



Te Oro

Case study as part of an evaluation of Auckland Council's investment into Arts and Culture in Auckland.

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Mihi and acknowledgement

Our grateful thanks are extended to all who provided their input and assistance to this project and the preparation of the report.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa.

This case study forms part of a broader evaluation of the Value of Auckland Council's investment in the arts and culture sector. This project was commissioned and funded by Auckland Council.

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Te Oro: Background

About Te Oro

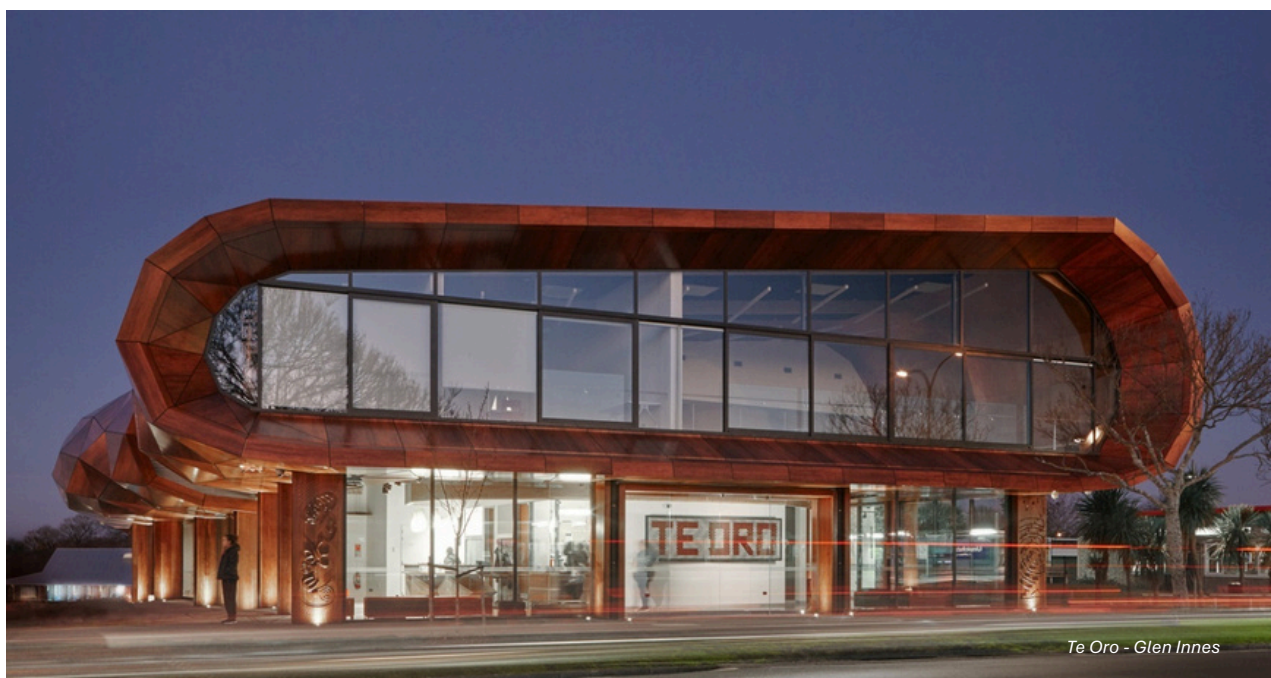
Te Oro is a multi-functional rangatahi and community arts facility located in the heart of Glen Innes town centre, East Auckland. Strategically positioned alongside key community facilities such as Ruapōtaka Marae and the Glen Innes Library, the facility stands as a central hub in the suburb known for its diverse cultural profile of largely Māori and Pacific communities, and ongoing urban development.

The vision for Te Oro was shaped by mana whenua Ngāti Pāoa, supported and blessed by Ngaati Whātua Ōrākei and Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki, in partnership with the Glen Innes community and Auckland Council. Opened in 2015 following nearly two decades of community advocacy and planning, its design is deeply rooted in local aspirations, particularly the desire to create a safe, accessible, and inspiring space for tamariki and rangatahi to explore their creativity, connect with their culture and seek pathways into creative education and employment.

Te Oro is an Auckland Council facility of which core funding is received through the Maungakiekie Tāmaki Local Board. The facility offers a wide range of creative offerings for the community, including visual art exhibitions and installations, performing arts and theatre spaces, a fully equipped music studio and recording suite, and regular workshop programming. It also supports emerging talent through artist residencies and community outreach.

“Our main kaupapa here is a place for storytelling... it’s being presented in different shapes and forms, from dance, to music, to visual arts... its mainly free programming and our vision is always to be developing gifts for the community.”

- Te Oro staff



Te Oro - Glen Innes

Facilities and programming

Te Oro offers a range of facilities and programming to the Auckland community, including venue hire, artist residency programmes, and accessible creative programming:

- **Venue hire:** Te Oro provides a range of purpose-built, affordable spaces that support creative activity, cultural events, and community use. These include a 150-seat performance and rehearsal space, a sprung-floor dance studio, three professional music and recording studios, visual arts and workshop rooms, and two community meeting spaces. The facilities are flexible and accessible, hosting everything from arts programming to health and wellbeing events, job fairs, and training workshops. Discounts and in-kind support ensure the centre remains financially accessible for community-led activity.
- **Artist residency programmes:** Te Oro has recently re-established its artist residency programme, hosting four artists for residencies ranging from three to five months. During this time, residents use Te Oro spaces to create new work, with the aim of developing an exhibition, community workshops, or work-in-progress showings. While residents self-invest in their own performances or outputs, Te Oro provides support in venue space provision and seeking funding through creative organisations such as Creative New Zealand. Residents also benefit from access to Te Oro's professional network and receive capacity-building support in areas such as creative development and production.
- **Free or low-cost creative programming:** In 2024/25, Te Oro delivered around 188 creative programmes, engaging approximately 20,000 participants. Most activities are free or low-cost and led by local artists spanning visual arts, dance, music, digital media, and cultural programmes tied to Pacific and Māori language weeks. The centre also runs community wellbeing activities, such as yoga and Arts and Tea for seniors, alongside school holiday programmes that provide accessible creative opportunities for tamariki and rangatahi.
- **Regional arts and culture programming:** Te Oro plays an active role in Auckland Council's regional arts and culture programming, regularly delivering events and partnerships that align with Auckland Council initiatives and major cultural celebrations. Working closely with the Council's regional arts and culture team, Te Oro hosts a number of Council-led or funded initiatives, including the annual Stand Up Stand Out secondary school performance competition heats, and partnerships with groups such as Wheke Fortress, an Indigenous artist-led space in Onehunga. Other examples include supporting the Matariki Te Ara Rama Light Trail, hosting performances for the Auckland Arts Festival, running workshops and events for Auckland Pride Month and running programming for the Diwali Festival.

Te Oro has evolved to provide inclusive creative programming that serves all community members, while maintaining a particular focus on supporting Māori and Pacific whānau, tamariki, and rangatahi. The facility generates wide-ranging benefits, not only for the local Glen Innes community, but also regionally by participating in and hosting Auckland-wide arts and culture initiatives.

Te Oro: Working in partnership to deliver value through investment

Te Oro demonstrates good stewardship of resources by leveraging Auckland Council funding, staff expertise, and community partnerships to maximise impact for Glen Innes and the wider region. Its collaborative approach with mana whenua, local organisations, and Auckland Council teams ensures investment is shared, responsive, and anchored in community aspirations.

Working in partnership with Auckland Council

Te Oro sustains a strong working relationship with Auckland Council's regional arts and culture team, acting as an activation site that delivers shared benefits while receiving regular support, visibility and advocacy from the wider Auckland Council arts and culture department. The teams work together and maintain regular communication to ensure the centre is actively integrated into regional events, festivals, and programmes, as well as guiding Te Oro users toward Auckland Council funding opportunities.

Te Oro receives core operational funding each year through the Maungakiekie-Tāmaki Local Board, with an annual allocation of approximately \$386,000 to support programme delivery and facility operations. This funding is supplemented by venue hire income and modest programme entry fees, which together ensure affordable access to the centre's programmes.

“We have those strong internal relationships of understanding what they [Regional arts and culture programming team] are wanting to achieve and finding ways as a facility that we can help them, and they immensely help us.”

- Te Oro staff

Engagement with mana whenua

Alongside the early design of the centre, Te Oro continues to benefit from the sustained support and a working relationship with Ngāti Pāoa, the mana whenua of Glen Innes and the wider Tāmaki region. Adjacent to the centre, Ruapōtaka Marae is a well-established community service hub in the area with deep ties to the local Māori community. Together, the centres contribute to shared events, co-use of space, and collaborative community initiatives. A representative of Ngāti Pāoa who works closely with Te Oro describes a strong foundation of manaakitanga and reciprocity in the relationship, noting that the centre consistently upholds tikanga Māori and works hard to support their kaupapa in various ways, particularly in the support provided to deliver the annual Te Ara Rama Matariki Light Trail.

“They definitely platform Māori tikanga by always having Ruapōtaka involved. If they have a kaupapa, Te Oro is the first to put their hands up.”

- Mita Tupaea, Ngāti Pāoa representative

The success of the centre's relationships with mana whenua over many years is attributed to the in-kind support and open-door relationship that has been consistently maintained, working together to deliver programmes and advance shared aspirations for the community. As described by staff, Te Oro is “sitting in the space between two waka”, working with both iwi and urban marae to ensure the centre supports outcomes for local Māori communities.

**“We always do our best not to be the big tree in front of the small tree.
We always honour them, and we always serve them as much as we can.”**

- Te Oro staff

Drawing on skills and knowledge of staff and key community partnerships

Te Oro is operated by a small, diverse team with connections to the Glen Innes community and the wider creative sector, including the recent recruitment of a Central/East arts programmer to lead the redevelopment of the centre’s artist residency programme. All Te Oro staff are arts practitioners themselves, bringing their own well-established networks with artists and community organisations to their role. As a multi-role team that work across many responsibilities with a number of part time staff, they navigate the challenges of limited capacity with strong leadership and a shared commitment to bring local aspirations to life.

“We're all creators, whether musically, artistically, performance. That draws people to places like this... we're here as artists because we can advocate with an understanding of what our communities need.”

- Te Oro staff

Located in the heart of Glen Innes, Te Oro is uniquely positioned within a central civic hub, neighbouring key community assets such as Glen Innes Library, Tāmaki College, the Glen Innes Business Association, Reserve Tāmaki (business hub), and the Tāmaki Regeneration Company. This proximity enables collaboration with local stakeholders, allowing Te Oro to co-host events, share space, and deliver joint programmes that draw on collective strengths and advance shared community outcomes.



Ruapōtaka Marae Kapa Haka Ropu during Te Oro Tekau - Te Oro 10 Year Anniversary

“Ruapōtaka might design programmes that Te Oro are happy to host and it’s a great collaboration.”

- Glen Innes Business Association

Te Oro operates as a multi-purpose space, available for community hire or provided in-kind to support programmes run by groups such as Pacific Dance New Zealand, the Rise Group, the Niuean Community, and the Tongan Green Harp group. This approach reflects an investment that services multiple civic purposes, sustaining strong, trust-based relationships with the community programme run in the Glen Innes community.

“We have a pretty cool partnership with the people at Te Oro... [the centre] is a community connector.”

- Rise Group representative

A representative from Ngāti Pāoa viewed Te Oro as a key convening space for community providers, including iwi, library staff, Local Board members, local business owners, and other stakeholders, to align strategically around shared community goals.

I have definitely met so many people through Te Oro... Local Board members, librarians... local shops owners, iwi... Te Oro is a space for us to come together.

- Mita Tupaea, Ngāti Pāoa Representative

Adapting to align with community needs

Collaborating since its inception, the Glen Innes Business Association felt as though the centre has demonstrated its growth, introducing workshops that move with the interests of its rangatahi community and ensuring they don’t have to travel far to experience its high-quality offerings.

“It has a vital role because the youth in the wider area can access programmes and workshops that they wouldn't even normally be able to access... the staff are very passionate about the arts and it shows... they know what the community wants.”

- Glen Innes Business Association

Te Oro has continued to adapt its strategic direction by expanding programming to a broader cross-section of the community. For example, in response to the social isolation experienced during COVID-19 lockdowns, the centre introduced programmes for older adults and expanded its digital and in-person offerings to incorporate a broader wellbeing focus, seeking to remain responsive to changing priorities.

Te Oro: Building artistic, social and cultural capital

Te Oro builds artistic, social, and cultural capital by nurturing emerging arts leaders, strengthening the practice and networks of local artists, and providing culturally grounded programmes that reflect and affirm community identity. Designed by and for Māori and Pacific communities, Te Oro is recognised as a space that reflects the identity and values of its local community.

Fostering emerging arts leadership

Te Oro supports the development of emerging arts programmers, producers and administrators, intentionally employing members of the user base who show potential to contribute meaningfully to the centre's development. Many current and former staff at Te Oro possess ties to the facility as past participants in its programmes. One example is the manager of Te Oro, who first joined the centre as a newly graduated audio engineer. Starting in a technical support role, he gradually moved into programming, driven by his ability to build lasting relationships with the Te Oro community and his enthusiasm for the centre's kaupapa.

“The networking and the connections that I gained here are incredible. I started here as a techy doing sound and lights from School of Audio Engineering and I knew no one in the industry... the people that use this space are really well connected and I've been able to build my personal network and broaden my skills.”

- Te Oro staff

Capacity building opportunities for local and regional artists

Te Oro supports grassroots to mid-career artists through its residency programme, which aims to strengthen professional practice, build funding capability, and expand artists' networks. Current resident Villa Junior Lemanu is a movement and visual artist from South Auckland, using their residency as an incubation period to explore new ways of engaging the local community and its rangatahi, including monthly intensives and performances with Q&A components. They note the growing challenge of connecting meaningfully with audiences in a time of increasing social isolation and digitisation of the arts, aligning their residency goals to focus on community engagement.

“I'm using the residency as an incubation period to find something different and challenge myself... artists are always making for artists and there's a sort of lack of connection between us and the community.”

- Villa Junior Lemanu, artist in residence

Among the many benefits Villa experienced through the residency, such as expanding his professional network, he particularly valued seeing his work resonate with the local community. He shared that this experience affirmed the worth of his artistic practice as a worthwhile pursuit, even in a context where creative careers are often undervalued.

“When my work is shared amongst people... who really take it on and really get into it... I think that's the biggest thing that I got out of this.”

- Villa Junior Lemanu, artist in residence

Highlighting local stories and improving access to cultural knowledge

Designed by and for Māori and Pacific communities, Te Oro is recognised as a space that reflects the identity and values of its local community. This is evident in its engagement with mana whenua, diverse staffing, and culturally grounded programming delivering around 42 programmes each year that meet Māori outcomes. Users describe Te Oro as a welcoming and affirming place, one that showcases local stories and feels genuinely connected to those who use it.

“If you look at the exhibitions and the communities that it pulls in... it's definitely reflective of what the community values... there's a strong sense of identity in Te Oro.”

- Artist in residence

Staff and programme partners shared that Te Oro provides a space for community members to connect beyond their usual networks and to reconnect with cultural identity. Recognising the diverse diaspora communities in Glen Innes, including Pacific and East Asian groups, many of whom have experienced cultural disconnection, staff see Te Oro as a place where people can both explore new cultures and reclaim their own through culturally relevant programming.

“Other people can come and share in their culture, come and learn what they do. We have a huge diaspora community here.”

- Te Oro staff

A future focus for Te Oro is to attract more regionally programmed events and locally led initiatives that reflect the growing diversity of Glen Innes, particularly its migrant communities. The aim is to ensure that new and emerging populations can access programmes that are relevant to their communities and experiences, without needing to look beyond their own neighbourhood.

Wide reaching benefits for the wellbeing of local rangatahi

Te Oro hosts a range of youth-focused programmes spanning creative skill development, school holiday programmes, dance workshops and rangatahi development programmes. Staff and community stakeholders describe Te Oro as an important site for engaging local rangatahi to develop their creative skills, while also supporting their wellbeing and connecting them to wider opportunities. Stakeholders shared that this is particularly significant in the context of the suburb where young people face a range of increasing social and economic challenges. Staff refer to the centre as a “lighthouse” within the community, acting as a consistent presence that supports rangatahi to explore their creative potential while also linking them to relevant local services and support networks.

“This place is really important for rangatahi and tamariki. We've got programmes which are not going to cost you anything... that keeps everyone off the rocks when it comes to wellbeing.”

- Te Oro staff

Te Oro: Delivering value for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau

Te Oro enhances the built environment of Glen Innes through its distinctive, culturally grounded design, which serves as both a community facility and a work of art that strengthens local identity and transformation of public spaces through art. Its presence supports vibrancy in the town centre while also generating economic opportunities for local businesses, vendors, and community partners.

Enhancing the built environment of Glen Innes

Te Oro enhances the built environment of Glen Innes, with community members recognising its culturally rich, thoughtful design as a key asset to the area. The facility is art in itself, named 'Te Oro' by local iwi Ngāti Pāoa, relating to the tonal reverberation of sound in te reo Māori. The architecture draws inspiration from ngā toi Māori form taonga pūoro (wind instrument), designed as a sound cone that captures the wind sweeping across Maungarei/Mt Wellington and producing an audible hum. Built without right angles, the structure's curves and timber elements act as sound baffles, allowing for natural acoustic performance in nearly any part of the building. Six 'sound sites' surround the perimeter of the building, offering integrated audio-visual artworks. Combining soundscapes, carved timber columns, and kōwhatu, they weave local stories, such as the legend of Parehuia, into a unique, multi-generational expression of place and identity.

“When you look at our land... when we take off the building, there was a massive artwork actually under the building and it symbolises connection of Te Oro to the community with the arts.”

- Te Oro staff



Positioned alongside key civic facilities such as the library, police station, and community hall, the centre enhances the safety, vibrancy, and identity of the town centre. Community stakeholders shared that its presence contributes to both placemaking and supporting local businesses and vendors by drawing people into the area.

“Te Oro is an incredible asset to the business community. We all benefit environmentally from having such a magnificent building and the magnificent programmes inside it. We're very lucky.”

- Glen Innes Business Association

By embedding the cultural narratives in place, the centre as a venue, and the people that use it are highly representative of the Glen Innes and Tāmaki community.

The community don't see monuments out there that reflect us. The building is so beautiful it does look like a piece of art next to the library and the police station and the old community hall.

- Pacific Dance New Zealand

Generating opportunities for the local business economy

Te Oro contributes to the Glen Innes economy by partnering with local businesses and community organisations to create opportunities for vendors and service providers. For local vendors, this includes hosting job fairs, markets, and collaborative events that generate shared benefits and opportunities to engage community members. Future partnerships, such as with Reserve Tāmaki, and ongoing collaboration with the Glen Innes Business Association, aim to further support economic development through community markets and business workshops.

Te Oro long-term programming partners, community organisational partners, and artists that use the space recognise the facility as a consistent supporter, helping to deliver programmes and performances through free venue hire and risk-share models. By covering venue costs, Te Oro helps ensure programme continuity regardless of shifts in external funding, a challenge staff identify as a key barrier for many of the centre's community partners.

We're always going to be dictated by the amount that we get each year and what we can deliver but working with Te Oro is a highlight for us. It means each year we know that we've got a venue and we just focus on the programme delivery.

- Pacific Dance New Zealand



Ruapōtaka Marae Kapa Haka Ropu during Te Oro Tekau - Te Oro 10 Year Anniversary

