

The Rise of the Social Procurement Professional

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Aotearoa has been slow to pick up on the need for innovative and equity focused procurement professionals, compared to the rest of the world. In Australia and the US, social procurement and supplier diversity roles are not unusual. The US is now at a stage where they have a 'Chief Equity Officer' as part of Executive Leadership Teams (how cool is that job title?).

Procurement teams within organisations are often seen as the roadblock to spending money. They tend to be rule followers, risk-averse and love a good process to follow.

So now that we are starting to see a number of large government organisations recruit specifically for 'social procurement' roles, we have an opportunity to change the way our beloved procurement teams are perceived.

The problem is, we have a significant capability gap. It's a hard ask to fill these roles because we lack the experience in Aotearoa.

What is social procurement?

Social procurement is a real buzz word and we see lots of organisations talk about it and some that even write it into their strategic documents, perhaps without fully understanding what it is and the impact it can have on their organisation and on society.

The most commonly used definition of social procurement is:

"The process of acquiring goods, services and works in ways that create socio-economic value over and above the purpose of what's being procured." (vic.govt.au:2020)

It's the premise that organisations spend intentionally to create additional social outcomes. This can relate to any additional social benefit produced above and beyond the purchase. Social outcomes created through procurement can be broad and can create impact through job creation, skills and training and supplier diversity.

Attributes of a Social Procurement Professional.

There are plenty of procurement professionals who can do the research, understand the theory and write a 'policy' about social procurement but not many with the practical experience of what it takes to create change. Aotearoa is still relatively early in its social procurement journey so it's going to take some time to develop practical expertise.

So instead of looking for the unicorns, how about looking for a horse with a pink mane :P

Here are the key attributes to finding a successful practitioner of social procurement:

- **Innovator** - Someone who is always prepared to try something new, to be the first. This is a person that's not afraid to trial and test new approaches even when the organisation hasn't done it before. They understand the rules but will find ways to innovate within them.
- **Influencer** - They need to be able to bring others on a journey. Often social procurement is left to a single champion, however, for it to be truly embedded, it needs to have people from across the organisation buying into the kaupapa (or movement) and wanting to create change with their spend.
- **Resilience/perseverance** - Advocating for social procurement to those relatively new to the concept, often requires some difficult conversations. Social procurement professionals have to be confident in having the facts to back up their conversations and be prepared to be knocked back several times.
- **Social justice warrior** - Passionate about creating change for the better is key. Having lived experience of inequity often helps. Understanding the need for change, systemic injustice and having a 'why', often ensures the ability to hold ground on creating quality outcomes through procurement activity.

How to find your next social procurement specialist?

Look for someone with these attributes and a transferable skill set. Procurement skills can be learnt, but having a passion for social justice and an ability to influence are rare to find. Don't limit the pool of candidates by only looking for those with existing experience.

Social procurement when used well, makes money go further and creates additional outcomes over and above buying a product or service. It has the potential to create greater socio-economic impact which is exactly what we need to help create a mana enhancing economy.

Will you be the next Social Procurement Professional?

About us

Puna Awarau is a Māori consultancy firm working at the forefront of Indigenous procurement in Aotearoa. With unrivaled expertise in supplier diversity, we are your specialist support. Generating Māori (and Pasifika) socio-economic outcomes within organisations and major projects.

We work with government agencies, local body authorities, Iwi, Māori land trusts, private enterprises and charitable trusts that want to better understand what social value they can create through their spending.

We understand the power of procurement in creating change and believe a more equitable Aotearoa is possible. We offer independent expert advice and support to organisations working towards broader outcomes through social procurement, progressive procurement and/or supplier diversity.

- We are 100% Māori owned
- We are 100% wāhine owned

Puna Awarau founders have whakapapa links to Ngaati Te Ata Waiohua, Te Rarawa, Te Waiariki, Ngāti Tūtae, Ngāi Tuupoto, Ngāti Reinga, Te Hikutu, Te Aupouri, Ngāti Kahu.

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