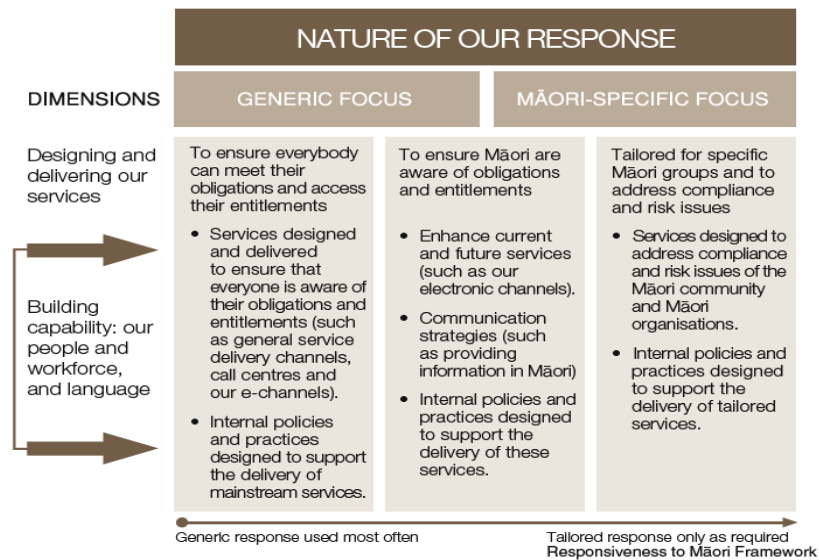


# A Case Study: Integrating diversity into customer service business strategy

## *Inland Revenue's Responsiveness to Māori Approach Weaving the strands of cultural diversity'*

Inland Revenue's **Responsiveness to Māori** approach underpins the development of our *Responsiveness to Māori* service delivery and capability plans. The approach recognises that our Māori customers have different requirements for accessing our services. It also allows us to take a more integrated view of our service delivery and organisational capability. It will help us to understand our Māori customers' requirements and develop appropriate solutions to them.



As a generic response all staff require some basic skills, such as being able to pronounce Māori names correctly and understanding some basic Māori cultural practices. A tailored response sees a greater need for Māori skills and understanding of Māori perspectives among a smaller number of staff responsible for delivering tailored services, for example catering for customers who want to conduct their business in the Māori language and tikanga. Over time, as our overall Māori knowledge and skills capability develops, it is expected that more and more Māori customers will be able to have their service delivery needs met by our generic response.

This approach was originally designed for *Responsiveness to Māori*, but we recognise that the basic principles can also be used in developing policies and plans for other customer groups. The lessons we learn in applying this approach to our Māori customers (for example, the implications and benefits of delivering our services in Te Reo Māori) may be used to inform the development of services for customers of other cultures.

Inland Revenue has taken this approach because it makes good business sense to do so. It is about providing the best possible services to our customers and giving our people the right skills and tools so they can deliver those services appropriately.

The *Responsiveness to Māori* approach is reasonably well established and awareness of it is increasing. We are continuing to focus on developing policies and practices that will further integrate responsiveness to Māori into business-as-usual practice across the organisation.

For a long time understanding cultural diversity has been woven into key documents, but Inland Revenue wanted to ensure it was actually part of standard practice. It started with small steps such as talking to our people, aligning plans with organisational outcomes, and then introducing initiatives that allowed people to participate and contribute to the business as usual approach in place today. This includes *Responsiveness to Māori* (including understanding about the Treaty of Waitangi) as part of an Inland Revenue core competency; one component of our job expectations.

Inland Revenue has found that for lasting change:

- Key messages are essential and must be regularly reinforced verbally and practically, especially by management.
- It's important to support managers and team leaders, as they may not always have the time or skills to develop Māori resources and initiatives alone. Inland Revenue has done this by incorporating training in leadership development and providing practical tools.
- You need to include regular practical activities for staff, which easily fit in with their work space and time. In the past there have been concerns about balancing the time required for initiatives like learning Māori language and culture skills with the need to meet business as usual targets.
- There needs to be committed resources (people with the right skills, time and tools) to continue this development over a long period and provide appropriate support across the organisation.

The key tools Inland Revenue has used:

- The department's ***Māori Language Plan*** is key in helping staff understand Māori perspectives and to integrating Responsiveness to Māori into the work place in a practical way. Initiatives from the plan include adding Māori perspectives to organisational policies such as bi-lingual business cards and correct use of Māori words and macrons in our style guide.
- The use of ***Māori Language Week*** as a catalyst to develop resources. It has created a safe environment to encourage people to learn about the culture and language and explain how these relate to the organisation. Rather than expecting staff to learn the Māori language, Inland Revenue asks people to learn how to pronounce Māori words correctly and show them how this helps to deliver more effective services. This is a much more achievable goal.
- ***Networks*** are also an integral part of supporting the development of Inland Revenue staff knowledge and understanding of the diversity of our people and customers, their customs, language and culture.
- Our ***Valuing Diversity Poster*** was developed following the success with Māori Language Week. It recognises a wide range of events significant to diversity groups.

This work will keep us busy for a while yet, but we feel we at least understand some of the core principles we need to work with if we are to continue to make progress.