

ACE Aotearoa strategy 2027-2040

Outline of Strategy

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Outline of Strategy

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We exist to influence the education system and enable ACE to thrive

- ▶ ACE Aotearoa exists to strengthen the conditions that enable adult and community education (ACE) to thrive in Aotearoa New Zealand. ACE Aotearoa is a system influencer - this means we shape the narratives, relationships, and policy settings that shape how the ACE sector operates.
- ▶ ACE Aotearoa wants to better position the ACE sector to thrive. This means we all see a resilient, diverse adult and community education sector recognised as contributing to individual, whānau, and community wellbeing, including the flourishing of cultural identity and the fulfilment of the promises of Te Tiriti O Waitangi 1840.
- ▶ ACE Aotearoa contributes to these impacts and the sector by strengthening the conditions that allow the sector to endure, adapt, and be recognised.
- ▶ The core areas of our role as a peak body include advocacy, communications, and training (such as through workshops).

Te Whare Tapa Wha is the lens that gives life to this Strategy

- ▶ We are using Te Whare Tapa Whā as the lens that gives life to our refreshed strategy. This decision is part of our ongoing journey as a Tiriti-based organization. Te Whare Tapa Whā is a wellbeing model developed by leading Māori health advocate Sir Mason Durie in 1984, describing health and wellbeing as a wharenui with four pou (post/pillar/walls).
- ▶ This Strategy uses the term pou and points to what the future of ACE could look like for tangata whenua and tangata tiriti members. We have outlined what good wellbeing for the ACE sector and providers could look like if each pou is strong as a result of successfully implementing our Strategy by 2040. That year will mark 200 years since the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi 1840.
- ▶ We hope tangata whenua and tangata tiriti members see themselves, their whānau, and their organisations in our proposed directions and how we move toward ACE Aotearoa's 2040 vision.

Our overall Vision for 2040

We are a peak body and a membership organisation. Our work is ultimately about listening, serving and providing a voice to the ACE sector.

We need to strengthen and change our organisation to support the sector better.

We will act as an honourable Te Tiriti O Waitangi partner and do whatever it takes to support organisations to close the gap for all learners (especially Māori, Pacific people, and people from a range of diverse ethnic backgrounds) so that everyone has equity

Founded upon Te Tiriti o Waitangi 1840, ACE Aotearoa exists to enable life through learning, strengthen communities, and actualise the intent of Te Tiriti through our leadership, advocacy, relationships, and support of adult and community education across Aotearoa.

To achieve our fundamental purpose, this Strategy aims to ensure that by 2040 ACE Aotearoa is:

- ▶ an influential organisation which regularly lifts people up through lifelong learning and brings people together in order to serve the ACE sector;
- ▶ grounded in our values and the history/legacy of ACE in New Zealand and globally so we are strengths-based and mana-enhancing; and
- ▶ known for having the courage to innovate and take bold steps forward in service of our values and goals.

A comprehensive working definition of ACE is in the Appendix

We will strive to achieve these five Big Aspirations by 2040, in line with our Vision

Everyone in Aotearoa / New Zealand knows what Adult and Community Education is or knows someone who has done it. They also know its value for people's lives and communities.

Lifelong learning is part of the national conversation

ACE Aotearoa is a centre of excellence for the ACE Sector

ACE Aotearoa is a reputable and responsive voice and partner in the minds of decisionmakers, policymakers, funders, stakeholders, our members, and the media.

Funders (government and non-government) understand the unique value of Adult and Community Education, resource it appropriately, and support initiatives which achieve both their goals and our goals

How this Strategy supports Te Whare Tapa Whā

These tables outline how the Strategy, if successful, should lead to each of the four pou from Te Whare Tapa Whā being strong. It points to what this could mean for how ACE Aotearoa will operate, how the sector will feel and function, and what this means for providers in practice. The table is not intended to be an exhaustive description of the future state.

Pou	What it means in English regarding wellbeing [1]	What this could mean for the ACE sector and providers if each pou is strong
taha tinana/ physical wellbeing	Capacity for physical growth and optimal human development. Our physical ‘being’ supports our essence and mental health, and shelters us from the external environment.	Our organisations are healthy and resilient because: - We have the resources (money, time, people) to support the learner needs we see in our community, - We can invest in the people and capabilities which maintain and increase our impact locally and nationally
taha hinengāro/ mental and emotional wellbeing	Capacity to communicate, think and feel. Thoughts, feelings and emotions are integral components of the mind, body and soul.	We can use our voice and are influential in every space we are in We lift awareness, participation, appreciation, and support of ACE We generate and receive positive emotions and feedback as a result of ACE

[1] Adapted from: <https://mentalhealth.org.nz/te-whare-tapa-wha> and <https://www.health.govt.nz/maori-health/maori-health-models/te-whare-tapa-wha>

How this Strategy supports Te Whare Tapa Whā

Pou	What it means in English regarding wellbeing	What this could mean for the ACE sector and providers if each pou is strong
taha whānau/ family and social wellbeing	Capacity to belong, care, and share where individuals are part of wider social systems. Extends beyond just relationships with immediate relatives - can include colleagues, friends, the community and the people you care about.	We have strong sustained relationships and partnerships with the people and organisations who share our goals Our people (volunteers, tutors, managers, governors, etc) are excited and supported to do the best they can for the learners we ultimately serve We know and feel part of a collective (such as through a provider, a network, or a local or national or international organization)
taha wairua/ spiritual wellbeing	Capacity for faith and wider communication with unseen and unspoken energies, higher power(s), connections to universe. Includes relationships with the environment, people and heritage in the past, present and future. Includes spiritual essence or wairua of a person as their life force. This determines us as individuals and as a collective, who and what we are, where we have come from and where we are going.	We are grounded in our history and values, while also forward-looking and ambitious for our future We have connections to the land we stand on and the people we serve in the areas we live in We foster a great sense of belonging wherever we are and whatever we do

ACE Aotearoa is a system influencer. We aim to influence these five system conditions.

A coherent,
credible sector
voice

Trusted peak body
leadership

Policy and funding
settings better
aligned to sector
reality

Stronger sector
confidence in
sharing and telling
impact stories

A learning-
oriented evidence
culture

The five system conditions explained further

These tables explain the conditions where ACE Aotearoa's influence can reasonably be observed.

System condition	What success looks like at a system level	Signals of influence
A coherent, credible sector voice	The ACE sector is more clearly understood and more consistently described across policy and funding environments.	• Emergence of shared framing about the role and value of the ACE sector across communications • Framing introduced by ACE Aotearoa in policy, funding, or strategy documents. • External stakeholders reference the analysis or narrative of the ACE sector in public or advisory forums.
Trusted peak body leadership	ACE Aotearoa holds mandate, legitimacy, and relational trust across a diverse and independent sector.	• Providers report confidence in ACE Aotearoa's ability to represent providers' and sector interests. • Breadth and diversity of provider engagement sustained over time (size, region, kaupapa). • Voluntary sector participation in co-design, consultation, or testing initiatives
Policy and funding settings better aligned to sector reality	Decision-makers and funders demonstrate improved understanding of the ACE sector's provision and its public value.	• Invitations for ACE Aotearoa to contribute to policy, advisory, or funding processes • Advice from ACE Aotearoa is reflected in guidance, frameworks, or funding criteria • Documented examples where the input of ACE Aotearoa clarifies or reduces policy misalignment

The five system conditions explained further

These tables explain the conditions where ACE Aotearoa's influence can reasonably be observed.

System condition	Meaning	Signals of influence
Stronger sector confidence in sharing and telling impact stories	ACE providers feel safer, more capable, and more confident in articulating their contribution without distorting practice.	• Providers voluntarily describe greater confidence in articulating their contribution • Voluntary uptake of ACE-supported tools or frameworks • Cross-sector learning examples shared and reused
A learning-oriented evidence culture	Evidence is used to inform learning and adaptation across the sector and within the governance of ACE Aotearoa. This condition is about how evidence is used for learning and governance – not how confident providers feel telling their story.	• Evidence and practices introduced by ACE Aotearoa are referenced or adapted by sector partners • Regular structured reflection processes in place • Adjustments made in response to sector feedback • Mātauranga Māori and Western knowledge systems are each recognized for offering complementary ways of understanding impact and value.

What we will regularly do as part of achieving our Vision and Strategy

What we will regularly do as part of achieving our Vision and Strategy can be grouped into five high level areas explained below:

Area	Meaning
We Connect the Sector	We bring adult and community education providers together, so they are not working in isolation. We create spaces for shared learning, collective voice, and mutual support – strengthening the whole sector, not just individual organisations.
We Illuminate What Matters	We surface the real work, insights, and challenges emerging across the ACE sector. We make visible the relational, preventative, and long-term value of ACE that often goes unnoticed.
We Tell the Story of ACE	We translate the lived experiences of the sector into clear, credible language that policy-makers, funders, and the public can understand. We ensure the value of adult learning is not overlooked or simplified.
We Shape the Conditions for Success	We engage with government and funders to influence the policy and funding settings that affect ACE providers. We influence the conditions where community education can thrive.
We Strengthen Confidence and Capability	We support providers to articulate their impact with clarity and integrity. We model proportionate, learning-focused approaches to evidence and reflection.

We do not: directly deliver programmes, guarantee learner outcomes, speak for every provider position, control government decisions

Giving life to Te Whare Tapa Whā through what we will regularly do in achieving our Vision and Strategy

What we will regularly do as part of achieving our Vision and Strategy is further grouped into their contributions to each pou.

We recognise there will be overlap between how certain actions contribute to each pou.

We acknowledge that the four pou ngā pou e whā we use are anchored in the foundations of whenua. This can be considered land, the environment, one's roots, and/or places where one belongs.

We recognise that structural, historical, and systemic conditions shape adults' access and participation in education - such as poverty, transport, and digital connectivity. Our work will support a stronger focus on equitable barrier-free access, culturally grounded learning environments, and the conditions that enable participation.

1. Te Taha whānau/family and social wellbeing (relationships, people, collectives, etc)

We are sought after to be at the decision-making table because we:

- ▶ fully understand sector needs and influence funders to help meet these needs
- ▶ regularly engage with organisations and individuals who share our values and goals
- ▶ enjoy regular positive reciprocal working relationships with funders
- ▶ show how we follow and work in the 'two house' model to ensure we are a Tiriti-based organisation
- ▶ have strong mutually beneficial connections with international networks, initiatives, and forums on adult learning and ACE.

We build sector capability because we will:

- ▶ understand all sector capability needs - by primarily supporting educators, as well as supporting leaders, managers, and governors in ACE organisations
- ▶ listen to learners, educators, and the communities our sector serves in everyday, and we reflect what we learn in what we do.

We coordinate the sector because we will:

- ▶ bring people together (primarily nationally and at a regional/city level, and where possible internationally) to ensure better coordination between and within networks of educators and providers

2. Te Taha Tinana/physical wellbeing (resources, healthy resilient organisations, etc)

- ▶ We influence Government policies to better reflect the role of ACE in Aotearoa
- ▶ We build sector capability because we will:
 - ▶ support organisations to grow learner pathways for the learners we all ultimately serve - especially Māori as tangata whenua
 - ▶ innovate through testing, listening, and focusing on continuous improvement in service of our values and goals
 - ▶ develop and support initiatives which benefit and transform the sector

3. Te Taha Hinengāro/mental and emotional wellbeing (use our voice, lift awareness, generate positive emotions, etc)

We are at the decision making table with funders (government and non-government) and are influential because we:

- ▶ ensure ACE's role in supporting national workforce development and training goals is clearly communicated and understood by decision makers among tangata tiriti and tangata whenua
- ▶ demonstrate how ACE is a solution leading to better outcomes in a range of policy areas outside education - such as workforce and skills development, whānau literacy, economic participation through employment, mental health, social cohesion through community development and volunteering, and protecting the natural environment
- ▶ have a deep understanding of the sector's needs and trends
- ▶ speak with authority as a sector peak body
- ▶ develop insights and evidence of impact to support the work of the ACE sector
- ▶ are sought after regularly for comment and advice in the public arena.

4. Te Taha Wairua/spiritual wellbeing (being grounded, having connections, fostering belonging, etc)

We are sought after to be at the decision making table because we:

- ▶ unite the sector and supporters of ACE to support our vision for the ACE Sector through effective storytelling
- ▶ celebrate and showcase the successes and diversity of adult learners and the people who work in the sector (educators, managers, governors) to people and organisations outside the ACE sector amongst tangata tiriti and tangata whenua
- ▶ lead the sector - through coordination, excellent delivery, innovation in delivery, research and insights, and in raising public awareness
- ▶ get alignment in the sector - through clear lines of 2 way communication; working in the 'two house' model; and listening to the sector

Five priorities for the next five years to help achieve the Strategy

Our Strategy is ambitious and wide ranging. We know we won't be able to do everything immediately and therefore we plan to focus on these particular areas over the next five years that are the most important to get right so we can achieve the rest of the Strategy.

This focus balances our ambition with maintaining a sustainable organisation which serves the sector well.

Research, evaluation, outcomes

Increasing the use of research and evaluation to demonstrate the ACE sector's impacts and outcomes. This could include working with the sector to establish a cohesive outcomes framework which demonstrates how the ACE sector contributes to the Tertiary Education Strategy and to other desired local, regional, and national outcomes and priorities.

This could also include developing ways to collect and use quantitative and qualitative data, and ways to observe, assess, and measure the health, wellbeing, and resilience of providers.

Five priorities for the next five years to help achieve the Strategy

Honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi 1840 in practice and grow te reo māori me ōnā tīkanga capability

This could include:

- Demonstrate how to be an organisation which honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi 1840 in practice and is based on the two house model
- Create space for tangata whenua perspectives to be visible, embedded, and normalised across the strategy
- Support ACE Aotearoa members who may be on different points on the journey to being Tiriti-based organisations, and develop capability for the sector in this area
- Develop and secure funding for a sector-wide Te Reo Māori me ōnā tīkanga 2040 language strategy, working with the sector to increase capacity and more fluent Te Reo Māori me ōnā tīkanga tangata whenua and tangata tiriti as trained practitioners.

Five priorities for the next five years to help achieve the Strategy

ACE strengthening local and regional economies

Show and grow how ACE strengthens local and regional economies by developing community capability through lifelong learning. Te Ao Māori principles and ACE provision enable individuals and communities to build skills, leadership, enterprise and resilience that contribute to economic and social prosperity. Growing human capability can benefit communities and local workforces and in turn produce real economic outcomes (confident capable people, literacy, community and leadership development, etc).

ACE Aotearoa could investigate partnerships with like minded organisations and develop initiatives that connect ACE with small businesses and social enterprises.

Financial sustainability and sufficient resources

Ensure financial sustainability and sufficient resources are available to achieve the Strategy and serve the sector. This includes maintaining high TEC contract performance and seeking increased funding from a range of sources.

Organisational transformation

Ensure our people, leadership, governance, policies, systems, and processes position ACE Aotearoa well to achieve the Strategy.

What does success look like? How we will know if we are progressing with the Strategy?

- ▶ The Board will regularly monitor progress in achieving the Strategy in collaboration with the Chief Executive. This includes observing signals of influence in relation to the five system conditions we aim to influence.
- ▶ The five system conditions represent changes in how the system behaves — they are not programme outputs and not guaranteed policy wins. They are signals of influence, rather than quantitative metrics or targets.
- ▶ As these conditions strengthen or change, broader system patterns will begin to shift across the ACE sector. These shifts are emergent and based on contributions from different parties and organisations.
- ▶ These shifts and conditions are described through narrative and structured observation, not attributed numerically. They also depend on relationships / *whanaungatanga* which are the mechanisms through which influence occurs. Some of our desired shifts and conditions are outlined on the next slide.
- ▶ We would also use indicators appropriate to a peak body. Countable signals of influence could include: the breadth of engagement with funders and government, invitations to give advice, inclusion in policy work, and levels of participation at fora and spaces relevant to ACE. These could be part of programme outputs.

What does success look like? How we will know if we are progressing with the Strategy?

Shifts and signals in system conditions we want to see include:

Shift / Signal	Meaning
Reduced Narrative Fragmentation	The ACE sector is described in more consistent and coherent ways across communications, funding applications, policy submissions, and public forums. Shared language about the purpose and value of ACE becomes more recognisable across the sector and funders.
Increased Cross-Sector Collaboration	Providers increasingly collaborate, share learning, and align messaging rather than operate in isolation. This is because of increased trust in ACE Aotearoa and its mandate.
Improved Policy Dialogue Quality	Engagement between government and the ACE sector becomes more informed, iterative, and grounded because coherence and trusted leadership are strengthened. This includes: earlier engagement in policy cycles rather than late-stage consultation, funders' goals and actions being better aligned with ACE Aotearoa's Strategy; and policy discussions reflecting a clearer and a more mature understanding of sector realities.
Greater Stability in Funding Conversations	As narrative credibility and sector legitimacy strengthens, funding discussions shift from reactive or defensive responses towards a more informed and structured dialogue. Ideally, funding criteria better recognises ACE's relational and long-term value, and funders reference sector-informed evidence in guidance or frameworks.
Stronger Sector Resilience	The ACE sector demonstrates greater adaptive capacity under political or funding pressure. This includes sustained engagement during periods of volatility and maintaining confidence in sector representation and shared narratives about the ACE sector.

Appendix: What is Adult and Community Education as a concept and in practice?

This Strategy's working definition, based on a synthesis of existing ACE documents.

- ▶ ACE provides the opportunity for many adults to continue learning, empowering them to make better decisions for themselves, their families and their communities. ACE is part of a lifelong learning journey because it allows adults to engage in a range of education activities within the community and encourages adults to learn to understand their world and to seek change within it. ACE provides individual and group learning and promotes whānau empowerment, equity, active citizenship, social awareness, and sustainable development
- ▶ ACE occurs alongside the formal education system is part of the tertiary and broader education sector. ACE is a diverse and wide range of learner-driven post-compulsory courses or programmes that are informal, usually non-certificated, structured in various ways, and typically delivered over a short period of time and limited hours.
- ▶ ACE provides education opportunities across a broad continuum because learning can happen in any situation. ACE happens in many settings (formal, informal, in an institution, at home or work) and is provided in many forms including informal education and non-formal education, post-compulsory education, adult learning, and lifelong learning.

Appendix: What is Adult and Community Education as a concept and in practice?

- ▶ ACE programmes and activities are diverse and contribute to community development; foundation learning, cultural enrichment, personal improvement, and/or professional or vocational development (adapted from ACE Environmental Scan 2019). The most common types of courses provided by ACE providers include: employment preparation, up-skilling, professional development; literacy and numeracy; digital literacy; foundational/core life skills; health and wellbeing; and te reo, tikanga, and mātauranga Māori (from ACE Environmental Scan 2025).
- ▶ Formal learning in the tertiary education sector does not always meet learners' needs for short, affordable, easily accessible learning. In contrast, ACE is accessible to all and provides individual, family/whānau, intergenerational and group learning. ACE facilitates learning and social connectedness with like-minded others. It is possible to try new skills and learning in ACE without fear of not passing or significant long-term financial commitment.
- ▶ ACE provision is often initiated and closely shaped by individual and group needs in unique and appropriate ways. Some ACE providers work with communities to address their needs, allowing people to construct their own learning journey.