop, 2023. Countering False Information Handbook: Evidence-informed approaches to prevent the spread of false information.

⁷ NZIER, 2023. Let it go: Devolving power and resources to improve lives.

relationships to play a central role in allocating funds, the Government can maximise the effectiveness and reach of its initiatives to address pressing societal challenges. Without the devolution of funding powers, the Government will not be able to impact hard-to-reach communities that urgently require support regarding disinformation positively.

Balancing Public Transparency and Accountability in Government Funding of Anti-disinformation Community Projects

Funding community-based, grassroots projects aimed at combating disinformation must be a key pillar of ongoing work to maintain the integrity of our democratic society. Safety and security are non-negotiable for the individuals and organisations undertaking this work, and upholding these principles is critical to ensure ongoing community buy-in. The organisations publicly operating in this space in New Zealand are small in number, meaning individuals are often easily identifiable when information about funding is made public. Given the highly sensitive nature of work relating to disinformation, disclosing identifying information can threaten or harm organisations and individuals. Protecting the identities of individuals and organisations receiving funding to address disinformation is important to safeguard them from physical and mental harm and ensure they can continue to operate effectively.

Protecting the identities of individuals and organisations does not need to clash with upholding public sector accountability. Releasing details about the nature of the projects funded without providing identifying information enables transparency regarding the use of Government funds without coming at the expense of endangering those on the front lines of the battle against disinformation. By protecting the identities of those working in this space, Governments can foster an environment where grassroots efforts thrive and resilience against disinformation grows domestically.

Demand for the Fund

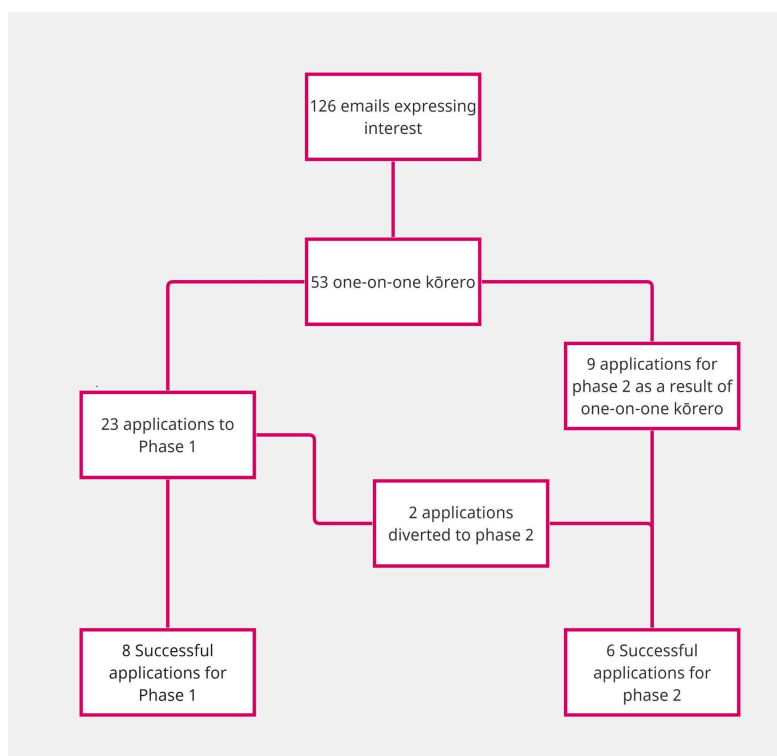
We recognised the urgent need to address the proliferation of disinformation within our communities, and our efforts to combat this threat have been met with resounding support. Through extensive one-on-one kōrero with over 50 community groups, it became abundantly clear that existing funding was falling short of meeting demand in this critical area. Many of these groups underscored the lack of adequate resources to combat disinformation, highlighting its detrimental impact on society. According to the latest research from our Internet Insights Report, 65% of New Zealanders are concerned (either extremely or very concerned) about information on the Internet being misleading or wrong.⁸

⁸ New Zealand's Internet Insights, 2023.

<https://internetnz.nz/assets/Uploads/New-Zealands-Internet-Insights-2023.pdf>

Despite the quality and potential impact of numerous proposals, the overwhelming demand for this fund has, regrettably, meant some deserving projects went unfunded. These projects represent vital initiatives poised to make significant strides in curbing the spread of disinformation and developing domestic resilience to it. If additional funding is directed towards work on disinformation, projects will be better resourced and able to focus on the work rather than having to shift their attention to aligning with general funding criteria. A number of other expressions of interest, from projects that had merit but did not completely align with the requirements of this fund, showed a broad demand for funding in this area.

The consequences of underinvestment in this space are profound and far-reaching. Disinformation undermines the integrity of public discourse, erodes trust in institutions, and fosters social division. Bolstering funding in this area would signal the Government's commitment to safeguarding the integrity of information within our communities and the social cohesion of Aotearoa. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that we take decisive action to confront the growth of disinformation in Aotearoa.

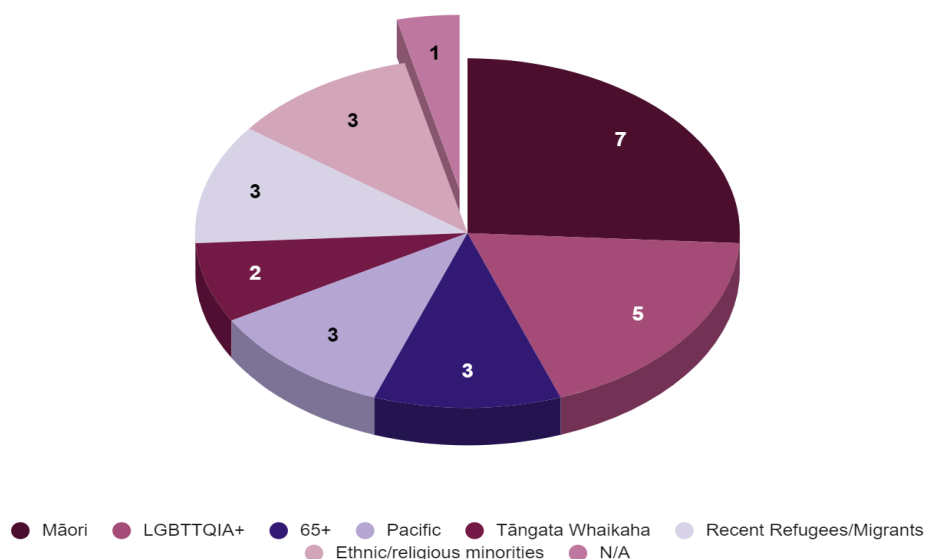


Summary of Funding Panel Process

The funding panel process for the One-off Fund to Build Resilience to Disinformation (disinformation fund) has been tailored to ensure support for diverse applicants and expedite the process to meet DPMC's timeline expectations. Community leaders, activists, and kaumatua received direct emails informing them of the fund's purpose and requesting dissemination of the information while announcements were placed on the website.

Communication channels were established with interested parties and managed by one designated person via email or phone to filter out irrelevant initiatives and prevent duplications. Individual discussions (kōrero) were held with potential applicants to review their ideas and ensure alignment with the fund's criteria and purpose, fostering a deeper understanding of the requirements and building rapport with applicants. Applicants wrote their application forms, with opportunities for multiple discussions with us to clarify any misunderstandings and receive feedback, ensuring clear communication and support throughout the process.

The internal funding panel, comprising members with diverse expertise, reviewed applications using an assessment matrix aligned with DPMC's criteria. This excluded the GM and CE to maintain impartiality and avoid conflicts of interest. The funding panel had the opportunity to seek further information from the project coordinator or the applicants to make informed decisions, ensuring thorough consideration of all aspects before reaching a decision. Results were then sent to the GM for final approval, who also had the opportunity to request additional information if necessary, providing a final layer of scrutiny to ensure successful applications met all criteria and were viable.



How Community Groups are Approaching Disinformation

We saw a wide range of approaches in how fundees identified disinformation and created more resilience. In Phase 1, four main approaches to building domestic resilience against disinformation existed.

Increasing literacy:

Increasing domestic resilience to disinformation requires building foundational digital and information literacy skills. Two groups focused on building these skills. One working with migrant ethnic minority communities and one in a rural Māori community. Increasing digital and information literacy improves critical thinking skills, and digitally literate individuals are better equipped to analyse and evaluate information critically. This critical approach helps people discern between reliable information and disinformation by questioning its sources, credibility, and potential biases. The two groups who took this approach also noted a need for their communities to gain awareness of information ecosystems and standard manipulation techniques used to spread disinformation, such as clickbait headlines and emotional appeals.

Developing social media communications skills:

One group took a related approach but focused on developing communications skills in the NGO/not-for-profit sectors. This is an essential approach to disinformation resilience for several reasons. Social media platforms serve as major channels for the spread of disinformation, and effectively leveraging these channels allows NGOs and not-for-profits to reach large audiences and mitigate the impact of misinformation. Strong social media communication skills enable NGOs and nonprofits to engage directly with their audience, building community trust and credibility. By consistently sharing reliable information, responding to inquiries, and fostering open dialogue where appropriate, these organisations can establish themselves as authoritative sources of information, making it more likely for people to turn to them for accurate information and updates rather than falling victim to disinformation. Strong social media communication skills allow NGOs and not-for-profits to adapt quickly to evolving misinformation trends and respond effectively in real-time. By staying informed about emerging disinformation narratives and utilising monitoring and escalation tools, these organisations can promptly identify and address false information, preventing its spread and minimising its impact on public perception.

Supporting individuals and communities already responding to disinformation:

Two groups worked on supporting individuals and communities already responding to disinformation. This was crucial for building resilience, as these individuals and communities often have expertise and insights on the tactics and strategies used to spread false information.

Individuals and communities with experience responding to disinformation play a vital role in promoting accurate information sharing. Their efforts help to prevent the spread of inaccurate information and mitigate its harmful effects on society, including its potential to incite fear, division, and mistrust. By providing resources, mental health support, security, and training, communities can strengthen their capacity to identify, challenge, and counteract false information within their own communities. This fosters a culture of critical thinking and information literacy.

Targeting specific categories of disinformation:

Three of the fundees approached disinformation by identifying and building skills relevant to specific categories of disinformation, such as disinformation about trans people, climate disinformation, or disinformation about standard Māori terms. By honing in on these specific topics, fundees can develop specialised expertise and knowledge to tailor their interventions and resources to each topic's unique challenges and vulnerabilities.

Targeting specific categories of disinformation also allows fundees to leverage existing networks, partnerships, and expertise within relevant fields. By collaborating with experts, organisations, and community leaders working on these issues, fundees can amplify their impact, share best practices, and coordinate efforts to combat misinformation more effectively. Focusing on specific categories of disinformation builds resilience by leveraging specialised expertise, tailoring interventions to specific challenges, fostering community solidarity, and facilitating stakeholder collaboration and coordination. Fundees can empower individuals and communities to resist misinformation and promote a more informed and resilient society by addressing unique needs and vulnerabilities in each of these areas.

Case Study 1

Case Study 1 is a small Māori organisation focusing on the greater public good in cyber spaces. It applied for \$75,000 to develop a training programme for NGOs, providing targeted communication and social media training to equip staff with skills to manage disinformation on social media. It proposed using this funding to deliver its training three times, twice in person and once online. It has experience countering disinformation and providing training, particularly for NGOs.

The funding panel noted that they had extensive experience designing and providing specialised digital communication training. The panel also noted that funding this project would mean creating an innovative training programme that would equip communities with the ability to manage disinformation effectively on their own channels.

As of this update, Case Study 1 has completed its training programme. It acquired the support of additional disinformation communications experts to ensure that

the programme used the most up-to-date research and methodologies. The training programme is a half-day workshop (online or in person) that provides multiple strategies to combat disinformation. For example, participants are walked through creating a triage system for incidents of disinformation, which considers factors including the communities served by the NGO, the type of disinformation and its relevance to the NGO's business-as-usual work.

Eighty-six individuals and groups, including kaupapa Māori, iwi, and charity groups, completed the programme. These 86 attendees were geographically spread across Aotearoa but were primarily located in the main centres.

The training programme developed by Case Study 1 has resulted in a social media safety workbook. This comprehensive resource was designed to help NGOs navigate social media complexities, focusing on disinformation management and online safety. The workbook covers essential topics such as understanding social media platforms and their audiences, identifying and managing risky content, and creating practical internal and community guidelines. It includes a triage system for handling disinformation incidents and offers strategies for pre-bunking and best-practice messaging. Additionally, the workbook emphasises value-based storytelling, encouraging NGOs to use shared values to communicate their stories authentically. It also provides guidelines for planning and executing proactive campaigns with specific goals, target audiences, and critical messages. This resource equips NGOs with practical tools to manage their digital presence effectively and protect their communities from online threats.

Case Study 1 noted the main challenge of operating publicly in the disinformation space, specifically the need to balance the safety of their small Māori team with their desire to reach new audiences for their programme.

After advertising the training for only a short time, the high level of interest in the programme demonstrates the considerable demand for disinformation comms training across various NGOs.

Regarding how they found the process and this fund, Case Study 1 said: "This fund has operated in high trust, and it means we've been able to create something customised for the communities we serve. We would love to run more training sessions like this and update the resources as future needs change. The team at InternetNZ have offered us wrap-around support and I've felt safe and supported throughout."

Case Study 2

Case Study 2 is a project co-designed by an independent disinformation research group and a leading cross-iwi group. They applied for \$100,000 to create rohe-specific baskets of knowledge for three iwi/hāpu relating to forms of disinformation that impact their communities. Furthermore, the development of

public resources explaining key Māori concepts often misused in disinformation. Together, the groups bring an expert understanding of mis- and disinformation and deeply ingrained respect and connections with Māori communities.

The funding panel noted that the co-design between these groups illustrated a unique combination of two expert fields. In addition to the three rohe, this Case Study had the potential to illustrate a successful Pākehā/Māori co-design process, which could then be recreated for different expert fields.

Case Study 2 spent the last few months of 2023 developing a clear plan for the complex engagement ahead of them. As of this update, they have started resource-building for the three locations. They have also onboarded an expert advisor to assist the independent disinformation research group in cultural advice and translation services.

The primary challenge noted by Case Study 2 relates to the timing of this project. The advancement of this initiative, along with several others highlighted in this report, has encountered delays. This slowdown is attributed to the urgent and pressing challenges currently faced by Māori communities, including disruptions arising from the Government's shortcomings in fully honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi. These critical matters have necessitated a shift in focus, diverting attention from other important work, such as efforts to combat disinformation.

Regrettably, this situation underscores the broader issue of how Māori communities are often overextended and subject to volatile political dynamics. The need to address these immediate threats compromises the ability to maintain sustained progress on various initiatives, revealing a persistent imbalance in the allocation of resources and attention.

When asked to provide feedback on the need for this kind of funding, Case Study 2 stated the following. “The growing technological, political and social impacts of disinformation in Aotearoa make it clear that more funding is needed to build meaningful partnerships between those most impacted by these harms and the groups working to understand and combat them. As the technology industry is often not incentivised or best placed to fund community-centred work in Aotearoa, the government must continue to support primary prevention efforts that centre the needs of people targeted by disinformation and online harm. Government departments which fund this work should be prepared for, and at this point unphased by, pushback from a minority of people and lobby groups who utilise technology to inflate their size and impact.”

Case Study 3

Case Study 3 is a small wāhine Māori group that runs an international forum for wāhine Māori. They applied for \$75,000 to run a series of six misinformation and disinformation online wānanga by and for wāhine Māori, discussing topical forms

of disinformation. Before applying for this fund, Case Study 3 had no previous experience in the disinformation space.

The funding panel noted this organisation's position of trust with wāhine Māori. Wāhine Māori occupy a unique position in often being both targeted with significant amounts of disinformation and being among the most vocal opponents of it.

As of this update, Case Study 3 has successfully held four of their six wānanga. The first wānanga attracted 80 bookings based on a koha model, with 40 in attendance and 30 accessing the recording afterwards. They have had positive engagement across LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook (engagement in the tens of thousands). Te Pati Māori MP Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke, the youngest Member of Parliament, was the kaikōrero of the first wānanga, where she discussed how maramataka and ancestral knowledge could be used to build resilience among those targeted by disinformation. Other speakers include high-profile wāhine Māori and some of the most senior leaders in the anti-disinformation space internationally. More high-profile wāhine Māori have been secured for the future wānanga. Case Study 3 also ran a popup kōrero regarding the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in response to requests from their community. This illustrated their ability to be reactive to the needs of their community.

Case Study 3 noted 90% positive feedback from the community. Further illustrated by engagement outside of the specific wānanga, with one of the highlight reels of a wānanga receiving 2.3k plays and 62 engagements (likes). Case Study 3 has had expected success leveraging their real-time engagement alongside their online engagement, ensuring the dissemination of information is as vast as possible.

Regarding challenges, Case Study 3 noted a few technical issues solved by further investment in staff training and technology upgrades. They also reported difficulties in meeting the level of demand. Within two days of advertising the tickets for their second wānanga, they had surpassed 60 participants. The first three wānanga all sold out and reached total capacity. They said their preference for kōrero is 50-60 participants. However, they are working on ways to accommodate the high demand.

Case Study 3 reported a positive experience with the fund process, expressing comfort in collaborating with us and receiving support as newcomers to the disinformation space. They noted a lack of the typical power dynamics between funders and applicants, viewing our organisation more as a trusted advisor. Additionally, feedback from wāhine underscored the significance of fostering resilience in this domain, especially for wāhine Māori, who often hold crucial roles as family educators.

The community participants who have taken part in Case Study 3 have stated that they appreciate the opportunity to “gather, korero, laugh, ponder and leave feeling uplifted and inspired.” Others also spoke about how the knowledge shared at these wānanga improved their mental health and hauora and that having a space to discuss such matters in a safe space was highly beneficial.

Case Study 4

Case Study 4 is an organisation based in Auckland and the Waikato, heavily embedded within ethnic and religious migrant communities in these regions. It provides services and support for small charities and communities that centre around digital solutions and online spaces.

The funding panel noted the advantages of the applicant having experience in the digital and online space and deep connections to often underserved communities. This application also targeted multiple priority groups.

As of this report, Case Study 4 has been working alongside small, trusted community organisations and media platforms to develop custom resources on the most common forms of disinformation and misinformation in these communities. Identifying the difference between opinion, bias, misinformation, propaganda, and disinformation is particularly important in these communities. They have also worked on building relationships between these communities and disinformation experts and researchers. This relationship-building has led to successful speaking events by disinformation experts within the targeted communities. They have created 5 resources, covering multiple languages and dialects.

The primary challenge noted by Case Study 4 was a difference in societal norms between migrants' home countries and the online information landscape in New Zealand. Due to this, Case Study 4 identified a need to provide more information to communities on what the trusted sources of online information are in New Zealand.

Case Study 4 has spoken about the importance of information sharing and resource development being responsive to the specific needs and requirements of diverse communities to be effective.

Case Study 5

Case Study 5 is an organisation that provides specialised support to individuals targeted by creators of disinformation. They provide physical support (e.g., home security cameras), mental health support (e.g., counselling/therapy), and specialist advice (e.g., security and communications advice). They successfully applied for \$100,000 to continue this mahi. Until this funding, they had only received support through crowdfunding.

The funding panel noted this specialised field of support and the high-security need of those within this organisation. They also agreed with the organisation's assertions regarding the lack of people providing this kind of support due to the heightened security risks.

As of this report, Case Study 5 has provided support to 27 individuals who have been directly targeted by creators of disinformation and their immediate families, who also required access to support due to health and safety risks. Given that 27 individuals and their whānau have been supported by this case study, it is likely that over 100 people have been supported indirectly by this project. They have noted examples of harm and threats they have been able to respond to using this funding, including death threats and threats of harm to children, some of which have moved to in-person harassment such as perpetrators showing up to people's workplaces, homes as well as being targeted in public or at events. Case Study 5's ability to respond rapidly in emergency situations is vital to successfully supporting communities' needs.

Primary challenges to date include communication challenges, which have sometimes hampered their abilities to share information effectively. Therefore, they review their social media and website channels to ensure they can effectively share information.

Case Study 5 has continually shared that this kind of funding is essential to ensure the safety of people fighting for the social cohesion of Aotearoa.

Case Study 6

Case Study 6 is a Māori organisation based in a rural region of New Zealand. It is a community-based organisation that provides mātauranga for the community, by the community, and with the community. The organisation was funded to provide a series of workshops with the community on topics relating to cyber safety and awareness of online information.

As of this report, five events have been held by Case Study 6, with an overall attendance of 60 individuals. They have also had positive engagement numbers through their social media platforms.

The community participants who have taken part in the Case Study have noted a concern about the number of 'scams' online and a greater awareness of AI, cyber security, and online services as a result of this organisation's work.

Case Study 7

Case Study 7 is a small organisation with a background in LGBTQIA+ specific cultural training for organisations, including not-for-profits and businesses. They

received funding to develop a new component of their training, which specifically addressed the ways misinformation and disinformation impact transgender and non-binary identities.

The funding panel noted Case Study 7's unique position as an organisation composed solely of people within the community it serves and the inherent trust this provides.

As of this report, Case Study 7 has researched, developed, and delivered a new curriculum that directly addresses tools individuals and organisations can use to manage disinformation about LGBTQIA+ communities. Case Study 7 has provided this bespoke training to 25 national mental health charity employees in preparation for a campaign later in the year. They received the following feedback from attendees: "You have certainly influenced my thinking on how we can reposition some of our messaging and make it more relevant and safer for our rainbow staff and audiences...The workshop was well-researched, added value, and showed a clear understanding of the current environment and our situation. We walked away with some rational perspectives to apply to the upcoming campaign."

Case Study 8

Case Study 8 is an established organisation working in the digital and disinformation space. They applied for funding to continue their current work, which consists of multiple education streams, including developing a new education programme and carrying out advocacy work within the community and with the government.

As of this report, Case Study 8 has continued to deliver its previously developed education streams. They have also developed a framework and outline for their new, groundbreaking education programme, which connects disinformation and climate change. This is aimed at a general audience and provides learning grounded in the most up-to-date expert research.

Case Study 8 noted that funding is the primary challenge in their line of work and that more sustainable funding is needed. This organisation believes that New Zealand is at significant risk of overseas interests negatively impacting our democracy through disinformation. They strongly highlight the need for more investment in effective interventions to uphold democracy in New Zealand.

Conclusion

The report for the "One-off Fund to Build Resilience to Disinformation" initiative presents a comprehensive analysis of the critical need for sustained efforts and funding to combat disinformation in New Zealand. The successful execution of this fund has demonstrated the effectiveness of devolving funds to

community-connected organisations like InternetNZ | Ipurangi Aotearoa, which have established trust and relationships within diverse communities. This approach has proven invaluable in addressing the unique challenges posed by disinformation, particularly in marginalised groups such as Māori, LGBTQIA+, seniors, Pasifika, and other ethnic and religious minorities.

Throughout this report, we have documented the significant demand for anti-disinformation funding, substantiated by extensive consultations with over 50 community groups. Our 2023 Internet Insights Report underscored the urgency of this issue, revealing that 65% of New Zealanders are significantly concerned about misleading online information. This widespread concern, coupled with the high quality and volume of proposals received, highlights a critical resource gap that necessitates augmented investment in combating disinformation.

The diverse strategies employed by funded projects illustrate a multifaceted approach to building resilience against disinformation. Initiatives aimed at increasing digital and information literacy, developing social media communication skills, and supporting individuals and communities already engaged in combating disinformation were particularly effective. Additionally, targeting specific categories of disinformation, such as those related to climate change or cultural terminology, enabled projects to develop specialised expertise and tailor their interventions to the unique challenges of each topic. The case studies provided in this report offer concrete examples of the positive impacts of these initiatives. They underscore the importance of culturally sensitive and community-specific approaches in effectively building resilience to disinformation.

The feedback received from community groups throughout this process highlights the chronic underfunding in this field and the reluctance of many funders, including the Government, to align with initiatives related to disinformation due to potential backlash. This has led to a significant gap in resources, which the One-off Fund has begun to address. However, the overwhelming demand and the quality of unfunded proposals indicate that there is still much work to be done.

The multiplier effect of delivering resources to individuals or organisations with established networks amplifies the impact of our efforts exponentially. While it is challenging to quantify this effect, anecdotal evidence suggests that these trusted recipients effectively disseminate learnings within their own networks, thereby extending the reach and influence of our initiatives. This organic spread of knowledge not only reinforces our mission but also empowers diverse communities to build resilience against disinformation on a broader scale. By strategically engaging with these key stakeholders, we harness their connectivity and credibility, fostering a more informed and resilient society.

Looking forward, it is imperative that we build on the successes of Phase 1 by continuing to invest in and support community-led initiatives to combat

disinformation. The devolution model has proven effective in reaching and supporting hard-to-reach communities, and it should be considered for future funding strategies. Ensuring the safety and security of individuals and organisations working in this sensitive field is paramount, and mechanisms to protect their identities while maintaining public accountability must be established.

In conclusion, the fight against disinformation is a complex and ongoing challenge that requires sustained investment, innovative approaches, and a commitment to supporting those on the front lines. We extend our deepest gratitude to DPMC for providing this critical fund and to all the communities and organisations that have participated in this initiative. Your dedication and resilience are instrumental in preserving the integrity of information and fostering a more informed and cohesive society. As we move forward, let us remember the wisdom of the whakataukī, *i orea te tuatara ka patu ki waho* — a problem is solved by continuing to find solutions. Together, we can build a robust defence against disinformation and ensure a more resilient future for Aotearoa.