



RSE Cultural Awareness Framework

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Executive summary

Bridging understanding across cultures

The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme connects Aotearoa New Zealand and Pacific nations through shared work and opportunity. For thousands of families it represents hope and growth, yet people across the system described a gap in cultural understanding that affects wellbeing, trust, and performance. Many challenges that appear operational are, at their heart, relational and cultural - sitting between what is visible above the surface and what lies unseen below it.

Grounded in Pacific voices

This framework draws on insights from more than forty tok talanoa across Aotearoa and the Pacific, involving over five hundred participants. Workers, employers, and Pacific partners described culture as the thread running through every part of the RSE experience. Five themes emerged:

- Wellbeing is collective and rooted in faith, family, and connection.
- Purpose gives meaning to work and aligns family and business goals.
- Leadership is relational and grounded in humility and service.
- Communication is cultural and shaped by respect and context.
- Learning is shared and experiential.



Designing the framework

The RSE Cultural Awareness Framework connects what sits below the surface - values, trust, and relationships, with what happens above it, systems, actions, and behaviours. It is guided by four Conditions for Growth: **Shared purpose and values, Courageous leadership, Learning together, Care and support.**

When these conditions are nurtured, understanding takes root and relationships flourish.

From framework to action

The accompanying RSE Common Ground Pathway turns insight into practice through three connected tiers:

1. **Foundations of cultural awareness** – induction and training that build shared understanding.
2. **Everyday practice tools** – communication, leadership, and support resources that make culture visible in daily work.
3. **Connection and belonging** – initiatives that celebrate identity, learning, and community pride.

Looking ahead

Embedding cultural awareness across policy, training, and everyday operations will strengthen wellbeing, retention, and trust throughout the RSE system. The next phase focuses on testing tools with workers, employers, and Pacific partners to ensure they are practical and culturally grounded. Through continued partnership and learning, the RSE community can build a system where everyone flourishes - rooted in trust, purpose, and common ground.

Why a Cultural Awareness Framework is needed



Cultural awareness is essential across the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme to protect worker wellbeing, strengthen workplace relationships, and reduce vulnerability to exploitation. It was endorsed by participants at the 2022 Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting (PLMAM) for the development of a cultural framework to assist employers increase their understanding of cultural differences and support collaborative and respectful relationships between employers and workers. This statement was reinforced at 2023 and 2024 PLMAM with updates and commitments from New Zealand and Australia to progress the development of a cultural framework that support each individual labour mobility scheme through the PALM and RSE.

While the scheme has delivered economic benefits across the horticulture and viticulture sectors, persistent gaps in cultural understanding continue to impact worker experiences and system integrity.

Extensive research and analysis have been completed across the labour mobility sector over the years, including concentrated reviews of the RSE programme in Aotearoa New Zealand. This work combines quantitative monitoring, qualitative tok-talanoa, policy and practitioner evaluations, conference findings, and targeted consultations with workers, employers, community partners and governance bodies. Policy and sector reviews have identified limited employer cultural capability as a key challenge, with inconsistent pastoral care and communication practices contributing to worker isolation and misunderstanding.

Immigration New Zealand's RSE recruitment guidance outlines employer responsibilities for worker wellbeing, yet practical implementation varies. The 2023 MBIE RSE policy review, informed by direct consultation with workers, called for stronger cultural and pastoral support, referencing the Ola Manuia Pacific RSE Health and Wellbeing Framework as a foundation for improvement. However, progress has been delayed due to shifting government priorities.

Pacific peoples are diverse historically, linguistically, and geographically in location across the Pacific region with each home sending country holding unique characteristics that shape identity, behaviour, and decision-making. These cultural distinctions influence how workers engage as individuals, with their families, and communities, and it supports their motivation, resilience, and adaptation within the RSE journey. They bring these values with them to enrich the RSE scheme, and in return, New Zealand has created the opportunities where culture, and practises may at times be strengthen in the workplace, and in other times clash.

Despite this diversity, there are similarity across cultural values. These values shape traditional practises, and is the foundation for establishing trusted relationships across communities and families.

Pacific connection with Māori



Drawing on the strength of Māori and Pacific connections will help navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead in the RSE scheme. Māori as tangata whenua of Aotearoa, with roots extending deep through Oceania play a vital role in how the framework will be implemented. Pacific peoples share histories with Māori as navigators, explorers, cultivators and nurturers of the land, innovators who traversed te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa in search of new lands. These shared journeys unite Māori and Pacific communities as tangata o te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa. Their customs, values, beliefs, and languages remind us that our paths have crossed many times and continue to do so today.

This relationship illustrates our shared ancestry and what binds us, rather than what separates us. In the RSE context, this means recognising that Pacific workers are not strangers in Aotearoa, but kin whose presence strengthens the relational space (vā) between Māori and Pacific peoples.

Our relationship with Māori strengthens the shared foundation between Pacific values and te ao Māori principles such as manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and kaitiakitanga, reinforcing the kinship and mutual respect that underpin meaningful engagement in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Honouring Te Tiriti in the Cultural Awareness Framework

The RSE Cultural Awareness Framework honours the intentions of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and acknowledges the legacy of colonisation in Aotearoa, including the impact on land use, sacred environment and resources and the historical connection with local iwi. Te Tiriti provides a framework for addressing these injustices and moving towards healing in practical and respecting the land that we all stand on.

As expressed in the Samoan proverb, *a logo tai ua logo uta*, responsibility to one another is collective. In the RSE context, this means employers, government, and communities share responsibility to manaaki (nurture) workers, uphold cultural identity, and support their time here in Aotearoa and vice versa. The relationship is reciprocated when employers travel to the Pacific to recruit and onboard new workers.

By embedding these principles, the RSE scheme becomes more than an economic arrangement. It becomes a space where Māori and Pacific values of respect, reciprocity, and collective wellbeing are honoured, where workers are supported holistically, and where cultural awareness strengthens both productivity and dignity. By embedding cultural understanding into pastoral care and workplace practice, the framework strengthens trust, supports wellbeing, and creates conditions where Pacific can thrive.

What we value as Pacific peoples

Key Pacific values have been identified across *Yavu - Foundations of Pacific Engagement*, which was utilised during consultation process, and used as a tool for effective engagement with Pacific peoples. In applying the principles of Yavu across the RSE sector, the cultural awareness framework ensures employers and stakeholders understand how these principles and Pacific values guide workers' behaviour and choices, and how they can be honoured alongside workplace expectations and productivity goals.

Family (Aiga/famle/matavuvale): Employers who understand this help workers stay connected and motivated for their families. In the RSE context, the workplace and wider sector become an extended family, supportive at times, challenging at others but the sacrifice is shared by everyone involved. ***“We miss home, but we sacrifice. We just come here to work, and that’s it.”***

Collectivism: Understanding that workers come from a diverse background, but collectively within the workplace, they will support each other, no matter what country you come from. ***“You have to understand them as people and how they think, what's important to them, how they respond to different situations.”***

Reciprocity: Reciprocity is not charity; it is the balance that makes each individual feel valued and willing to give more. ***“If they can also do their own sort of cultural day with the employer, the company, they still demonstrate their cultures.”***

Respect: Respect for elders, leaders, and supervisors is shared amongst workers and employers. In return, the understanding of respect for different cultures, languages and contribution to the workplace makes the workplace culture thrive. ***“The success of our RSE workers is a strong team leader. They look to that person to understand their work.”***

Consensus: Consensus means feeling respected and being part of the conversation that will support community, workers and employers. ***“We want to welcome them in our traditional way here in Aotearoa, they say that they feel like at home, that they are included and being valued here.”***

Spirituality: Employers and workers who allow space for spirituality show they understand what keeps their team together and grounded in faith. ***“Spiritual leadership is very important for us in a village setup; a spiritual guide will be very important. Prayer is always important every morning before we leave for work.”***

Love: Love is the thread that connects families, villages, and extended families together. It is how workers will greet each other, share food, joke, mourn a loss, and how support is shown to one another when they are homesick. Love is the duty of care for individuals, families, and communities. ***“I found it difficult to leave my family for a few months. I encourage everyone to continue to maintain communication with their families when they are under the RSE scheme in NZ”***



The RSE Cultural Awareness Framework was developed to provide a cohesive foundation that connects values, relationships, and practical action. It enhances existing tools, such as inductions, pastoral care guides, and leadership training by embedding cultural integrity into everyday practice. By aligning these resources with shared Pacific values and lived experiences, the Framework supports a more consistent, respectful, and sustainable approach to labour mobility across the sector.

“Pacific people cannot all be treated the same way due to their different cultural backgrounds.”



Discovery

Tok-Talanoa to understand people,
culture and context

Engagement process

Tok-Talanoa methodology

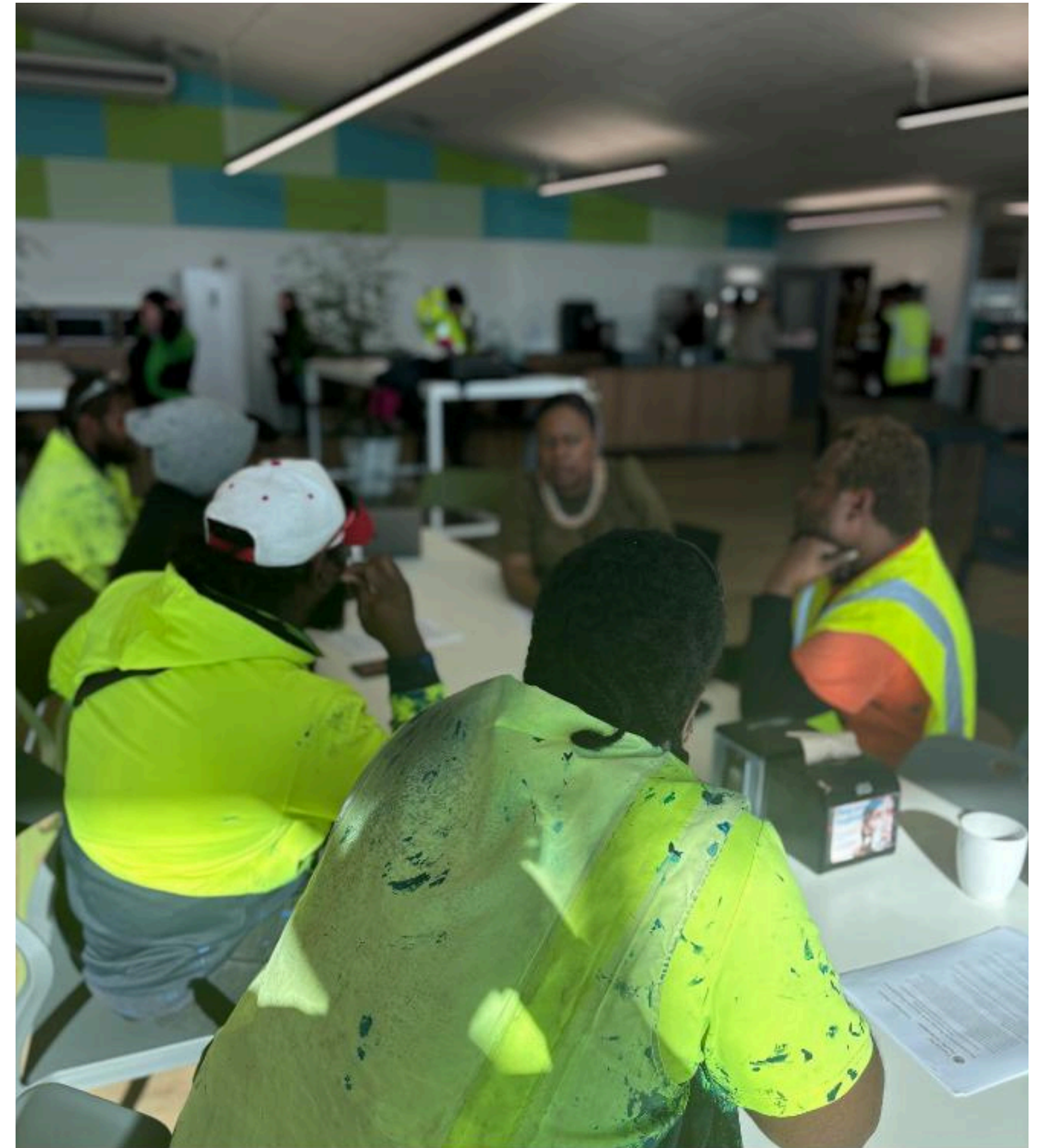
The RSE Cultural Awareness Framework was developed through a culturally grounded process using the Pacific Tok-Talanoa approach, which values trust, reciprocity, and shared understanding. Engagement combined both face-to-face and online talanoa to ensure broad participation, creating safe spaces guided by Pacific protocols and supported by language use. Two rounds of consultation with workers, employers, and Pacific partners were undertaken, complemented by presentations at the Horticulture New Zealand RSE Conference (Wellington, 2025), the PLMAM Conference (Honiara, 2025), and discussions with the Cultural Committee Group, Pacific Liaison Officers, and national and regional labour governance groups. Together, these engagements captured diverse perspectives across the horticulture and viticulture sectors.

These engagements identified five core themes - **Wellbeing, Purpose, Leadership, Communication,** and **Education and Training**. These core themes highlighted priorities such as consistent pastoral care, culturally responsive leadership, and tools that link visible practices to underlying values. Insights from RSE workers shaped the framework to reflect lived realities and informed the design of the Common Ground Pathway to embed cultural awareness across the system.

Stakeholders

A list of stakeholders recommended by Pacific Liaison Officers, MBIE, and Horticulture New Zealand who had input into the framework is listed in [Appendix 1](#). Additional stakeholders were contacted by the project team, but did not respond or are currently engaged at a more strategic level of the RSE Scheme.

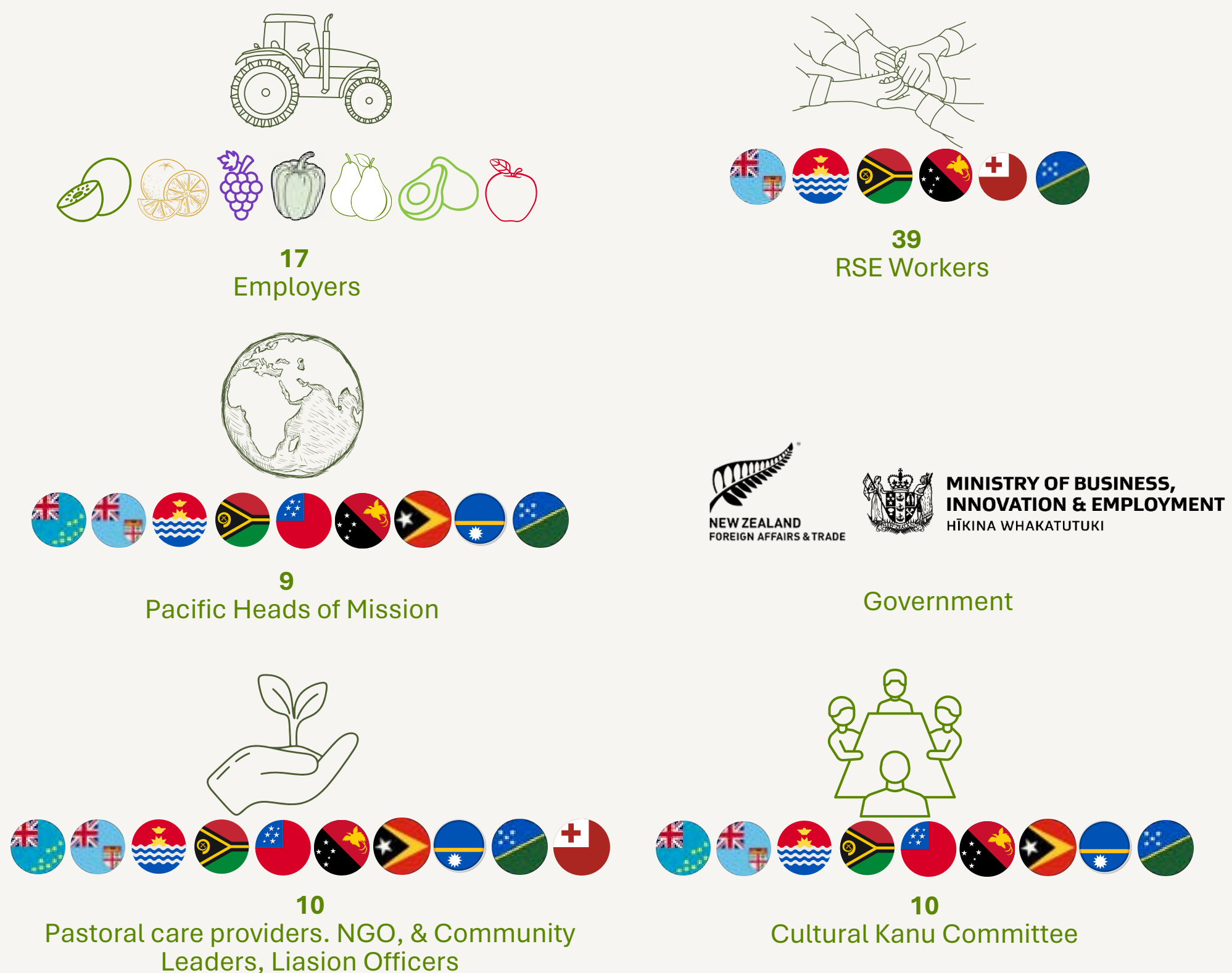
RSE workers engaged in tok-talanoa across Aotearoa to share lived experiences, challenges and aspirations, while employers and community stakeholders described their vision, practice and achievements, insights that continue to inform policy, training and pastoral support. Their voices also emphasised the systematic changes that needs to be made at a policy level across the scheme.



Engagement Summary



Consultation with Stakeholders



What we heard

The voices of RSE workers, employers, and Pacific partners sit at the centre of this work. People spoke openly about their experiences and what helps them feel supported while living and working in Aotearoa.

This section brings together the **cultural insights** shared through the tok-talanoa. These insights reflect the experiences and expectations that shape how people connect with one another. Many described cultural understanding as a two-way street, where workers and employers both learn about and appreciate each other's cultures.

People also spoke about practical issues such as housing, income settings, transport, work hours, and compliance requirements. These matters are important but sit outside the scope of the Cultural Awareness Framework. A summary of these insights is provided at the end of this section.

Five core themes emerged from the tok-talanoa

1 Wellbeing

Wellbeing reflects the physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational needs that help people feel steady and supported. When these needs are understood across cultures, people settle more easily and work with more confidence.

2 Purpose

Purpose reflects the values and motivations that guide why people take part in the RSE scheme. When people understand each other's goals and expectations, it strengthens trust and helps teams work with more clarity.

3 Leadership

Leadership reflects the roles, behaviours, and cultural expectations that shape how people guide and support others. When this is recognised, teams communicate more openly and work together more smoothly.

4 Communication

Communication reflects how people express themselves, listen, and interpret meaning in different cultural settings. When these styles are understood, conversations are clearer and relationships strengthen.

5 Education and training

Education and training reflect how people learn and build confidence in a new environment. When learning approaches consider cultural perspectives, they support better teamwork and more positive outcomes.



“Our people work hard – they just need to be seen and understood.”

Theme 1: Wellbeing



Wellbeing was described as collective and shared. Workers talked about how faith, family, and cultural identity helped them stay resilient while living far from home. Employers noticed that people settled more easily when relationships felt warm and respectful, and when workers could bring their own practices and routines into daily life.

We heard that...

- ✦ **Family separation is emotionally hard**
Workers talked about missing home and worrying about their families. Many also felt the weight of providing for people back home, which added pressure during the season.
- ✦ **People often keep their concerns to themselves**
Workers said they sometimes stayed quiet because they did not want to create tension or appear ungrateful. Employers and pastoral care staff recognised the silence but were not always sure when to step in with support.
- ✦ **Faith helps people through stress and pressure**
Daily prayer, worship, and other faith practices helped workers manage homesickness and worry. Some described stress in ways linked to faith, such as saying they were “*leaving it to God*,” which meant their struggles were not always visible. Leaders who understood this said it helped them check in more and build trust.
- ✦ **Trust affects how open people feel**
Workers said it was easier to raise concerns when they trusted the person they were talking to. Employers and team leaders said that when trust grew, communication felt more natural and issues surfaced earlier.
- ✦ **Isolation makes it harder to feel settled**
Workers talked about feeling isolated when they had limited contact with people from their own culture or when they lived with people from unfamiliar backgrounds.
- ✦ **Access to familiar food and church helps people feel at home**
Workers said it helped when they could cook food from home or attend church regularly. These needs support identity and comfort. Employers and community groups also spoke about food and church as anchors for people who are far from home.



“Prayer is always important every morning before we leave for work.”

“The way I look after them is the way I would like to be looked after in their country.”



“If you understand why they are here, you understand how to lead them.”

“Everything I do is for my family back home.”

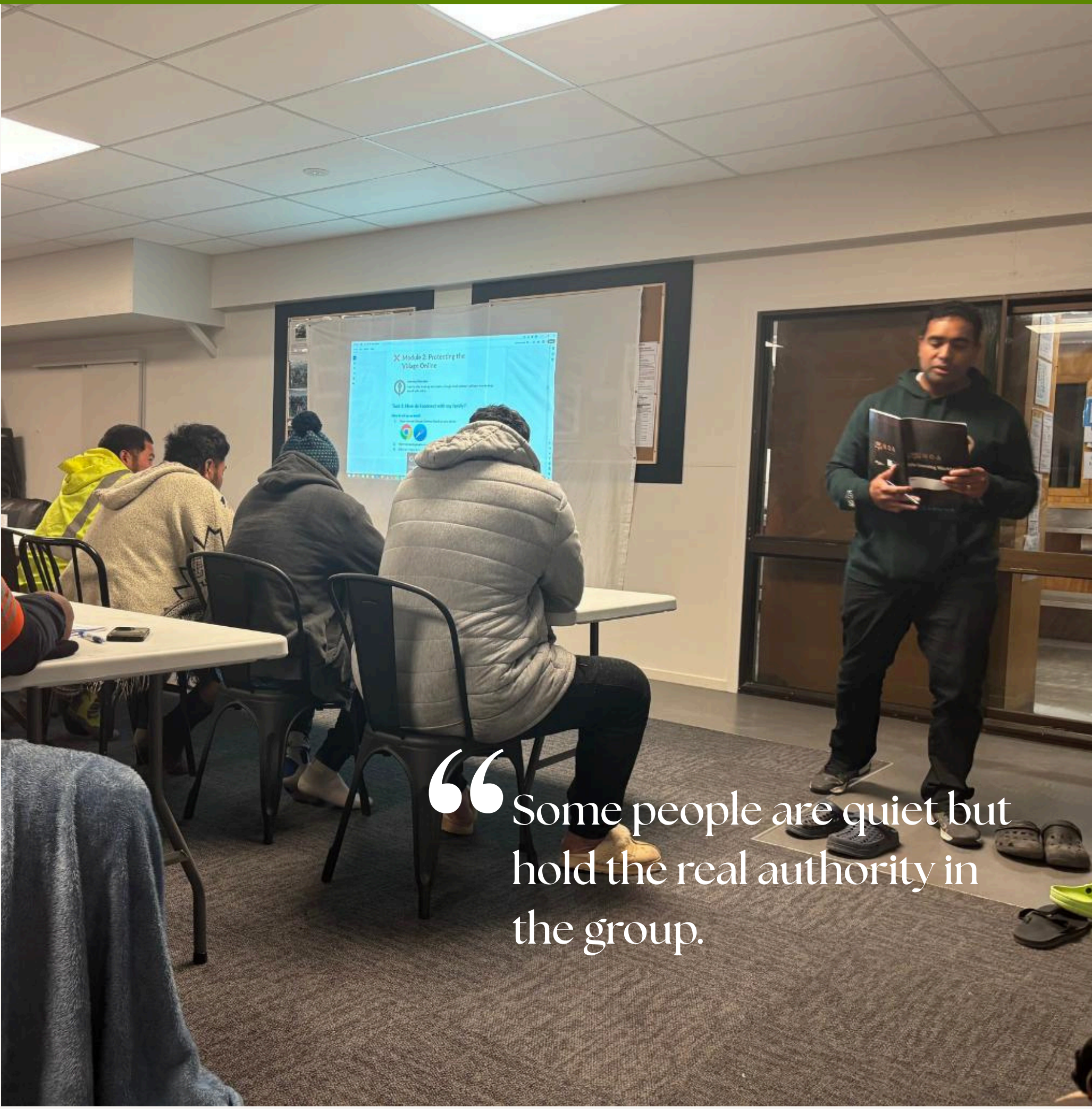
Theme 2: Purpose

Across the tok-talanoa, people spoke with pride about why they take part in the RSE scheme. Workers talked about why they leave home, who they work for, and the values that guide their effort. Employers spoke about the purpose behind their businesses, the need to sustain employment, and the care they want to uphold.

People said that when purpose is understood on both sides, relationships feel stronger. They also noted that cultural understanding supports motivation, confidence, and productivity, which helps businesses remain stable and keep creating work opportunities.

We heard that...

- ✿ **Purpose is centred on family and community**
Workers said their main motivation is to support their families, help with school fees, build homes, and contribute to village life. Many carried this responsibility with pride and said it shaped how they behaved at work.
- ✿ **Faith strengthens people's purpose**
Workers often linked their effort to their faith. Prayer, church life, and belief helped them stay focused and gave meaning to the sacrifices they were making. Many described purpose as something shared with family and community.
- ✿ **Shared purpose builds stronger relationships**
Workers said they felt more committed when leaders understood their reasons for coming to New Zealand and supported them to meet their goals. Employers who listened to these motivations said teams worked with more respect and unity.
- ✿ **Talking about purpose helps people stay motivated**
Workers said they stayed motivated when leaders talked about goals and values, not only tasks or rules. These conversations helped people feel they were working toward something meaningful, rather than just completing daily routines.



“Some people are quiet but hold the real authority in the group.”

Theme 3: Leadership



Leadership was one of the strongest influences on trust, motivation, and cultural understanding across the RSE scheme. Workers talked about leaders who listened, guided, and checked in, rather than relying only on instructions or authority. Employers spoke about the value of team leaders who understood both cultures, and noticed that when leaders focused on relationships, teams were more settled.

We heard that...

- Cultural leadership is inherent not assumed**
Workers said every group has people who hold influence because of their cultural role, age, wisdom, or spiritual standing. Others look to them for guidance even when they are not in a formal role. When this cultural status is not recognised in the workplace, it can create tension and make daily work harder.
- Younger team leaders can find the role difficult**
Employers said younger workers with stronger English were sometimes appointed as team leaders. Workers noted that this could create pressure when age or cultural expectations did not align with the role. When team leaders were supported to navigate these expectations, teams worked more smoothly.
- Respect shapes how feedback is given and received**
Workers said they responded better to feedback delivered with calmness and respect. They felt encouraged when leaders explained why guidance was being given. Employers also said they were learning how to approach conversations in ways that maintained people’s mana.
- Leaders who model care build trust**
Workers talked about leaders who helped with everyday needs, checked how people were coping, or joined cultural activities. These gestures made people feel valued and more willing to speak up when things were difficult.
- Pacific leadership is based on humility and service**
Heads of Mission and community leaders described leadership as a shared responsibility. Leaders are expected to serve, guide, and look after their people. Workers said they felt safer and more confident with leaders who carried themselves in this way.

Theme 4: Communication



Communication came through strongly across the tok-talanoa. Workers and employers both said that good communication sits at the heart of cultural understanding. When people take time to listen, explain, and speak with respect, relationships feel stronger. When communication is rushed or one-way, misunderstandings form quickly.

We heard that...

Language gaps affect confidence and clarity

Workers said they sometimes replied “yes” out of respect even when they were unsure. Asking for clarification felt uncomfortable for many. Employers who checked understanding gently said conversations became easier.

Tone affects how safe people feel

Workers said they were more open when explanations were delivered calmly. A steady, respectful tone helped people feel valued and willing to ask questions. Leaders who spoke with care found communication smoother.

Showing works better than telling

Workers said they learned well when they could watch a task being done first or see instructions visually. Employers and trainers said this approach reduced confusion.

Cultural cues guide how people speak and act

Workers said silence, humour, and gestures carry meaning in Pacific cultures. Some paused before answering to show respect. Others used humour to ease tension. When these cues were misunderstood, communication broke down.

Regular check-ins help build trust

Workers said they felt more comfortable when leaders checked in often and made space for conversation. Employers said that these informal moments helped issues surface earlier.

Translation support improves relationships

Workers said it helped when someone who spoke their language could explain instructions or help raise issues. Employers noted that access to this depended on who was available.

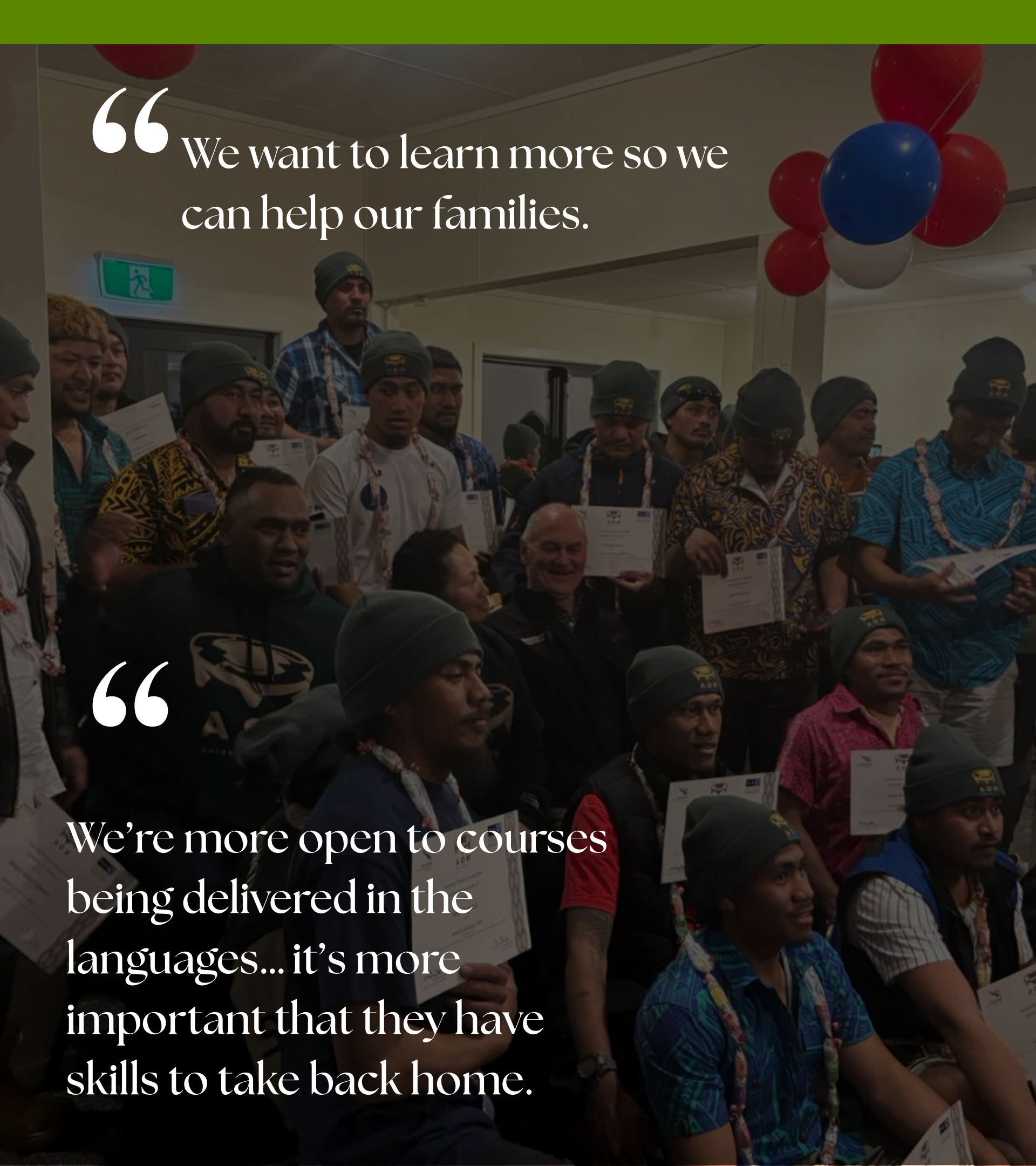
Mixed groups create different communication patterns

Workers said their communication style changed depending on the nationalities or groups they were working with. Employers recognised these differences and said they were often linked to cultural habits as well as team composition.



“ Silence does not mean they agree. They might be thinking or being respectful.

“ We understand better when we can see it first.



“We want to learn more so we can help our families.

“We’re more open to courses being delivered in the languages... it’s more important that they have skills to take back home.

Theme 5: Education & training

Learning was talked about as something that benefits both workers and employers. Workers spoke about the pride that comes from learning new skills and sharing progress with their families at home. Across the talanoa, education was described as a two-way exchange. Workers learn the tools and systems they need for their role, and employers learn about culture, communication, and how to support people well.

We heard that...



Workers are eager to learn and take pride in new skills

Workers said they felt proud when they learned something new and were able to share that progress with their families. Learning helped people feel more confident and more settled at work.

Hands-on and visual learning works best

Workers said they learned well through demonstrations, repetition, and watching others. Employers and trainers said this practical approach reduced confusion and helped overcome language barriers.

Learning grows when people understand each other’s culture

Employers said training was more effective when they understood workers’ cultural values and communication styles. Workers said learning felt safer when leaders explained things with patience and respect.

Team leaders and returnees are important cultural mentors

Workers said experienced team members helped new arrivals with guidance, translation, and settling into daily routines. Employers also relied on these people to support communication and build trust.

Cultural learning should go both ways

Workers said they wanted to understand New Zealand workplace expectations. Employers said they wanted to learn more about Pacific values and cultural practices. People described this shared learning as a practical way to build stronger relationships.

Operational and system insights (outside scope)

These insights reflect the practical issues people raised through the talanoa that sit outside the scope of the Cultural Awareness Framework.

They relate to living conditions, income settings, workplace structures, and access to support. Although these insights are not cultural in nature, they affect how well workers and employers are able to connect, communicate, and take part in learning.

These insights also underpin many of the RSE system or scheme-level actions and recommendations that appear later in the report. They help show why those actions matter and how they are linked to what people experience on the ground. The section “**RSE System or Scheme-level actions and recommendations**” (pg 39-40) draws directly on the issues summarised here.

>> **Living conditions and daily environment**

Workers talked about cramped or cold housing and said this affected comfort and morale. Some said it was hard to rest or feel at ease in shared spaces with people from unfamiliar cultures. Employers also noted that distance from shops and essential services created extra pressure, especially when transport was limited.

>> **Income, deductions, and financial settings**

Workers said uncertainty about weekly hours made it hard to plan for their families back home. Deductions for accommodation, transport, and other costs reduced what they could send home, which added stress. Many said they wanted clearer information about pay and remittances so they could understand their earnings.

>> **Leadership structures and workplace roles**

Team leaders often carried extra responsibilities, such as translation or settling conflicts, without clear support. Some leadership roles were assigned based mainly on English ability rather than experience or cultural standing. Employers said they sometimes struggled to set clear expectations because systems varied across sites.

>> **Communication and support systems**

Workers and employers said access to interpreters or bilingual staff varied across regions. Time pressures also made it difficult for leaders to check in regularly, which meant some issues surfaced late. People said it helped when employers had consistent support structures, but this was not always available.

>> **Education and training access**

Workers said they valued training but found it hard to attend when rosters were full or transport options were limited. Employers said they wanted to offer more learning opportunities but struggled during busy periods. Access to bilingual tutors or culturally aligned trainers also varied between regions.

>> **Pathways and opportunities**

Some workers said they wanted clearer information about earning potential, deductions, or ways to increase their income. Others wanted opportunities to learn skills they could take home. Employers and community partners noted that access to these opportunities depended heavily on seasonal demand, time pressure, and available support.



Designing the framework

Turning insights into a shared foundation
for cultural understanding

Designing the framework

Informed by what we heard, we used the Water of Systems Change model (*Kania, Kramer & Senge, 2018*) to make sense of the insights shared. It helped us look at the RSE system through three levels:

- **Structural** – the visible systems such as policies, induction, housing, and liaison support.
- **Relational** – the quality of trust, leadership, and communication between workers, employers, and agencies.
- **Mental models** – the beliefs and assumptions that shape how people see and relate to one another.

As we mapped the insights across these layers, patterns began to emerge. Many of the visible challenges - such as low retention or wellbeing concerns - were linked to deeper relational and mindset factors.

To shape solutions, we then drew on other frameworks and research from Aotearoa, Australia, and across the Pacific, including:

- The RSE Ola Manuia Wellbeing Framework
- PACER Plus Labour Mobility Principles
- CPL's Family Framework
- Edward T. Hall's Cultural Iceberg, which reminds us that most of culture lies beneath the surface.

Together, these perspectives gave a clear direction for the framework: to connect what can be seen and managed (systems and behaviours), with what is felt and believed (values, trust, and relationships).

Design principles ✱

The framework was guided by five core principles

- 1 Respect the vā**
Build trust, connection, and reciprocity - relationships are the foundation for lasting change.
- 2 Be led by lived experience**
Centre the voices of workers, employers, and RSE communities.
- 3 Be mana enhancing**
Start from a place of strength. Recognise people's dignity, knowledge, and capability constantly.
- 4 Make it usable, not just beautiful**
Design tools that are practical, clear, and easy to apply.
- 5 Honour diverse perspectives**
Value the distinct stories and cultural expressions of both sending and receiving countries, including employers and workers.

Starting with a story

The first step in designing the framework was to capture its essence in narrative form.

We drew on the Pacific tradition of storytelling to explain and create understanding in a memorable way.

“
Storytelling is how we bridge
the gap between concepts and
meaning.
- Arieta Tora Rika

Journeys towards land

Participants described the RSE experience as a journey: leaving home, crossing oceans, adapting to new environments, and building relationships along the way.

Navigation is central to many Pacific identities. For generations, Pacific peoples are master navigators whose voyages were purposeful, always moving toward land, toward safety, belonging, and opportunity.

This mirrors the RSE journey. Workers travel to Aotearoa not only to earn an income but to create better futures for their families and communities.

Employers, too, are guided by purpose, to build successful and sustainable businesses while supporting the wellbeing of the people who make it possible.

Land and soil as common ground

From these shared journeys, the metaphor of land and soil emerged. Land represents the destination and the shared ground where workers and employers meet. The soil symbolises the foundation that sustains growth and connection, the unseen elements that hold everything in place.

The framework reflects both perspectives:

- Pacific workers bring deep expertise, resilience, and commitment to working the land.
- Employers welcome and value their contribution to business success and community wellbeing.

Each brings different strengths and responsibilities. The soil represents what they build together, a shared foundation of trust, care, and understanding. When this foundation is strong, both workers and employers' flourish.

The Framework Narrative



>> [Watch the RSE Framework Narrative video](#)



In Aotearoa, our Māori whānau call us Ngā Iwi o te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa - the people of the great Pacific Ocean. For generations, Pacific peoples navigated vast waters, guided by stars, winds, and ancestral knowledge. They crossed the Pacific not just with skill, but with purpose. And always, they journeyed towards land.

Whenua. Fanua. Enua. Vanua. Hanua.

Land is more than a destination. It's where we anchor, where we grow, and where we nourish. It's where we plant roots, raise aiga, and build connection.

When Pacific workers come to Aotearoa, they carry that same respect for land - the belief that if we care for it, it will provide for us and for generations to come. Growers understand this too. Working the land isn't just about production - it's about stewardship, knowledge - sharing, and tending relationships as carefully as crops.

Season after season, growers stand alongside workers - the pickers, the packers, the drivers, the supervisors. Everyone contributes. Together, they make the harvest possible.

He waka eke noa - we are all in this together. The trust built between workers and growers sustains families, strengthens communities, and keeps our shared future flourishing.

This shared respect for land is what binds us and it's what makes this framework so important. It is not just about building understanding, but to connect through the values we already share.

Shared respect. Shared responsibility. Common ground.



Introducing the RSE Cultural Awareness Framework

Above the
surface

Below the
surface

Conditions
for Growth

Flourishing



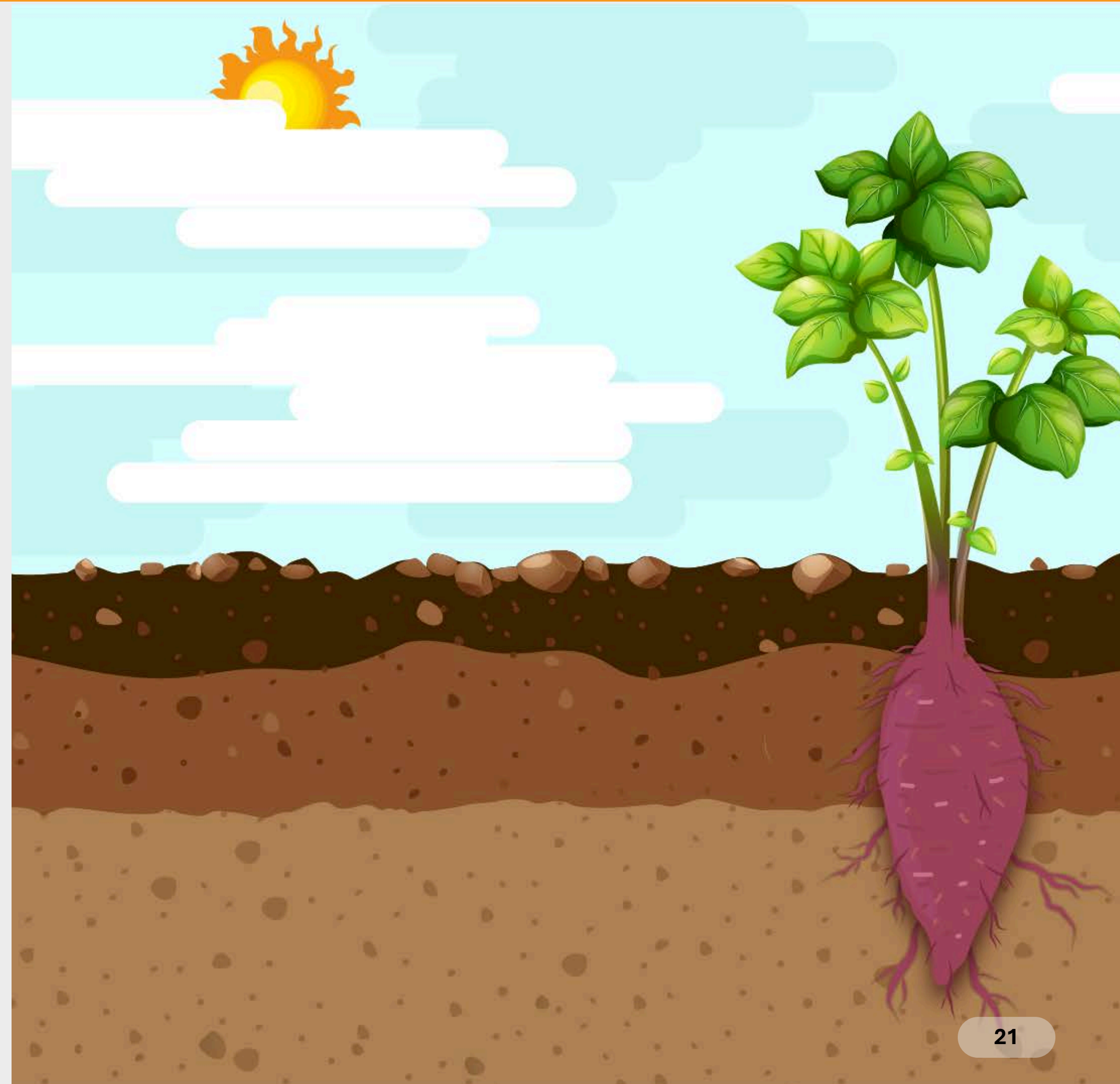
The framework is built on a simple idea:
Strong relationships are like healthy soil.

When the soil is cared for, everything that grows from it is stronger and more resilient.

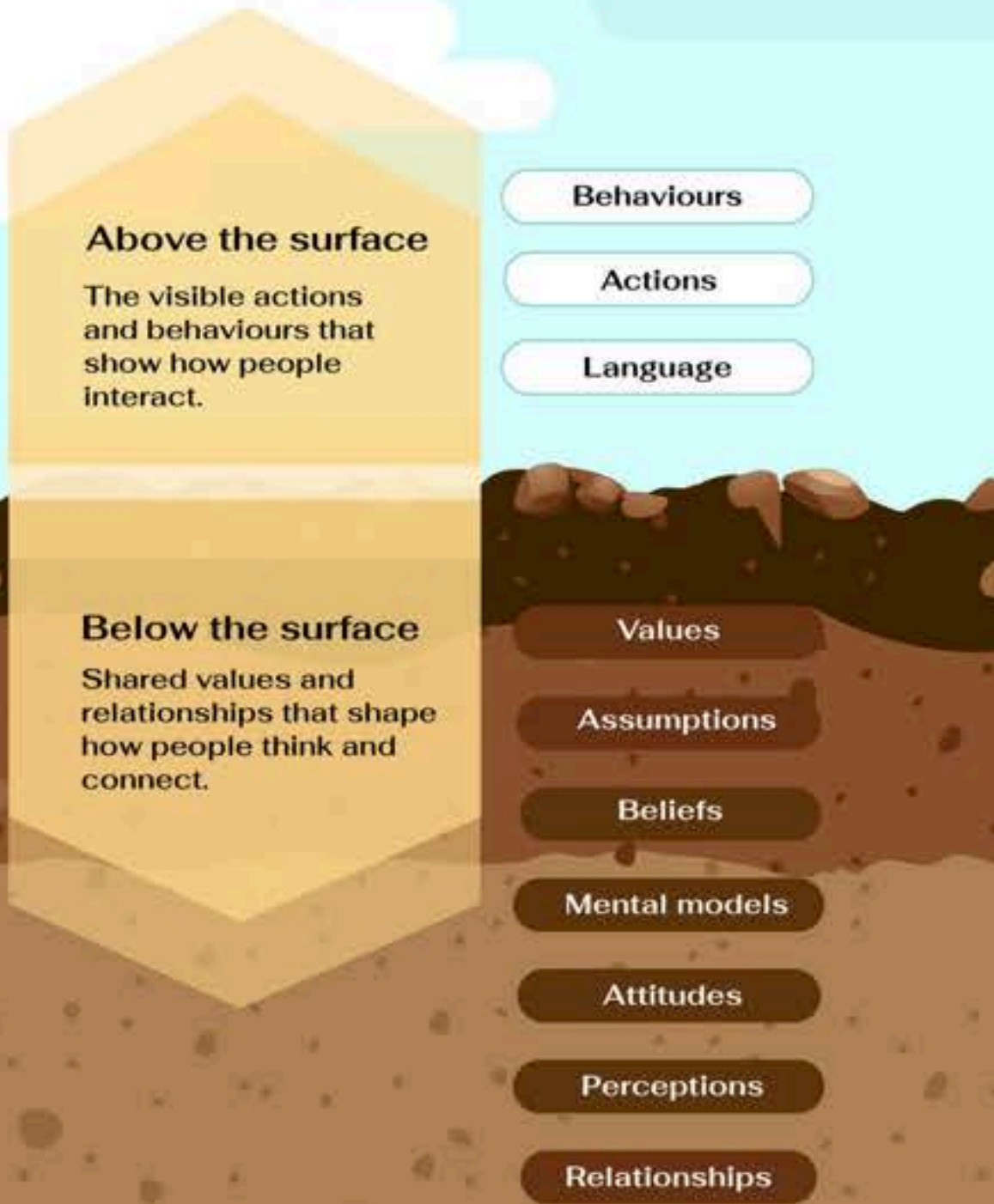
The RSE system depends on the strength of the relationships, values, and shared understanding.

The framework seeks to establish awareness and understanding by exploring:

- ✦ What lies beneath the surface - the invisible foundations
- ✦ What happens above the surface - visible practices
- ✦ What enables growth - conditions that nourish both
- ✦ What success looks like - flourishing across the system



Above and below the surface



Above the surface - visible practice

These are the actions and behaviours we see every day - how people communicate, how work is organised, and how culture is expressed.

In practice, this can look like:

- Induction sessions using Pacific greetings and customs of welcome
- Shared meals and celebrations that build informal connection
- Employers joining cultural events or learning workers' languages
- Workers participate in health and safety trainings or briefings.

When these visible practices are supported by strong relationships and values below the surface, they help create belonging, trust, and consistency across the RSE system.

Below the surface - invisible foundations

These are the values, beliefs, and relationships that shape how people think, connect, and respond to one another. They are less visible but drive every interaction above the surface.

In practice, this can look like:

- A worker staying quiet out of respect, while a supervisor may misread that silence
- Employers taking time to build trust before giving feedback
- Team leaders maintaining harmony by mediating rather than confronting issues directly
- Workers learning that direct feedback is a normal part of the workplace and not a sign of disrespect.

When these foundations are strong, relationships hold firm. When neglected, everything built above them becomes unstable. Real change begins below the surface.

Conditions for growth

Like rain, sun, and nutrients for soil, these conditions help both the visible and invisible elements thrive.

They make cultural awareness part of everyday life.



Shared purpose and values

Trust beings with shared purpose. When workers and employers understand each other's goals - family, faith, and community - decisions are guided by care.

Example: At season start, employers and workers share their goals. Regular talanoa keeps these front of mind and tracks progress together.



Courageous leadership

Cultural awareness takes courage - to listen, to stay open, and lead with humility.

Example: A supervisor notices performance issues linked to late-night kava use. Instead of reacting, they meet with a Pacific leader to understand its cultural role. Together, they agree on respectful boundaries that protect wellbeing and productivity.



Learning together

Shared learning builds confidence and respect.

Example: Workers and supervisors lead shortsessions teaching each other techniques i.e. Pacific pruning methods, local equipment use. These exchanges build teamwork and mutual respect.

Care and support

True support includes emotional, social, and spiritual wellbeing. When care becomes part of everyday practice, trust grows and everyone benefits.

Example: A pastoral team notices a worker is withdrawn. They discreetly check in to learn of a sick parent back home and arrange a video call along with community support. The worker feels cared for, and the team gains deeper cultural understanding.



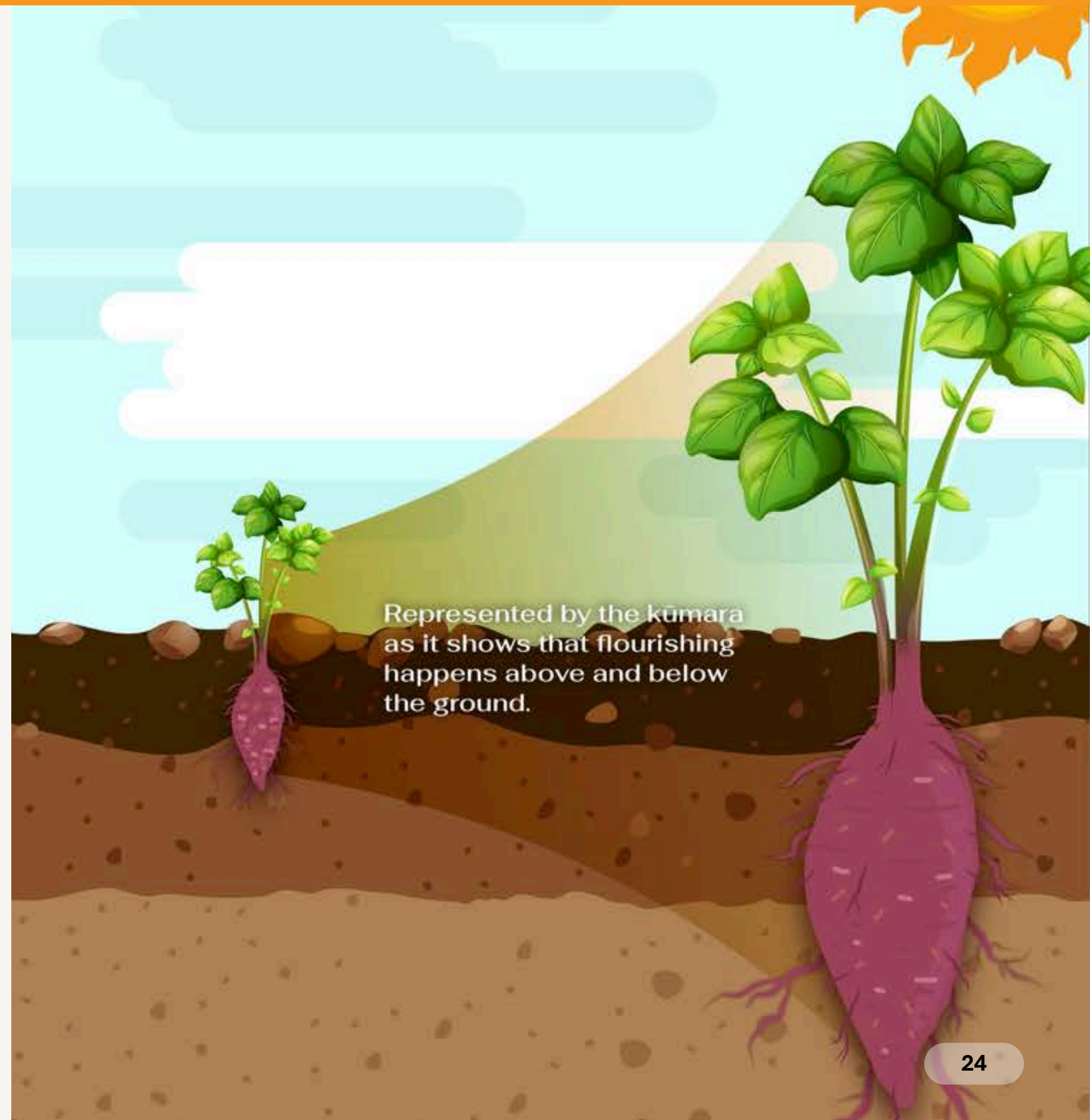
Flourishing

Flourishing happens when the foundations are strong, conditions for growth are in place, and understanding is shared.

Represented by the kūmara as it shows that flourishing happens above and below the ground.

“ Kāore te kūmara e kōrero mō tōna ake reka - the kūmara does not speak of its own sweetness.

Flourishing reminds us that true success in the RSE system is collective. It grows from care, shared purpose and strong relationships.



The RSE Cultural Awareness Framework

1

Look beneath the surface

Start by understanding what sits beneath the visible – the values, beliefs, and relationships that shape how people connect.

2

Create the right conditions

The right conditions connect what lies below the surface with what we see above it – helping understanding take root.

3

Define what flourishing looks like

What would it look like if everyone understood and valued each other's culture?

Conditions for growth



Flourishing

The outcomes we see when the cultural understanding is shared.

Above the surface

The visible actions and behaviours that show how people interact.

Behaviours

Actions

Language

Below the surface

Shared values and relationships that shape how people think and connect.

Values

Assumptions

Beliefs

Mental models

Attitudes

Perceptions

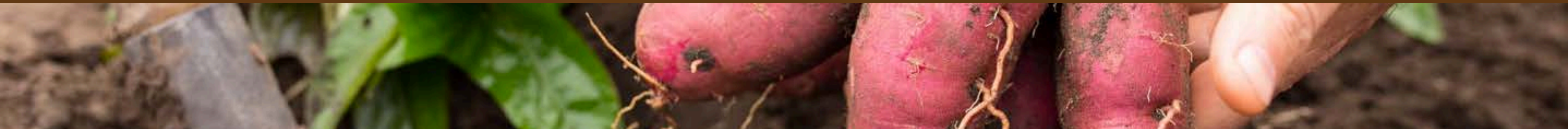
Relationships

Represented by the kumara as it shows that flourishing happens above and below the ground.

A close-up photograph of a hand planting a small green seedling into dark, rich soil. The hand is positioned in the upper right, with fingers gently holding the soil around the base of the plant. The seedling has several bright green leaves and a thin stem. The background is dark and out of focus, emphasizing the action of planting.

Framework in action

Bringing cultural awareness to life
through tools, practice and connection



Putting the framework in action

The RSE Cultural Awareness Framework offers a practical way to strengthen understanding and relationships across the scheme.

It helps people see that behaviour, communication, and decision making are shaped by deeper values and connections.

By using the framework, workers, employers, and system partners can work together to find solutions that support both people and productivity.

Using the framework encourages reflection and learning rather than reaction.

- ✦ What might be sitting below the surface of this issue?
- ✦ Which conditions for growth could help us work through it?
- ✦ What would flourishing look like if we got this right?

These questions help turn cultural awareness into an everyday practice.

Applying the framework at different levels

The framework is flexible and can be used in many ways.

- Workers and teams can use it to reflect on shared values and how these appear in daily work. It supports conversations about communication, leadership, and connection.
- Employers and leaders can use it to review practices, strengthen trust, and resolve conflict. It helps them see how culture influences motivation, teamwork, and leadership.
- System partners and policymakers can use it to align programmes and policies with Pacific values and lived realities, keeping wellbeing and fairness central to design.

Embedding the framework across the system

For the framework to take root, it must be visible and supported at every level. This means weaving its principles into training, policy, leadership, and community engagement.

Practical steps include:

- Including it in orientation for employers and new workers
- Linking leadership and pastoral-care training to the Conditions for Growth
- Holding seasonal reviews to reflect on what's working and what can improve
- Sharing good practice across the network to build collective learning

Embedding it this way makes cultural awareness part of everyday operations, not a one-off activity.



A shared approach to cultural awareness

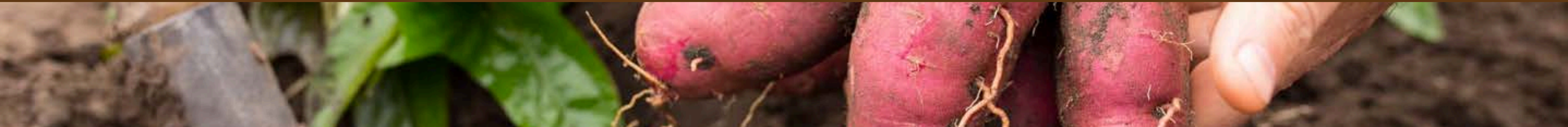
The framework works best when everyone takes part.
Each person contributes to building understanding through how they listen, lead, and care for others.

Cultural awareness grows through consistent practice such as small acts of respect and connection that builds over time.

When used in this way, the framework helps people move from awareness to shared action. It turns understanding into something that can be seen and felt in everyday relationships and decisions.

The next section explains how this shared understanding is being put into practice through tools and resources that support workers, employers, and system partners to act with cultural integrity.





EXAMPLE IN ACTION

Shared goals and purpose

THE ISSUE | What is seen

Workers seem anxious about pay and deductions. Employers notice requests for extra hours, advances, or early pay and assume this reflects poor money management. Workers, meanwhile, see rising costs and pressure to send money home. Productivity drops as tension grows.

How the framework helps

The Framework prompts employers to pause and ask, **“What might be causing these requests for extra hours or advances?”** It highlights two Conditions for Growth: **Shared Purpose and Values**, which focuses on aligning goals and expectations, and **Learning Together**, which creates space for honest conversation and shared financial understanding.

Tools to support

- Cross-cultural talanoa sessions to align family and business goals.
- Worker Capability resources with modules on budgeting, savings, and remittances, co-designed with liaison officers.
- Returnee mentoring to share examples of how mutual understanding supports both wellbeing and productivity.

BELOW THE SURFACE | What is unseen

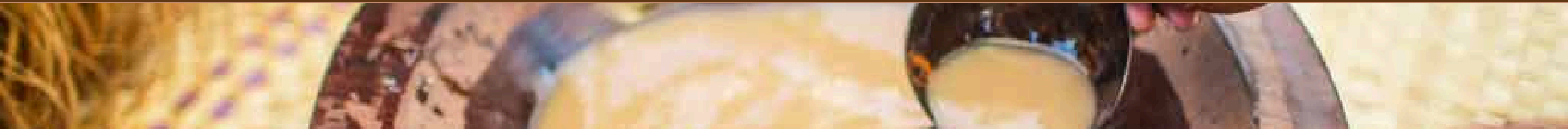
Pacific workers carry a deep responsibility to support families and villages back home. When deductions for housing, transport, or health visits aren’t clear, stress builds quickly. Many employers don’t realise that a worker’s income must cover both living costs in New Zealand and remittances overseas.

This understanding enables:

- Clear discussion of financial goals and pressures.
- Transparency about pay, deductions, and living costs.
- Exploration of savings and investment options to help workers meet family commitments.
- Collaboration on ways to reduce costs, such as shared housing or transport.
- Employer reflection on how to provide worker conditions that are cost-efficient and sustainable over time.

OUTCOME | What flourishing looks like

Workers send money home confidently and stay focused on their goals. Employers build trust through fairness and transparency. Shared purpose turns potential conflict into partnership, strengthening families, communities, and workplaces.



EXAMPLE IN ACTION

Understanding the use of kava

THE ISSUE | What is seen

Supervisors notice some workers arriving tired or less focused after late-night kava sessions. Groups of workers are gathering two to three nights a week, often sitting for several hours drinking and talking. Fatigue builds over time, and productivity and safety start to drop. Employers move to ban the practice, citing reduced performance and safety risks.

BELOW THE SURFACE | What is unseen

Kava is a cultural and social practice that helps workers relax, reconnect, and maintain a sense of belonging. It’s a way to unwind, share stories, and relieve homesickness. When employers see only the impact on performance, and workers feel their culture is being criticised, trust and communication breakdown.

How the framework helps

The Framework encourages employers to pause and ask, **“What might be sitting beneath the surface?”** It supports talanoa to understand the reasons behind what they see.

Two Conditions for Growth apply here:

- **Courageous Leadership**, which promotes listening before reacting, and
- **Care and Support**, which helps balance wellbeing with safety and performance.

This understanding enables:

- Open discussion about the role and meaning of kava from a cultural standpoint.
- Sharing views on how to socialise and create spaces where people feel safe to relax and unwind.
- Create shared agreements on when and how kava can be used responsibly.
- Clarity about rest, safety, and performance expectations.

Tools to support

- Cross-cultural talanoa sessions to support respectful discussions.
- Wellbeing and Kava guideline co-designed with workers, outlining safe practice.
- Leadership and Pastoral Care training showing how to respond to cultural issues through dialogue.
- Speak Pacific App content on cultural context and wellbeing.

OUTCOME | What flourishing looks like

Employers and workers reach shared understanding and clear boundaries. Workers feel respected and supported; employers maintain safety and performance. A potential point of tension becomes an opportunity to build trust and cultural awareness across the team.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

Leadership dilemma

THE ISSUE | What is seen

Employers appoint team leaders based on English proficiency or because someone is outspoken and shows initiative. Tensions arise as workers defer instead to those with cultural authority - people recognised as matai, chiefs, elders, or respected community figures. Unease builds when instructions are not followed and workers seek advice and guidance from those outside formal leadership roles.

BELOW THE SURFACE | What is unseen

In many Pacific cultures, leadership is relational and earned through service, humility, and contribution to the collective. It reflects inherent mana - authority recognised by others - rather than assumed mana gained through title or role. When relational and hierarchical leadership styles meet, good intentions can clash, and both trust and performance can suffer.

How the framework helps

The Framework helps employers recognise that leadership can be both positional and relational. It encourages talanoa to explore how respect and authority are expressed across cultures and where influence truly sits within a group.

The key Conditions for Growth are

- **Courageous Leadership**, which calls for humility and listening, and
- **Learning Together**, which supports shared leadership and clarity of roles.

This understanding enables:

- Acknowledge that there are different forms of leadership and ways of leading.
- Recognise that in collective cultures, speaking or decision-making may be shared across roles rather than held by one individual.
- Support formal leadership structures to work in tandem with inherent cultural roles.

Tools to support

- Leadership in Practice Series co-designed with Pacific leaders and employers.
- Cultural Induction Toolkit including guidance on relational leadership and cultural authority.
- Recognition guidelines for informal leaders and mentors.
- Supervisor training on shared and service-based leadership approaches.

OUTCOME | What flourishing looks like

Employers and cultural leaders work together to guide teams. Workers feel respected and confident in the leadership structure. Cohesion improves, and leadership becomes a shared practice that strengthens trust, communication, and performance.



Tools and resources to support the framework

The tools and resources introduced here are based on what was heard during the talanoa and analysed through the six key themes.

A full list of all tools, existing resources and new concepts identified through this process, is provided in **Appendix 5**.

Why new tools are needed

While many useful resources already exist, they vary in quality, accessibility, and cultural depth. Some focus mainly on compliance and safety, while others demonstrate strong relational practice but are not consistently applied.

Three main gaps emerged:

- **Consistency:** Approaches to cultural awareness and pastoral care differ across employers, leading to uneven worker experiences.
- **Cultural depth:** Many tools focus on surface-level awareness rather than the values and relationships that shape behaviour and wellbeing.
- **Accessibility:** Resources are text-heavy, English-only and not suited to Pacific ways of learning such as visual, oral, or interactive methods.

These gaps highlight the need for a coordinated set of tools that are culturally grounded, easy to use, and adaptable to different contexts. The goal is to make cultural awareness part of everyday work and leadership.

The type of tools needed

To embed consistent cultural understanding across the system, two types of tools are required:

- 1 Framework tools:** Help people apply the framework's ideas in any setting. These support reflection, conversation, and shared planning. Still in early development and will be tested with workers, employers, and system partners.
- 2 Practical tools and resources:** Respond to common issues raised in the talanoa. These turn cultural awareness into daily practice through clear guidance, translation, and shared learning. Some are existing tools adapted for stronger cultural alignment; others are new concepts to fill gaps.

All tools should:

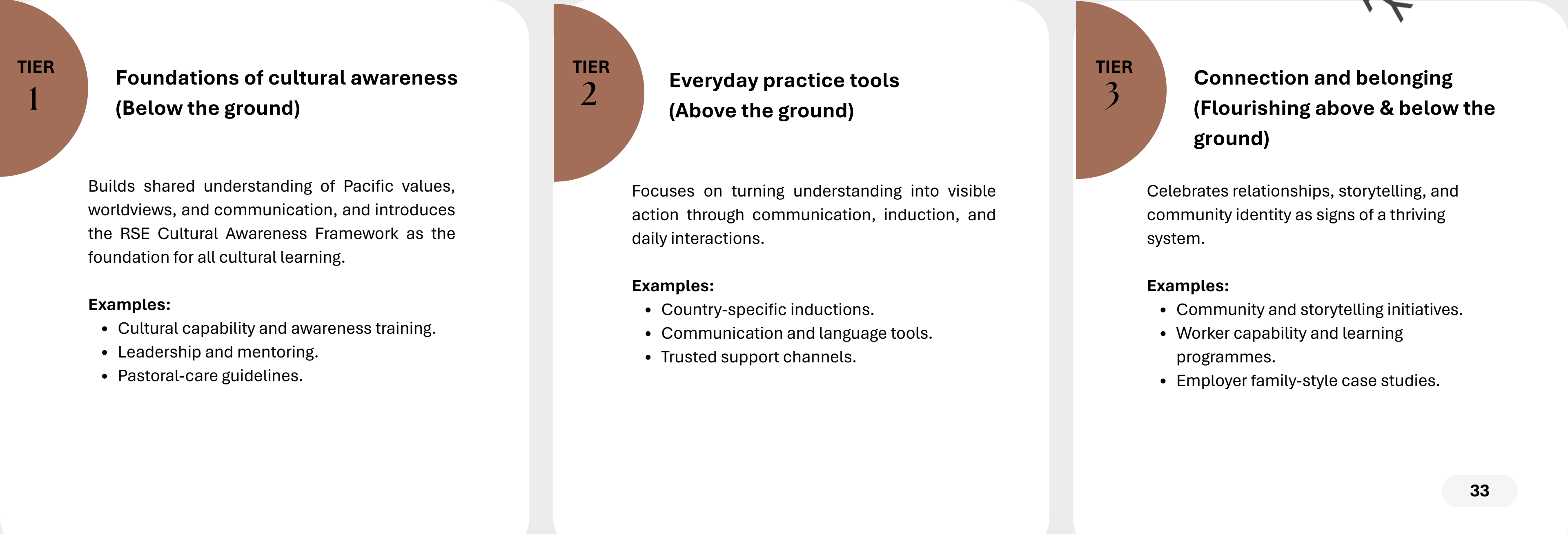
- Connect visible actions with the values and relationships beneath them.
- Be accessible and adaptable across languages, settings, and levels of experience.
- Encourage dialogue, reflection, and shared learning rather than one-way instruction.
- Create consistency by aligning leadership, policy, and frontline practice with shared values.





The RSE Common Ground Pathway to Culture Awareness

To bring the tools together in one structure, we developed the **RSE Common Ground Pathway to Cultural Awareness**. Two types of tools - framework (to guide reflection) and practical (to support action) - are applied across three tiers. These tiers build from shared understanding, to everyday practice, to connection and belonging.





Strengthening cultural awareness through connected practical tools and resources: Tier 1 Tools and resources

Tier 1: Building the foundations of cultural awareness

Cultural capability and awareness training

Audience: Employers and supervisors

Conditions for growth supported:
Shared Purpose & Values, Courageous Leadership, Learning Together

Description

This focus area sits below the ground, where values and mindsets shape behaviour. Employers need structured, ongoing learning that deepens understanding of Pacific values, communication styles, faith, and reciprocity.

These foundations are strengthened through the RSE Cultural Awareness Framework Induction, which introduces the Framework, its values, and the Conditions for Growth, supported by practical capability training led by Pacific educators.

What exists now

Strong foundations exist through national intercultural and cultural awareness training, such as the Introduction to Intercultural Capability (Ministry for Ethnic Communities) and Cultural Capability Workshops (Centre for Pacific Languages).

However, there is no RSE-specific learning pathway, and content remains largely English-only and not tailored to the realities or Pacific contexts of the RSE scheme.

Future state (med-long term)

Introduce the **RSE Common Ground Pathway which combines RSE Cultural Awareness Framework Induction and cultural capability training** into a unified foundation for all RSE employers and supervisors.

The induction introduces the Framework and companion tools (e.g. Culture Canvas, Maturity Model) while capability workshops apply these concepts to real-world RSE scenarios. This approach uses bilingual materials, consistent visuals, and Pacific-led facilitation so cultural understanding becomes a shared and ongoing practice.



Strengthening cultural awareness through connected practical tools and resources: Tier 1 Tools and resources

Tier 1: Building the foundations of cultural awareness

Leadership

and mentoring

Audience: Team leaders, supervisors, employers.

Conditions for growth supported:

Courageous Leadership, Learning Together.

Description

This focus area bridges below and above the ground.

Leadership and mentoring bring cultural values to life through everyday behaviour - showing humility, service, and respect while guiding others. When leadership is relational and grounded in Pacific values, it builds trust, confidence, and belonging across the system.

What exists now

Some leadership training exists within employer induction or health and safety programmes, but it varies in depth and cultural relevance.

Informal mentoring often happens naturally among Pacific workers, yet this knowledge and influence are rarely recognised or supported.

Future state (med-long term)

Develop a tiered **Leadership in Practice series** that brings together practical training, reflection, and peer mentoring.

Co-design the series with returning workers and employers to reflect Pacific leadership principles such as humility, courage, and collective responsibility.

Recognise and reward mentors who play key cultural roles within teams, and link this training to the broader RSE Common Ground Pathway.



Strengthening cultural awareness through connected practical tools and resources: Tier 1 Tools and resources

Tier 1: Building the foundations of cultural awareness

Pastoral care guidelines

Audience: Workers, employers and supervisors

Conditions for growth supported:
Care and Support, Shared Purpose and Values

Description

This focus area sits below the ground, where values of care, faith, and responsibility shape how wellbeing is understood and supported.

Strong pastoral care depends on relationships of trust – where emotional, spiritual, and cultural needs are recognised alongside physical and practical ones.

What exists now

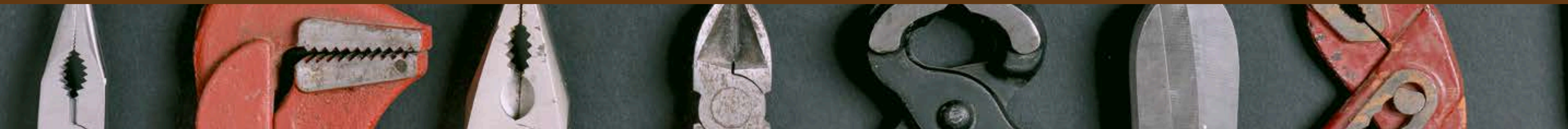
Immigration NZ’s RSE Employer Pastoral Care Guide provides practical requirements for worker wellbeing and compliance.

While comprehensive, it focuses mainly on logistics such as accommodation, transport, and recreation. It lacks depth in cultural and spiritual care and does not reflect Pacific ways of relating, faith, or collective wellbeing.

Future state (med-long term)

Update **existing pastoral care guidance to include emotional, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of wellbeing**, co-designed with employers, workers, and Pacific faith leaders.

Develop **complementary Women’s Wellbeing and Pastoral Care Guide** to address specific needs such as safe accommodation, hygiene access, and peer support. Embed these resources within pastoral training and align them with bilingual and visual communication tools for everyday use.



Strengthening cultural awareness through connected practical tools and resources: Tier 2 Tools and resources

Tier 2: Everyday practice tools (Above the ground)

Country-specific on-arrival inductions

Audience: Workers

Conditions for growth supported:
Shared Purpose and Values, Care and Support

Description

This focus area sits above the ground, where visible actions and communication shape early experiences.

On-arrival inductions are often a worker’s first point of contact with New Zealand life and workplace culture. When designed well, they help set shared expectations, build trust, and ease the transition between home and host countries.

What exists now

Country-specific induction materials exist through Immigration NZ’s Get Ready Information Booklets and Horticulture NZ’s Recognised Seasonal Employer Information Booklets for Samoa, Fiji, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, and other Pacific nations.

However, these are text-heavy and English-only. They do not yet reflect the relational, visual, and language preferences common in Pacific learning

Future state (med-long term)

Redesign existing induction resources to suit each Pacific context through bilingual, visual, and story-based formats.

Combine country-specific materials into a coordinated RSE Induction suite with short videos, visual guides, and translated fact sheets co-designed with return workers.

This will create a consistent, welcoming experience that strengthens understanding from day one.



Strengthening cultural awareness through connected practical tools and resources: Tier 2 Tools and resources

Tier 2: Everyday practice tools (Above the ground)

Communication and language

Audience: Workers, employers and supervisors

Conditions for growth supported:
Learning Together, Care and Support

Description

This focus area bridges below and above the ground.

Communication reflects both the values that shape how people connect and the visible behaviours that show respect and understanding in daily work. Strengthening communication across languages and cultures helps reduce misunderstanding, build trust, and support safe, confident workplaces.

What exists now

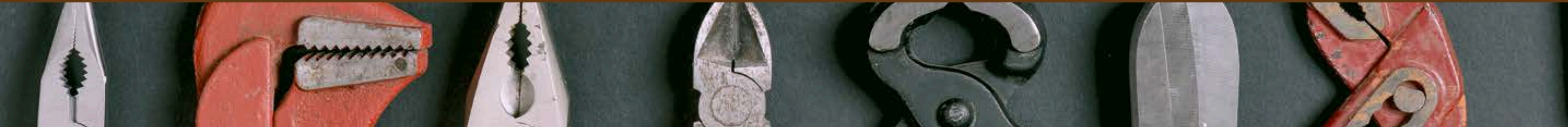
Translation efforts and language-learning initiatives already exist, including the Speak Pacific App (Centre for Pacific Languages) and ad-hoc bilingual materials created by employers and pastoral teams.

However, these tools are not coordinated, and most RSE resources remain English-only. Few reflect Pacific communication styles such as storytelling, visual cues, or relational language.

Future state (med-long term)

Integrate existing language tools and translation resources into a coordinated **RSE Pacific Language suite of resources**. This could include translated guides, short video explainers, and quick-reference visuals showing key terms, processes, and cultural etiquette.

Develop RSE-specific language modules within the **Speak Pacific App**, featuring everyday workplace phrases in multiple Pacific languages. Together, these tools make communication clearer, more relational, and more inclusive.



Strengthening cultural awareness through connected practical tools and resources: Tier 2 Tools and resources

Tier 2: Everyday practice tools (Above the ground)

Trusted, visible support channels	Description	What exists now	Future state (med-long term)
Audience: Workers and employers Conditions for growth supported: Care and Support, Courageous Leadership	his focus area sits above the ground, where visible systems and communication make trust tangible. Clear, consistent, and culturally safe support channels help workers feel confident to seek help when needed and give employers assurance that issues will be managed with care and integrity.	Contact lists and pastoral-care posters are available through employers, Missions, and government agencies, but they are inconsistent in design and often outdated. Information is mainly text-based and in English, and there is little clarity around privacy, confidentiality, or escalation processes.	Establish a consolidated digital resource for RSE workers that provides a directory of contact details and confidential contact options (including the 0800 number) to strengthen worker trust and access. This could be extended to serve as a one-stop hub for all information relating to the RSE scheme for both employers and workers.



Strengthening cultural awareness through connected practical tools and resources: Tier 3 Tools and resources

Tier 3: Connection and belonging (Flourishing above and below the ground)

Community celebration & storytelling events

Audience: Workers, employers, workplaces and communities

Conditions for growth supported:

Shared Purpose and Values, Care and Support

Description

This focus area sits above the ground, where culture is made visible through relationships, celebration, and shared stories.

Building community and connection strengthens belonging, pride, and mutual respect - helping workers and employers see themselves as part of one shared RSE whānau.

What exists now

Community events, cultural celebrations, and language-week activities are held across regions but rely on local champions and vary widely in quality and frequency.

Stories of success and good practice are not consistently shared or recognised at a national level.

Future state (med-long term)

Establish a **coordinated RSE Community and Celebration Calendar** that highlights key events, cultural milestones, and recognition opportunities across the network.

Provide employers and Missions with a simple toolkit to host celebrations, gather stories, and share them across regions. Co-design this initiative with Pacific community groups to ensure authenticity and inclusivity



Strengthening cultural awareness through connected practical tools and resources: Tier 3 Tools and resources

Tier 3: Connection and belonging (Flourishing above and below the ground)

Worker

capability and learning

Audience: Workers and employers

Conditions for growth supported:

Learning Together, Care and Support

Description

This focus area connects below and above the ground. It builds visible skills such as language, financial literacy, and digital confidence, while nurturing the deeper values of learning, wellbeing, and self-determination.

When workers grow their knowledge and confidence, both they and their communities thrive.

What exists now

Some capability initiatives are in place, including the NOA Learning Programme (EIT) and various employer-led workshops on budgeting and digital safety.

Future state (med-long term)

Create integrated **Worker Capability resources** that brings together short, translated learning modules on budgeting, wellbeing, digital skills, and English language.

Co-design with workers and employers to ensure materials reflect real-life needs, use visual and audio learning styles, and connect to pastoral and wellbeing support.

RSE System or Scheme-level actions and recommendations

The following recommendations sit outside the direct scope of the Cultural Awareness Framework, however they are included as they were raised consistently through the talanoa and represent important enablers of cultural awareness across the wider RSE system.

Recommendation (in order of priority)	Description
Appoint full-time Liaison Officers in NZ	Dedicated liaison roles (one per sending country) for pastoral care, mediation, and dispute resolution.
Establish clear governance and feedback loops	Regular cross-agency roundtables and community forums to align expectations and track progress.
Establish an independent Pacific-led RSE Support and Governance Body	Create a dedicated, Pacific-led entity to provide cultural oversight, independent mediation, and strategic advice on RSE practice and wellbeing. The body would represent Pacific sending countries, employers, and government agencies, ensuring that cultural awareness and worker wellbeing remain central to system decisions.
Establish a Trusted Voices network	Establish a network of returnee RSE leaders, church or community representatives who act as cultural mediators and advocates within regions.
Improve pay transparency and legal support	Ensure all contracts are translated; provide clear explanations of deductions and legal rights at pre-departure, including rights to negotiate contracts.
Strengthen pastoral-care accountability	Integrate cultural and faith-based pastoral structures alongside HR; train faith leaders and trusted figures.
Link RSE participation to skills and qualifications	Create recognised vocational pathways and certification for RSE participants.

RSE System or Scheme-level actions and recommendations (contd)

Recommendation (in order of priority)	Description
Introduce gender-responsive policy and protection	Set gender participation targets, safe accommodation standards, and reproductive-health access.
Integrate wellbeing and faith into RSE policy	Recognise spiritual, emotional, and relational wellbeing as key wellbeing indicators.
Expand employer accountability for cultural safety	Include cultural empathy KPIs in audits and performance reviews.
Formalise diaspora partnerships for crisis response	Enable Pacific diaspora groups to provide emergency support during crises.



Next steps and recommendations

The work so far has created a shared foundation for cultural awareness across the RSE system.

The next step is to bring this foundation to life through testing, collaboration, and practical action. Strengthening cultural understanding takes time, reflection, and continued partnership. It is an ongoing journey rather than a single achievement.

Implementation priorities

To embed the **Framework** and the **proposed Common Ground Pathway**, clear priorities and shared accountability will be needed across all levels of the system.

Key actions include:

- Testing and refining the tools with employers, workers, and Pacific partners to ensure they are practical, relevant, and culturally grounded.
- Supporting employers and agencies to embed the Framework into policies, training, and everyday processes such as induction, leadership development, and pastoral care.
- Building capability and confidence across the RSE network through shared learning, mentoring, and exchange between employers and worker representatives.
- Establishing feedback and reflection loops so insights from practice continue to shape improvement across the system.

These activities align with the four Conditions for Growth: strengthening shared purpose and values, building courageous leadership, learning together, and embedding care and support as everyday practice.

Strengthening collaboration

The success of the Framework and Pathway relies on collective effort. Employers, Pacific Missions, government agencies, and community organisations each hold a part of the system and bring valuable experience to it. Collaboration will be essential to maintain alignment, avoid duplication, and ensure that support for workers and employers remains consistent and culturally responsive.

This collaboration could be supported through:

- A coordinated reference or leadership group to guide implementation, share learning, and support good practice.
- Regular talanoa that bring together system partners, employers, and worker representatives to reflect on progress, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.
- Shared digital spaces for learning resources, translated materials, and examples of effective practice that make knowledge accessible across the network.



Next steps and recommendations

Recommendations for policy and practice

To sustain momentum and ensure lasting impact, the following system-level actions are recommended:

- ✦ Endorse the Framework as a shared foundation for cultural awareness across the RSE system.
- ✦ Resource and coordinate implementation through a central or cross-agency group that can support consistency and learning.
- ✦ Integrate cultural awareness outcomes into policy, monitoring, and funding decisions to reinforce accountability and shared responsibility.
- ✦ Continue partnership with Pacific Missions to align communication, training, and worker support across all participating countries.

Looking forward

The **RSE Cultural Awareness Framework** and the **proposed Common Ground Pathway** provide a shared direction for a more connected, respectful, and sustainable RSE scheme. By continuing to learn together and act with care, the RSE community can build a system where workers, employers, and Pacific partners all flourish - a system rooted in trust, purpose, and common ground.





Appendices

Appendix 1: List of stakeholders

Stakeholders who had input into the development of the Framework

RSE Workers

- Kiribati: 4 workers Fiji: 2 workers
- Papua New Guinea: 4 workers
- Solomon Islands: 24 workers
- Vanuatu: 3 workers Tonga: 2 workers

Recognised Seasonal Employers

- Turners & Growers
- Graigmore
- Apatu Farms
- Eastpack
- Seifried Estate
- Mr Apple
- Landstaff
- Maori Kiwifruit Growers
- Southern Paparika Limited
- Graggy Range Vineyards
- Avocado Heaven

Pastoral care providers. NGO, & Community Leaders

- Western Bay of Plenty District Council
- Fale Pasifika, Northland
- Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP) Society (Timor-Leste)
- Suzie Merib-McLellan, Pastoral Care Worker (Vanuatu)
- Pasifika O Wairarapa Trust
- New Zealand Ethnical Employers
- Fijian Community Leader, Tauranga

Head of Missions and Pacific Liasion Officers

- Idelta Rodrigues, Timor Leste
- Jimmy Nipo, Vanuatu
- June Rofeta, Solomon Islands
- Palipa Lauti, Tuvalu
- Pyale Pati, Papua New Guinea
- Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, Fiji
- Teaiaki Koea, Kiribati
- Camilla Solomon, Nauru
- Va'atu'itu'i Apete Meredith, Samoa
- Olivia Johnson, Vanuatu

Industry Governance Group & Representatives

- Niuafolau Helen Uiese, Horticulture New Zealand
- National Labour Governance Group
- Regional Labour Governance Group
- Pacific Liaison Officers Engagement Briefing

Subject matter experts & Academics

- Professor Richard Bedford, Emeritus Professor at the University of Waikato and Auckland University of Technology
- Dr Charlotte Bedford, Research Fellow in the Development Policy Centre at the Australian National University
- Dr Heather Nunns, Analytic Matters

The Cultural Kanu Committee

- Dr Naomi Faik - Simet, Language and Cultural Advisors - Papua New Guinea
- Dr Tarisi Vunidilo, Language and Cultural Advisors - Fiji
- Florie Cooke (Maiden name Dausabea), Language and Cultural Advisors - Solomon Islands
- Jose de Jesus, Timor-Leste
- Kinaua Ewels, Language and Cultural Advisors - Kiribati
- Lemoa Fesuluai Henry, Language and Cultural Advisors - Samoa
- Lisa Murgatroyd, Language and Cultural Advisors - Vanuatu
- Loretta Hasu, Language and Cultural Advisors – Vanuatu
- Maka Pailate – Tonga
- Rev Sua Malie (Suamalie Iosefa Naisali), Language and Cultural Advisors - Tuvalu

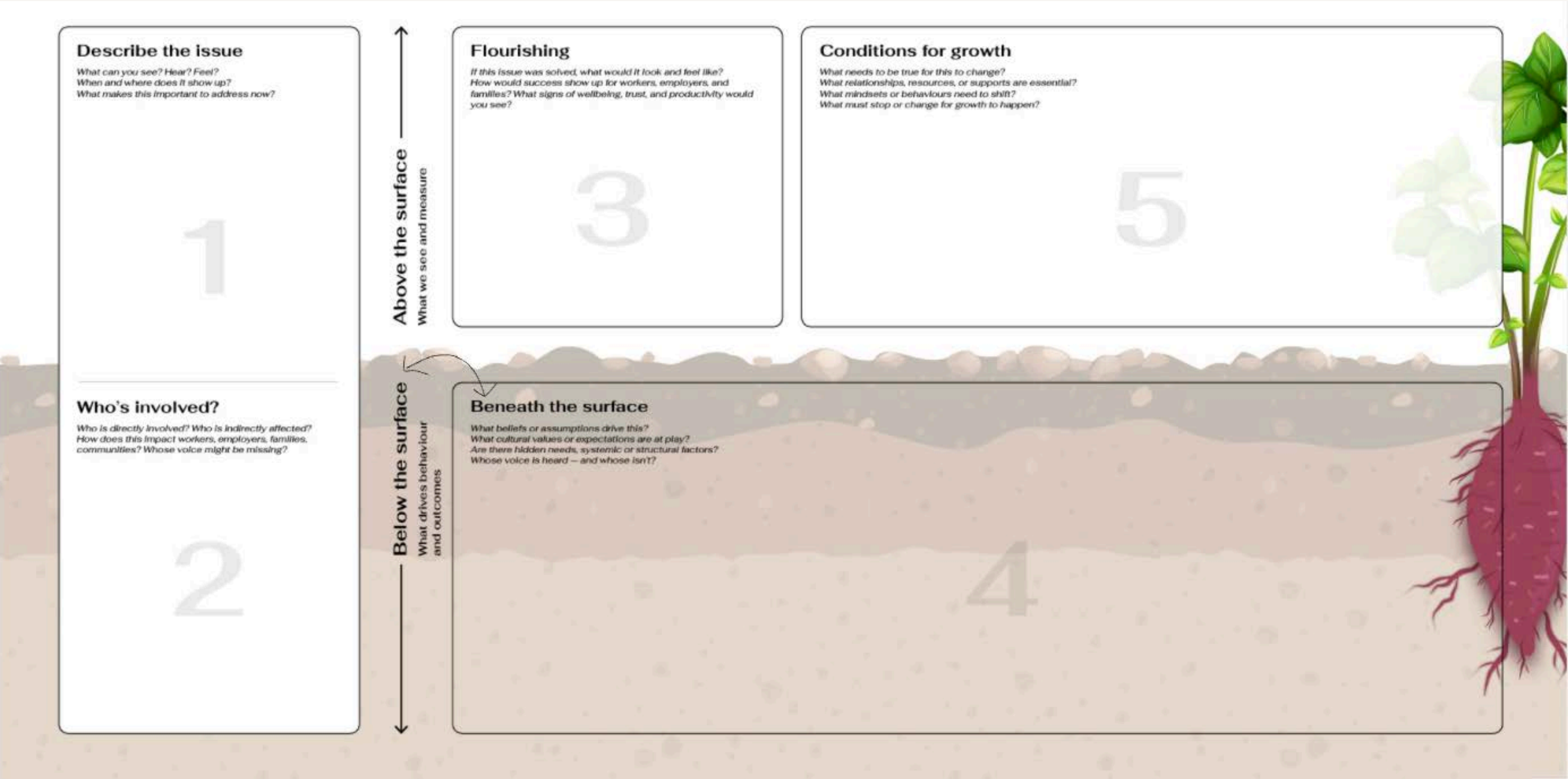
New Zealand Government Officials

- Emma Sherwood, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Faamata Laumalili & Andrew McNaught, Harrison Taylor, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

Appendix 2: Culture Canvas

This tool can be used to reflect on a specific issue, challenge, or opportunity within the RSE context. Employers and RSE workers can complete it individually to capture their own perspectives, or together to build a shared understanding.

Start by describing what’s happening above the surface - what you can see, hear, or feel - then look below the surface to explore the beliefs, values, and relationships that might be influencing it.



Appendix 3: Culture Awareness Maturity Model

Concept
only

The Cultural Awareness Maturity Model provides a pathway for organisations to understand where they currently sit in their cultural awareness journey and identify what growth looks like over time.

It reflects the four Conditions for Growth within the Cultural Awareness Framework - Purpose and Values, Courageous Leadership, Learning Together, and Care and Support - and describes how each evolves across five stages of maturity.

Condition for growth / Maturity Stage	Emergent	Developing	Established	Integrated	Mature
Purpose and Values	Purpose is compliance-focused and transactional. Cultural values are not yet acknowledged or visible in practice.	Leaders recognise the importance of cultural awareness but rely on informal champions to drive it.	Shared purpose is beginning to align business goals with worker wellbeing. Values are discussed and occasionally reflected in decisions.	Purpose and values are clearly articulated and guide organisational behaviour. Cultural principles are reflected in strategy, policies, and daily operations	Purpose is values-led and relational. Organisations act as stewards of shared wellbeing, embedding reciprocity and respect in every decision.
Courageous Leadership	Leadership focuses on outputs and compliance rather than relationships. Cultural capability is limited to a few individuals.	Leaders begin engaging in cultural learning; some recognise the value of humility and relational leadership.	Leaders model cultural awareness and promote inclusive practices, though not yet consistently across all levels.	Leadership practices are grounded in humility, service, and shared accountability. Employers actively collaborate across the system to strengthen cultural responsiveness.	Leadership reflects collective stewardship. Organisations mentor others and share learnings, contributing to system-wide cultural capability.
Learning Together	Learning focuses on rules and technical requirements (e.g. induction, safety, compliance).	One-off cultural awareness sessions occur; learning is largely information-based and not yet experiential.	Learning is ongoing and participatory; cultural perspectives are incorporated into training for staff and supervisors.	Education is hands-on, reflective, and co-designed with Pacific partners. Continuous learning is embedded into leadership and workforce development.	Learning is embedded as part of organisational culture. Knowledge is shared reciprocally with workers and communities, creating a cycle of mutual learning.

Appendix 3: Culture Awareness Maturity Model

Concept
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Condition for growth / Maturity Stage	Emergent	Developing	Established	Integrated	Mature
Care and support	Minimal resources are allocated to cultural responsiveness; support is reactive and issue-driven	Some investment is made in cultural activities (e.g. translation, celebrations) but lacks strategy or continuity.	Resources are planned and aligned with cultural awareness initiatives. Wellbeing and pastoral care are seen as shared responsibilities.	Sustained investment supports the emotional, spiritual, and social wellbeing of workers. Cultural roles are formalised and valued.	Support is holistic, proactive, and co-owned across the system. Investment in cultural wellbeing is viewed as essential to business and community success.
What tools and resources need to do at this stage	Focus: Building awareness and shared language Build awareness and create a shared language around culture, values, and relationships. Tools at this stage should help employers and workers understand why cultural awareness matters - linking it to wellbeing, productivity, and purpose. They should be simple, visual, and story-driven, encouraging reflection rather than compliance.	Focus: Moving from awareness to action; connecting intent with relationships. Turn awareness into action by connecting insights to everyday practice. Tools should help people explore real issues through dialogue and reflection - prompting them to look above and below the surface, share perspectives, and agree on small, practical steps that strengthen trust and communication.	Focus: Embedding cultural awareness in systems, leadership, and learning. Embed cultural awareness into systems and leadership. Tools at this stage should help organisations assess where they are, plan improvements, and build consistency across teams. They should support continuous learning, leadership accountability, and measurement of progress over time.	Focus: Sustaining and sharing cultural capability across the system. Sustain and share cultural capability across the system. Tools need to capture, celebrate, and share what works - creating opportunities for mentoring, storytelling, and collective reflection. They should help maintain cultural integrity, encourage collaboration, and embed Pacific values as the standard for good practice.	

Appendix 4: RSE Journey Blueprint

This blueprint illustrates the journey as a living system - one that depends on strong relationships, clear communication, and cultural respect at every stage. It can be used to:

- Identify opportunities for cultural awareness tools and training.
- Map responsibilities across workers, employers, and agencies.
- Prioritise testing and validation - for example, by focusing on one stage (e.g. pre-departure or arrival) to prototype tools and measure impact before wider rollout.

RSE stage	Pre-arrival	Arrival	First 3 months	4+ months	Departure
Description	Workers are selected and prepared for travel. Orientation focuses on logistics, contracts, and expectations. Employers finalise documentation and prepare for worker arrival.	Workers arrive in Aotearoa and begin orientation. Employers focus on accommodation, safety, and induction processes.	Workers settle into routines. Early challenges in communication, expectations, and leadership styles emerge.	Relationships and routines are established. Focus shifts to maintaining motivation, wellbeing, and productivity.	Contracts conclude. Workers prepare to return home. Employers wrap up payments, logistics, and reporting.
Worker's experience	Workers are often excited but anxious - balancing pride in selection with fear of the unknown. Information shared can be confusing, fast-paced, or inconsistent across countries.	Workers are adjusting to new surroundings, weather, food, and language. The early tone set by employers shapes trust and confidence.	Workers begin to navigate workplace hierarchies and adjust to expectations. They value respect and fairness but may not feel confident speaking up. Homesickness can emerge.	Workers gain confidence and a sense of belonging. Spiritual and communal connections (church, village groups) become key to resilience. Fatigue and family pressure may increase.	Workers feel pride in contribution and relief to return home, but also uncertainty about reintegration. They worry about managing earnings and community expectations.

Appendix 4: RSE Journey Blueprint

Concept
only

RSE stage	Pre-arrival	Arrival	First 3 months	4+ months	Departure
Employer's experience	Employers rely heavily on liaison officers and agents to coordinate logistics. Limited direct contact with workers before arrival, making it hard to build early trust.	Employers are under pressure to get workers settled quickly while maintaining productivity. Orientation may feel rushed or transactional.	Employers focus on productivity and team cohesion. Differences in communication or work pace can cause frustration if not well managed.	Employers recognise the value of worker stability and cultural strengths but may overlook ongoing wellbeing needs.	Employers feel pressure to complete documentation and prepare for next recruitment cycle. Little time for reflection or closure.
System enablers	Clear and consistent pre-departure briefings. Worker booklets in first language. Collaboration between liaison officers, governments, and employers.	Warm, relational welcomes; translated induction materials; buddy or mentor systems; pastoral care roles clearly defined.	Regular check-ins; clear communication protocols; supervisor training on cultural leadership and pastoral care.	Faith and community engagement supported; shared celebrations; leadership pathways for experienced workers.	Reintegration planning support; opportunities for reflection and celebration; feedback loops to improve next season.
Common pain-points identified	Inconsistent preparation across sending countries. Workers receive information focused on rules, not relationships. Some workers sign contracts they don't fully understand. Employers often lack context on worker backgrounds or cultural expectations.	Cultural missteps during orientation (e.g., tone, humour, body language). Limited cultural understanding by supervisors. Workers hesitant to ask questions or challenge authority.	Miscommunication or conflict due to different cultural norms (e.g., saying "yes" to show respect). Leaders unsure how to balance authority with empathy. Workers missing family and church networks.	Burnout or disengagement if wellbeing not prioritised. Lack of recognition for informal leaders. Limited opportunities for feedback or shared decision-making.	Limited reintegration support or follow-up. Missed opportunity to capture lessons learned. Workers return home without structured pathways for skills recognition or future planning.

Appendix 5: Comprehensive list of practical tools and resources

Tier 1: Building the foundations of cultural awareness

Focus area	Resource	Publisher	Description	Status	Timeframe
Cultural training for employers and supervisors	Introduction to Inter-Cultural Capability	Ministry for Ethnic Communities	A short, self-directed online course (~60 mins, free) introducing cultural awareness and intercultural communication. Helps participants reflect on their own cultural lens, understand bias, and build confidence to engage across diverse communities. Provides a strong foundation for RSE employers and supervisors beginning their cultural capability journey.	Existing	• Immediate: available online, self-directed • Medium: Use as a prerequisite for a broader RSE-specific cultural awareness programme, supported by facilitated in-person sessions and Pacific case studies. • Long-term: Integrate as a recognised prerequisite for RSE leadership and pastoral-care training.
	Cultural Capability workshops	Centre for Pacific Languages	Interactive workshops (~2 hrs – 1 day, in-person or online) exploring how culture shapes communication, relationships, and leadership. Sessions are tailored to each organisation and can include specific Pacific cultures led by cultural knowledge-holders. Builds confidence to engage respectfully across languages and values.	Existing	• Immediate: available on demand, by request • Medium: Tailored course for RSE employers
	RSE Cultural Awareness Framework induction	TBD	A short, facilitated introduction to the RSE Cultural Awareness Framework. It helps employers, supervisors, and partners understand the Framework’s purpose, layers, and Conditions for Growth, and how these connect to everyday practice. The session uses companion tools such as the Culture Canvas, Cultural Awareness Maturity Model, and RSE Journey Blueprint to guide reflection and planning. Designed to be interactive and relational, it creates a shared language and foundation for applying cultural awareness across the RSE system.	New	• Medium / Long-term: Embed as the prerequisite module within the wider RSE Cultural Capability Training, with bilingual materials and country-specific examples co-designed by Pacific educators and employers.

Appendix 5: Comprehensive list of practical tools and resources

Tier 1: Building the foundations of cultural awareness

Focus area	Resource	Publisher	Description	Status	Timeframe
Leadership and mentoring	Leadership in Practice Series	TBD	A proposed set of short workshops and peer sessions to strengthen culturally grounded leadership and mentoring, extending the principles already outlined in the RSE Pastoral Care Guide (Immigration NZ).	Existing	• Medium / Long-term: Develop short sessions that extend the Pastoral Care Guide into site-ready practice. Topics could include: relational leadership, conflict resolution, the role of faith and spirituality, communication, coaching and mentoring.
Pastoral care guidelines	RSE Employer Pastoral Care Guide	Immigration NZ	Guidance document for RSE employers outlining mandatory pastoral-care requirements for Agreements to Recruit (ATRs). Covers ten core areas including induction, accommodation, transport, banking, medical insurance, recreation, and cultural connection, with practical examples and resource links to support worker wellbeing and compliance.	Existing	• Immediate Medium: Update to include emotional, spiritual, and cultural wellbeing, with examples reflecting Pacific values and ways of caring. • Long term: Co-design future versions with employers, workers, and Pacific partners
	Women’s Wellbeing and Pastoral Care Guide	TBD	A dedicated guide and toolkit supporting the wellbeing of women in the RSE scheme. Covers safe and private accommodation, access to healthcare and hygiene needs, leadership and peer-support opportunities, and culturally appropriate pathways for reporting and pastoral support. Develop with input from Pacific women workers and employers to ensure relevance and respect.	New	• Medium – Long term: Co-design with women workers and pastoral teams to ensure practical guidance, translated versions, and strong links to community and faith networks.

Appendix 5: Comprehensive list of practical tools and resources

Tier 2: Everyday practice tools (Above the ground)

Focus area	Resource	Publisher	Description	Status	Timeframe
Country-specific on-arrival inductions	Get Ready Information Booklet	Immigration NZ	Pre-departure and on-arrival booklets (~20 pages, free) outlining travel preparation, work rights, and settlement guidance for RSE workers. Help workers understand expectations, entitlements, and support available when they arrive in Aotearoa New Zealand.	Existing	• Immediate: Distribute to new RSE workers via Immigration NZ and Pacific Missions. • Medium: Use the existing material as the base for country-specific induction packs, with shorter, more visual and video content and translated content. • Long term: Integrate with digital orientation videos and other on-arrival resources.
	Recognised Seasonal Employer Information Booklets	Horticulture New Zealand	Country-specific information booklets produced for Samoa, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands and Kirbati. Each includes details on the RSE recruitment process, pre-departure requirements, health information, pastoral-care and funeral-support guidance, and basic local greetings. Not translated, free	Existing	• Immediate :Distribute, translate to sending countries • Medium: Redesign to suit specific country needs, with shorter, more visual and video content and translations where appropriate.
	Health and safety rights and responsibilities	Puataunofo – Come Home Safely Educational Programme	To support workers health and safety explaining rights and responsibilities in New Zealand. This resource is available in English, Māori, Chinese, Fijian, Hindi, Samoan, Tagalog, Tongan, Bislama, Tuvaluan, Tok Pisin, Pijin, Rotuman, Kiribati, Cook Islands Māori, Tokelauan, and Niuean. Educational training is also provided for workers to be delivered across multiple languages	Existing	• Immediate: Can be used immediately during inductions, health and safety briefings, or pastoral-care sessions to ensure workers feel confident, informed, and safe in their workplaces.

Appendix 5: Comprehensive list of practical tools and resources

Tier 2: Everyday practice tools (Above the ground)

Focus area	Resource	Publisher	Description	Status	Timeframe
Communic- ation and language	Speak Pacific App	Centre for Pacific Languages	A free mobile app introducing users to seven Pacific languages and cultures through simple greetings and phrases. Developed in partnership with Kiwa Digital, the app complements CPL’s Pacific language courses and makes basic language learning accessible to anyone with a smartphone. Available on the Apple App Store and Google Play, free	Existing	• Immediate • Medium: Expand the Speak Pacific App to include RSE-specific modules for workers and employers, featuring common workplace terms, greetings, and phrases in key Pacific languages.
	Pacific Language courses	Centre for Pacific Languages	The Centre for Pacific Languages (CPL) is offering free online Pacific language courses across 10-week programme with weekly 2-hour online classes, and an intensive 4-week option (2 hours weekly) across available languages including Tok Pisin, Bislama, Rotuman, Te Reo Māori Kuki ‘Airani, Gagana Samoa, Vosa vakaViti, and Solomon Islands Pidgin, Lea Faka Tonga, Vagahau Niue, Te Gana Tuvalu, Gagana Tokelau.	Existing	• Immediate: Offer online learning for RSE employers & stakeholders across 10 weeks focus on building conversational skills, basic Pacific language and cultural understanding. • Medium: Expand 4 week short courses to include RSE tailored content, tools and resources to support the cultural capability within the RSE sector. • Longterm: Develop micro-credentials courses recognised by NZ tertiary providers and compatible with home-country recognition.
	Lalaga cards	Lalaga Inc	A Pasifika-inspired card game that helps people connect through open and meaningful conversations. Using 180 question cards across five levels, it encourages players to move from light topics to deeper reflections. It’s a simple, engaging way to build trust, understanding, and stronger relationships in teams and communities.	Existing	• Immediate: Can be used immediately as part of induction packs & pre-departure resources. Cards can be developed across Pacific languages. • Medium: Embed RSE language, workforce & sector topics

Appendix 5: Comprehensive list of practical tools and resources

Tier 2: Everyday practice tools (Above the ground)

Focus area	Resource	Publisher	Description	Status	Timeframe
Trusted, visible support channels	RSE Information and Support Hub	TBD	A consolidated digital hub that brings together verified contact details for Pacific liaison officers, High Commissions, health providers, and community networks. Includes bilingual QR access points for worksites, pay offices, and accommodation, linking workers directly to the right country page and New Zealand services.	New	• Medium / Long-term: Establish a consolidated digital resource for RSE workers that provides a directory of contact details and confidential contact options (including the 0800 number) to strengthen worker trust and access. This could be extended to serve as a one-stop hub for all information relating to the RSE scheme for both employers and workers.
	Get Ready Information Booklet	Immigration NZ	Official worker booklet that lists national contacts including Labour Inspectorate, Immigration NZ, Healthline, Citizens Advice Bureau and emergency services. Ensure every worker receives this and posters mirror the numbers.	Existing – needs adaption	• Immediate: Design posters with key contacts in each of the Pacific languages

Appendix 5: Comprehensive list of practical tools and resources

Tier 3: Connection and belonging (Flourishing above and below the ground)

Focus area	Resource	Publisher	Description	Status	Timeframe
Community celebration & storytelling events	Calendar of events Ministry for Pacific Peoples Language Weeks series Regional Pacific events & sports competitions	Regional Industry Groups Pacific and Regional Groups	Community celebration and storytelling events bring RSE workers, families, employers and community partners together to honour cultural identity, share experiences, and strengthen social connections.	Existing	• Immediate: Promote language weeks, Melanesian Festival and local Pacific events, sports competitions • Medium: Incorporate activities as part of workforce Health & Wellbeing package and briefings, welcome induction • Long-term: Formal recognition for employers & employees at RSE Conference Awards that support Pacific language use across the sector.
Worker capability and learning	NOA's Niu learning programme	Eastern Institute of Technology	NOA (Village of Learning) is EIT's RSE Worker Training Programme, a MFAT-funded initiative delivering skills training to Pacific RSE workers while in New Zealand to maximise the benefits of participation in the RSE scheme and support meaningful, transferable skills for reintegration	Existing	• Immediate: Deliver short, practical reintegration courses scheduled with employers and pastoral care workers during low-peak work periods to maximise attendance. • Medium: Integrate reintegration outcomes into wider RSE policy and employer practice standards to make training part of the overall worker lifecycle.

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