

## Mentoring rural Māori business at start-up

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This paper documents work that we are doing with Māori (predominantly Tūhoe) in the Eastern North Island and Te Urewera. The work is part of a four-year study looking at the barriers to setting up rural Māori tourism businesses and some ways to work through them. As part of this work, we have two people working with individuals interested in setting up business to help them through the process of doing so. Using an action research approach, we set this up as a mentoring process to work primarily with businesses in start up – a phase of business development that is very high risk and for which it can be difficult to get help because of the risk. This paper outlines a number of findings and issues that we have encountered so far.

Our clients were clear about the visible aspects and the skills needed for living in the bush, going hunting or managing horses, but they were mostly unaware of how to keep financial records, understand the financial imperatives associated with business, the need for having office systems that work, the legal requirements that face them and even how to find potential customers. Communications are also a major issue: Most of our clients also have very little experience with computers; the local phone lines through the Urewera make linking to the Internet intermittent, slow and frustrating; the phones in the area are often cut off; there is no cell phone coverage; and the road through the area is often impassable.

While there are many services available to potential Māori tourism businesses, most of our clientele have not sought help from outside the area. The few that have have struggled because many of the courses assume access to services and reliable communications infrastructure and a greater level of experience or knowledge in some areas.

The process that has worked best for our clients is one that is *not* normally understood by the word “mentoring.” It has involved more “hands on” help than the team expected at the start, and more work on some basic skills such as how to search the Internet or set up a database to keep track of customers or potential customers. It can be difficult to assess just what is needed for each business. Some business people that we thought would need much help have been able to draw on family to help them, while others who had more experience, but who have not had the same human resources to call on, have needed more help. An important first task has been detailing a clear description of the product to be provided by the business and to decouple that from what individuals feel they should do to serve the needs of their community best. A very strong driver *and* barrier to business development in rural Māori communities is the strong sense that potential business people have of needing to serve their community.

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[http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/sustainablesoc/tourism/growing\\_regional.asp](http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/sustainablesoc/tourism/growing_regional.asp)