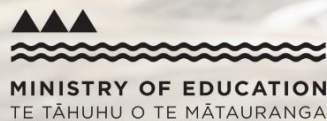




# Lalanga Pule

Weaving Samoan and Tongan Governance  
Principles into Early Learning Services in  
Aotearoa New Zealand



## **LALANGA PULE**

Weaving Samoan and Tongan Governance Principles  
into Early Learning Services in Aotearoa, New Zealand

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27 September 2024

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# Introduction

The Lalanga Pule project is a groundbreaking initiative funded by the Ministry of Education's Pacific Education Innovation Fund (Ministry) from 2023 to 2024.

The original initiative was to develop long-term project to build a body of evidence about existing indigenous models of governance from Fijian, Samoan and Tongan contexts that would support the Ministry to inform state sector wide conversations about governance arrangements and to offer models of governance practice to strengthen early learning centre governance and management structures in Tamaki Makaurau Auckland.

By November 2023, two Indigenous governors formed the project team led by Director Christine Nurminen (Tongan) of Manava Partners Ltd and Director Salā Marie Young (Samoan) of Pacific Enterprise People (PEP) Ltd. The project team partnered with the Ministry of Education to explore principles of Samoan and Tongan governance.

The project team formulated and executed an Action Plan to identify the value of conceptualising governance from indigenous Samoan and Tongan perspectives and to assess the significance of incorporating governance concepts from these viewpoints into the Ministry's existing 2008 Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Services.

The project team would like to thank and acknowledge the guidance and collaboration from the Ministry of Education Pacific Advisory Group (PAG) Senior advisors based in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Waikato and Hawkes Bay. Their ongoing support, availability, and expertise have been instrumental in making this project possible. We would also like to sincerely thank all the dedicated participants who generously shared their time, experiences, and aspirations for the next generations of learners during our talanoa.

In addition, Salā, from PEP, is deeply grateful to her academic supervisors, Dr. Sarah Carr and Dr. Edmond Fehoko, from the University of Otago. Their guidance has been invaluable as she is currently pursuing her Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree, specialising in Samoan Indigenous Governance.

# Project Objectives

The project objectives were:

1. Create an Action Plan
2. Establish a Ministry of Education Pacific Advisory Group (PAG).
3. Engagement with Samoan and Tongan governors in ELS
4. Findings from Samoan governors on eight key themes:
  - a. What does governance mean?
  - b. Does developing an indigenous Samoan governance model matter?
  - c. What indigenous Samoan values or cultural principles conceptualise/define governance?
  - d. What difference would an indigenous Samoan governance model make in the future?
  - e. What difference would an indigenous Samoan governance model make in the Governance, Management and Administration (GMA) and licensing requirements?
  - f. What actions could be taken to address gaps and needs in governance?
  - g. When should these actions take place?
  - h. What are your board processes for meetings and how do you handle reporting from ERO (Education Review Office) reviews?
5. Findings from Tongan governors on eight key themes:
  - i. What does governance mean to Tongans?
  - j. Does developing an indigenous Tongan governance model matter?
  - k. What indigenous Tongan values or cultural principles conceptualise/define governance?
  - l. What difference would an indigenous Tongan governance model make in the future?
  - m. What difference would an indigenous Tongan governance model make in the Governance, Management and Administration (GMA) and licensing requirements?
  - n. What actions could be taken to address gaps and needs in governance?
  - o. When should these actions take place?
  - p. What are your board processes for meetings and how do you handle reporting from ERO (Education Review Office) reviews?
6. Report with final recommendations

## Profile of Samoan and Tongan Early Learning Services

The (PAG) could only introduce the project team to selected early learning services (ELS) in Aotearoa, New Zealand, serving Samoan and Tongan communities. Due to time, travel and budget there were a selected number of 20 Samoan, and 20 Tongan service offered the opportunity to participate in this project.

Most of the engagements (talanoa sessions) took place in Tamaki Makaurau Auckland, which included all of the Tongan Akoteu and Home-based services. Additional Samoan face-to-face interviews were conducted in Tokoroa, and online engagements were conducted in Hawkes Bay, Wellington, and Canterbury.

Originally, we had planned to meet with board members at the beginning of June 2024. However, it was a busy period for Samoan and Tongan communities with several individuals unavailable, therefore our engagements continued into July and August and the final report rescheduled to September 2024.

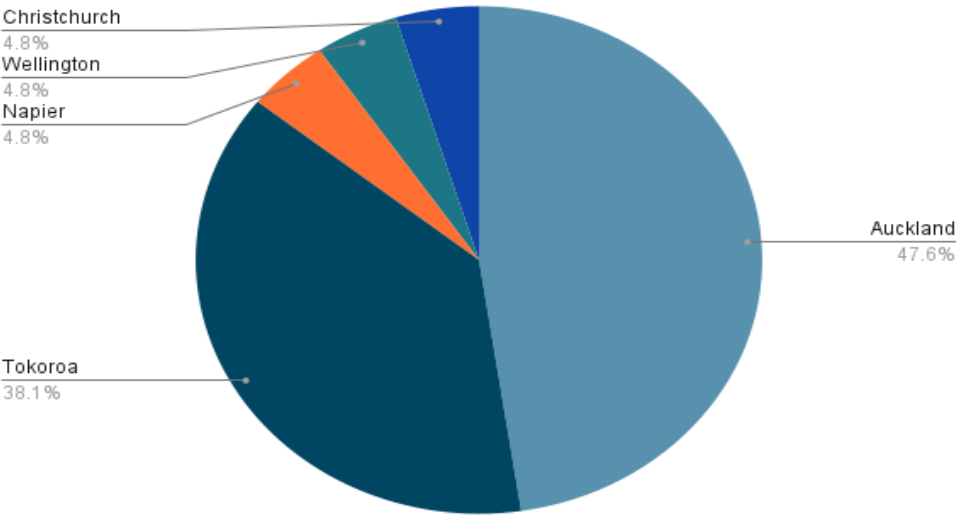
The following table outlines our engagements with Samoan and Tongan ELS.

<b>Number of Samoan and Tongan ELS engagements</b>	<b>Forecast in Action Plan</b>	<b>Actual number reached</b>	<b>Individual talanoa</b>
Number of Samoan ELS	20	8	21
Number of Tongan ELS	19	8	9
<b>Total Engagements</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>30</b>

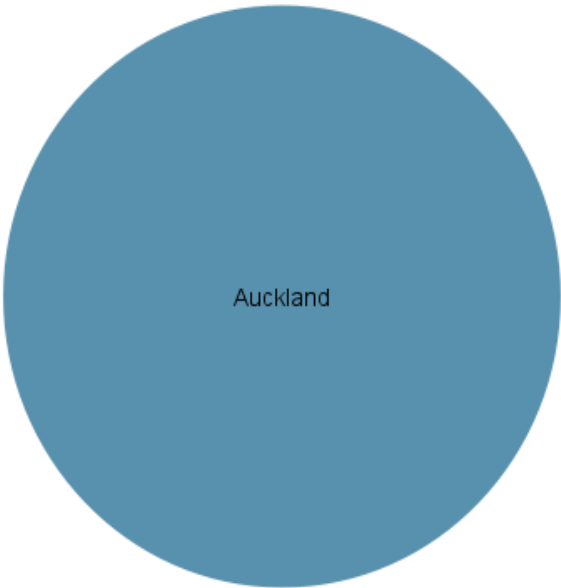
This report sets out the findings from the individual talanoa of thirty (30) participants based at the eight Aoga Amata and eight Tongan Akoteu and Home-based services. Altogether, five (5) males represented three (3) Samoan men and two (2) Tongan men. Twenty-five (25) females represented eighteen (18) Samoan women and seven (7) Tongan women.

The participants comprised various stakeholders in these centres' governance, management, and administration. To ensure confidentiality, any identifying details have been omitted. The stakeholders represented a range of roles, such as CEOs, Chairpersons, Vice-chairs, secretaries, treasurers, board members, centre managers, teachers, parent representatives, service provider contact person, external consultants, and leaders within the centres, each offering unique insights into the governance practices within their respective organisations.

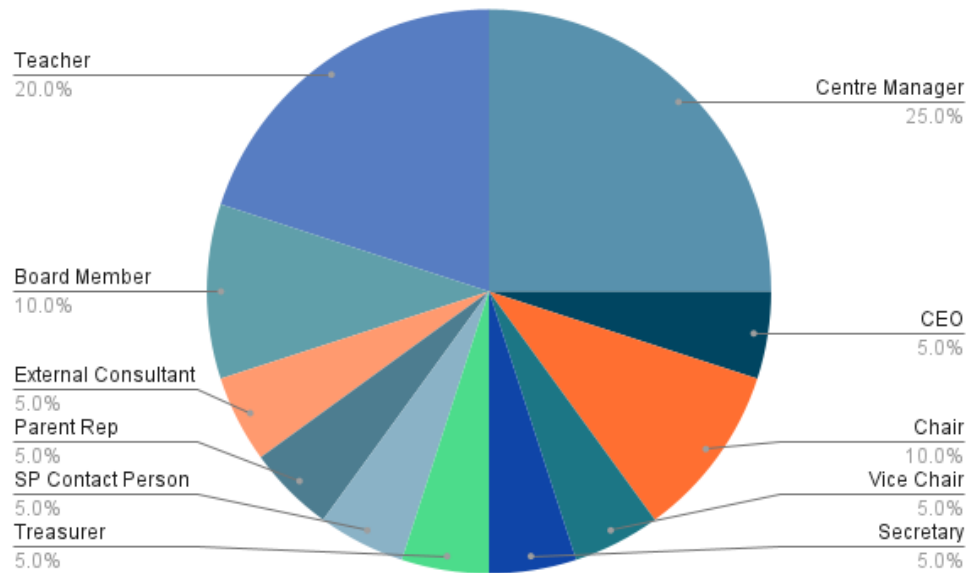
Locations: Samoan Aoga Amata



Locations: Tongan Akoteu and Home-based services

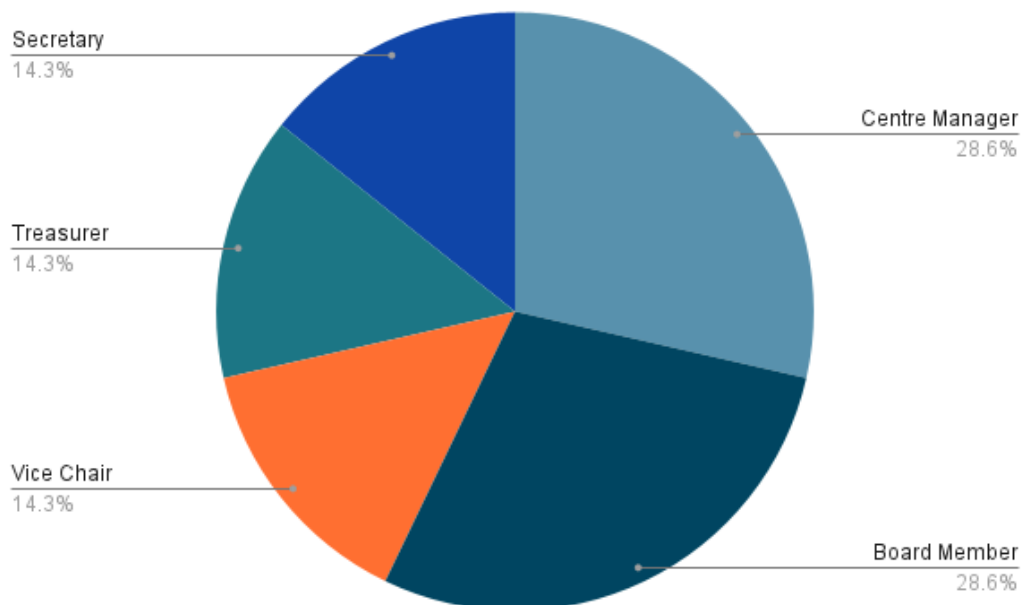


## Roles: Samoan Aoga Amata



*\*SP Contact Person = Service Provider Contact Person, formerly known as licensee*

## Roles: Tongan Akoteu and Home-based centres





# Project Outcomes

## 1. Application of the Kakala as a Research Framework

The project used the Kakala Research Framework as the infrastructure of the Action Plan and provided the infrastructure of the report.

<b>Kakala Model</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Activities</b>
TEU	May 2023	Proposal received by MOE
	December 2023	MOE approved the proposal and requested an Action Plan.
	Feb 2024	New MOE Pacific Advisory Group (PAG) meets and finalises the TOR. The PAG selects the ELS to be part of the project.
	March-May 2024	MOE Advisory Group undertakes meetings to finalise survey questions and communicate the Project via MOE Gazette.
TOLI	June 2024	MOE introduces the Project Team to selected engagements with Samoan and Tongan ECES in Auckland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Porirua and Christchurch. Project team schedule engagements.
TUI	July 2024	The Project Team identifies key themes and drafts report findings
LUVA	30 Aug 2024	MOE Advisory Group meets and receives the final report.

The project team acknowledges that the original Kakala framework consists of three components: 'toli', 'tui', and 'luva'. Professor Konai-Helu Thaman created it as an articulation of her conceptualisation of teaching and learning. (Johnansson-Fua, 2015:50). Today, three other new components, 'teu', 'mafana, and' malie', have enriched the model (Manu'atu, 2000).

## 2. Establish a Ministry of Education Pacific Advisory Group (PAG)

The project team developed a Terms of Reference (TOR) to establish and outline the roles and responsibilities of the seven members of the Ministry of Education Pacific Advisory Group (PAG) for this project. As a collective, the PAG provided guidance, data and were critical in introducing the Project Team to the Samoan and Tongan ELS.

The PAG membership had representation from Pacific regional advisors from across Aotearoa New Zealand. The role of Chair for PAG was held by Auckland-based PAG members and all meetings were virtual and mostly scheduled for a monthly basis. The first PAG meeting took place in February 2024 and the last meeting took place in September 2024 for the final report.

### 3. Engagement with Samoan and Tongan governors

The project team successfully developed and delivered one questionnaire to be shared for engagement with the Samoan and Tongan ELS. The questions were endorsed by the PAG and reviewed by the academics from Otago University. The project team engaged in talanoa, either led in the Gagana Samoa language, Lea Faka-Tonga language or English language.

Our questionnaire used the talanoa engagement method to primarily delve into understanding the participants' lived experience about governance, particularly concerning the identification and development of Indigenous Samoan governance principles and models for the Samoan Aoga Amata and Indigenous Tongan governance principles and models for the Tongan Akoteu or Home-based services.

Vaiioleti (2006) talanoa method was applied to facilitate the sharing of collective stories among the Samoan and Tongan participants. This approach provided insightful perspectives on the Samoan and Tongan participants' cultural values while concurrently addressing the education sector's specific needs.

#### Questionnaire

At the start of our talanoa sessions, participants were asked how they first became involved in the centres. This provided insights into their lived experiences, motivations, and pathways to governance roles.

1. *Vision for the Centres:*
  - The talanoa sought to understand the participants' long-term vision for the centres, especially regarding cultural preservation and the role of governance in achieving that vision.
2. *Understanding of Governance:*
  - Participants were asked what governance means to them, focusing on how their [Samoan or Tongan] cultural values influence their understanding and practice of governance.
3. *Importance of a [Samoan or Tongan] Indigenous Governance model:*
  - The talanoa explored whether participants believed developing a [Samoan or Tongan] Governance model in Aotearoa New Zealand was essential and what difference they thought it would make for their services.
4. *Impact on Governance, Management, and Administration (GMA):*
  - Participants discussed how either a [Samoan or Tongan] Indigenous Governance model could affect governance, management, administration, and compliance with licensing criteria.

5. *Cultural Values in Governance:*
  - The talanoa delved into which [Samoan or Tongan] indigenous values or cultural principles define governance for the participants.
6. *Challenges and Inequalities:*
  - Participants were asked about the challenges and inequalities teachers and board members face within the governance context.
7. *Recommendations for Improvement:*
  - The talanoa included questions on what specific actions could be taken to address gaps and needs in governance and how [Samoan or Tongan] cultural principles could be applied in a modern context.
8. *Board Meeting Processes and ERO Reviews:*
  - Participants provided insights into their boards' meeting processes and how they handle reporting and Education Review Office (ERO) reviews.

## 4. Findings from Samoan Governors

All the Samoan responses offered a comprehensive overview of the participants' motivations and perspectives on governance from their Samoan Early Learning Services ELS. Their insights as indigenous Samoan governors underscore the significance of incorporating their indigenous cultural values into reframing governance and redefining governance practices and the challenges associated with doing so within the framework of New Zealand's educational system.

### a. What does Samoan governance mean?

*As described by participants, governance is deeply rooted in the concept of Vā, the relational space between people. It is about maintaining and nurturing relationships, ensuring that decisions are made collectively and reflect the values of respect (Fa'aaloalo), love (Alofa), and service (Tautua). Governance was also seen as a mechanism for ensuring that cultural practices are upheld, and that the community's voice is central to the decision-making process. In this context, governance is less about power and authority and more about stewardship and care for the community.*

**Participant quote:** *"The Matai (chief) and his family and how they make decisions... There is a lot of cultural wealth to choose from to weave and create a Governance model." (Referring to Fa'amatai-Samoan chief system)*

**Participant quote:** *"Governance is not new; and the outworking and putting it into practice is not new. I think the challenge is translating the GMA (Governance, Management and Administration) inside your own board in a way that they can make ... good decision(s)"*

*moving forward. The bigger problem is the relationship between us and the Ministry. (Referring to Vā as a Foundational Concept)*

**Participant quote:** *"One of our parent reps was saying, I understand everything they (board) are saying, I feel so emotional that they're considering the parents even though the parents most times are not fully attentive to what the board does, but they still consider the parents, children and families. They consider the wider families and communities."*

*(Referring to Collective Decision-Making - Soālaupule)*

**b. Does developing an Indigenous Samoan governance model in Aotearoa, New Zealand matter?**

*Participants unanimously agreed that developing a Samoan Indigenous Governance model is crucial. They highlighted that such a model would provide a formal structure for embedding Samoan values into governance practices, ensuring these values guide decision-making processes. Participants believed that this model would help preserve Samoan culture in the face of increasing assimilation pressures and ensure that governance practices are culturally relevant and responsive to the needs of the Samoan community in Aotearoa, New Zealand.*

**Participant quote:**

*"It's time because you're here today... to uphold the spirit of Te Ao Māori MoE regulations but forefront Samoa." (Referring to a Samoan Indigenous Governance Model)*

**Participant quote:**

*"I pray that we will have an opportunity to have a Samoan Indigenous Governance model so that it can help explain to non-Samoans why we do what we do and still be compliant. Also the Samoans that work for ERO and/or MoE, we hope that they can advocate and help the non-Samoan ERO and MoE understand that while it may look different it is still safe and compliant, just because it doesn't convey what they are used to in the Western approach. We are carrying on the Samoan traditions from when we were brought up in Samoa. Children are a gift from God, and they are meant to be treasured, and cared for, but also taught and reared in Christianity and the Samoan way, learning their language and culture and having a sense of belonging"*

*(Referring to a Samoan Indigenous Governance Model)*

*(Referring to Empowerment Through Cultural Alignment)*

**c. What indigenous Samoan values or cultural principles conceptualise/define what governance means?**

*Participants identified key Samoan values that define their understanding of governance, including:*

- **Vā:** *The relational space that emphasises maintaining respectful and harmonious relationships.*
- **Fa'aaloalo (Respect):** *A fundamental value that guides interactions and decision-making, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued.*
- **Alofa (Love):** *The concept of love and care for others underpins governance's communal and inclusive nature.*
- **Tautua (Service):** *The principle of serving others, especially the community, is central to leadership and governance roles.*
- **Faamaoni (Faithfulness):** *The value of being faithful and loyal, particularly in upholding cultural practices and responsibilities.*

**d. What difference would an Indigenous Samoan governance model make for your Centres and the future generations of governors and leaders?**

*Participants felt that an Indigenous Samoan governance model would significantly enhance the cultural integrity of the Centres, making them more reflective of Samoan values and more responsive to the needs of Samoan families. It would also provide a structured pathway for future generations of Samoan leaders, equipping them with the knowledge and tools to lead in a way that honours their cultural heritage. Furthermore, this model would likely increase community engagement and ownership, as the governance processes would align more with traditional Samoan practices. (Referring to a Samoan Indigenous Governance Model) (Referring to Empowerment Through Cultural Alignment)*

**Participant quote:**

*"Given the context... would a Samoan tree grow in Aotearoa? This is why it's hard for our people to adopt sometimes. We think our cultural models may not work in Aotearoa, but I believe we have enriched cultural Governance models that could work in Aoga Amata. ... I think it's really good to have our own Cultural Governance model. It's not just to help us think and understand, but it also connects us spiritually and in our hearts. It relates to our hearts. Then it is going to help us understand if we say that it is important for us to grow Aoga Amata then it has to start with a vision"*

*(Referring to a Samoan Indigenous Governance Model)*

*(Referring to Empowerment Through Cultural Alignment)*

- e. What difference would a Samoan Indigenous Governance model make in the GMA (Governance, Management, and Administration) and licensing requirements?

**Participant quote:** *“A Samoan Indigenous governance model could potentially transform the GMA processes by integrating Samoan cultural principles into the core of these functions. This would ensure that all management and administrative decisions are made with cultural considerations at the forefront, leading to more culturally appropriate practices. Additionally, licensing requirements could be adapted to recognise the unique aspects of Samoan governance, providing more flexibility for Centres to operate in a way that aligns with Samoan values. This could also lead to creation of culturally specific benchmarks and standards within the licensing process”* (Referring to Empowerment Through Cultural Alignment) (Referring to a Samoan Indigenous Governance Model)

- f. What actions could be taken to address the gaps and needs in governance within the discussed context?

**Participant responses:** To address these gaps, participants suggested several actions, including:

- **Culturally Responsive Training:** Training board members to better incorporate Samoan governance principles into their decision-making.
- **Resource Allocation:** Advocating for more resources to support the implementation of culturally specific governance practices.
- **Leadership Development:** Creating programs to develop future Samoan leaders who can take on governance roles in the Centres.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Working with policymakers to adapt regulatory models to be more inclusive of Indigenous governance models.

- g. When should these actions take place now or later?

All respondents were adamant that change is essential, must happen as soon as possible, and is long overdue because the current model is not working properly.

**Participant quote:**

*“A model is desperately needed and has to make a difference. Things are not properly working at the moment.”* (Referring to a Samoan Indigenous Governance Model)

**h. What are your board processes for meetings and how do you handle reporting from ERO (Education Review Office) reviews?**

**Participant quote:** ...*"so sometimes it's the roles and responsibilities that they don't always understand but the buck stops with them when it comes to making these decisions, and they make decisions all day long with their extended families, with their Churches. They are happy to contribute to church, community decisions. They make good level-headed decisions as long as you provide them the information in the way that they will receive it. They don't want long reports. When it comes to finances, I summarise all that stuff, but when it comes to discussions (Soālaupule -collective decision-making process) they have full vision of the community and the thinking that these elders bring to the board table."*(Referring to the importance of nurturing the Vā, relationships) (Balancing Cultural Values with Regulatory Requirements)

**Participant quote:** *"They have ... financial, strategic and HR decisions. This can be complicated but if we simplify it, the Governance board makes decisions just like any other committee for any organisation. They are the suits, VIP; the rest of the organisation are the hands and feet. And they come prepared, they ask good questions, they want to understand the context and the consequences of their decision-making. Our board members have very deep understanding and knowledge."*(Referring to the importance of nurturing the Vā, relationships) (Balancing Cultural Values with Regulatory Requirements)

**Participant quote:** *"It's different from the Palagi (Western) way where there is so much data and information and pages and pages. And on top of that we have to make so many copies of documentation, then present it to them ... then we start the talanoa (conversation)"* (Balancing Cultural Values with Regulatory Requirements)

**Participant quote:** *"I like the MoE worker. I think they are doing as much as they can around Governance. I also like the ERO worker; I just think they are in a system, that is really restrictive of how they can help. I don't think there's any harm in them just coming out and saying, 'Let's do this, this will get you compliant,' instead of having to say it in the report two weeks from now when you can just tell us now..."* (Balancing Cultural Values with Regulatory Requirements) (Referring to the importance of nurturing the Vā, relationships)

**Participant quote:** *"Imagine if [ERO reviewers] were to role-model all of the outcomes that they expect the teachers to teach the children, I imagine that it would mean they would have to humble themselves, they would have to be at the same level as us. I'm not saying come down to our level because I don't want to position us lower. I think we just need to come to an understanding where both parties feel and understand each other's value and*



acknowledge. And move forward together towards providing the service for the kids, because like I said, we're not conflicting interests. We want the same thing. If the energies that we spent being frustrated, instead of being effective... Then everybody's happy. I don't think that's too simple a concept. I don't even think that's a concept, and that it's got anything to do with culture or worldviews, that's just common human relationships. They are just too tied up in their job descriptions and their regulations that they forget that they are dealing with people. And well respected in the community people - very professional, highly qualified people." (Referring to the importance of nurturing the Vā, relationships) (Balancing Cultural Values with Regulatory Requirements)

**Participant quote:** "Nurture the space between people... Vā feiloa'i po o le teuina o le vā." (Referring to the importance of nurturing the Vā, relationships)

**Participant quote:** "Don't turn your nose down and think that we are a babysitter's club. [ERO reviewers] should be uplifting the teachers, elderly teachers who have been serving for such a long time. The teachers have served faithfully in the community. They help bring up our children, protect the children; they are maternal, and they try to preserve our Samoan language and their value. Even the unqualified teachers have given so many years of service to the industry" (Referring to the importance of nurturing the Vā, relationships) (Balancing Cultural Values with Regulatory Requirements)

**Participant quote:** "ERO ripped us. No learnings. Hard. No guide to 'how to work through this', [no] induction pack or welcome... MoE should provide this to centre managers." (Referring to the importance of nurturing the Vā, relationships) (Balancing Cultural Values with Regulatory Requirements)

**Other participants had experienced more positive interactions with ERO:**

**Participant quote:** "I have to give credit where it's due. [ERO has] been a lot more accommodating and a lot more user friendly. Again, it's probably the repetition of a lot of the oldies ... pushing back and saying 'no, if we're wrong, we're wrong; if we're right, make sure you change your practice to make it right'." (Referring to previous interactions where the centre pushed back on ERO recommendations as being counter to their mandate as a full immersion centre.) (Referring to the importance of nurturing the Vā, relationships) (Balancing Cultural Values with Regulatory Requirements)

**Participant quote:** "I do like the way they came on board. They were helping me. ... The other officer came on site and met with me, because I've never met her before. I think that's something I'd really like to continue, for them to come meet us. Because in my



*experience when it comes to ERO you are sort of nervous... but I like how she came and met with me on site, and we got to know each other. So, it makes me feel comfortable to be able to carry on with the visits. So for us Pasifika, we really enjoy that meeting in person, to have that talanoa, to know someone before things are put in place."*

*(Referring to the importance of nurturing the Vā, relationships)*

*(Balancing Cultural Values with Regulatory Requirements)*

**Participant quote:** *"I had found that ERO had really made a big effort to switch in terms of being more collaborative with us. And I found that their new methodology, in terms of meeting with us before having a zoom, we had a get-to-know each other talanoa via zoom. They listen to our story, they listen to [our CEO]'s background, and there was a lot more collaborative talanoa discussion throughout the start of the process, throughout the visits, on the actual day, and any time that we found something that needed to either be rectified or, "hey, look, this is not here, do you have it?", the conversation around that was really done in a respectful manner. It was very culturally responsive."*

*(Referring to the importance of nurturing the Vā, relationships)*

*(Balancing Cultural Values with Regulatory Requirements)*

## 5. Findings from Tongan Governors

All the Tongan participants offered their lived experiences and perspectives on governance from their Tongan Akoteu or Home-based services. Many of the Tongan participants were fluent in Tongan, therefore the talanoa engagements were conducted in Lea Faka-Tonga, the Tongan language.

All the Tongan governors underscored the significance to *centre* their indigenous cultural values into reframing the concept and definition of governance and also redefining governance practices. A few of the Tongan governors also identified the need to strengthen the relationship with Māori as Tangata Whenua of Aotearoa New Zealand.

### a. What does Tongan governance mean?

In the talanoa process, many of the Tongan respondents recognised the term governance as a *foreign* concept.

All the participants shared their lived governance experience, their journey and used Indigenous Tongan concepts, values and practices to describe what they believe governance to be which included tu'utu'uni (decision-making), taki lelei (good leadership), faka'apa'apa (respect), tauhi fonua (protects the land/people) and langa fonua (builds the land/people) as significant ways of how they understood governance and its relationship to Tongan identity.

Educational research in New Zealand shows that by implication, Tongan peoples' relationship to the world is linguistic, and meaning is being constructed and reconstructed from the artistic or linguistic enterprise (2000, Manu'atu).

**Participant quote:** *“Governance is labels, like a pink uniform. We need to rethink these labels, these uniforms. We need to use our concepts... As migrants, we have made assumptions about New Zealand and taken things for granted i.e. ‘getting a visa, getting a job’. If we knew how New Zealand was governed, would we have come?*

*We also have to be ‘ofa ki he kakai (show love/compassion to the people). Take them to a ‘new place’ or what’s the point? Take them to ‘greener pastures’ as the psalm says. To be a Tongan ‘affirms’ we have something. Where is the Treaty of Waitangi, in governance? We need to respect the language and te Reo protests our language. Let’s look at Māori, they have an agenda and that’s about decolonisation”.*

**Participant quote:** *“We thought of Pule or Pule’i. Then we actually thought of – ‘Taki lelei’ (good leadership). It’s the way we do our governance here at our school. It’s about how we ‘lue fakataha’, hand-in-hand. It must be caring about people and our environment”*

**b. Does developing an Indigenous Tongan governance model in Aotearoa, New Zealand matter?**

*Participants were unanimous.* All the Tongan participants confirmed that developing an indigenous Tongan governance model for Aotearoa New Zealand does matter and it is important. The talanoa identified the need to develop an indigenous Tongan governance model and the talanoa identified the need to have a *process* to develop this model that is unique to Tongans.

An indigenous Tongan governance model would be about Tongans.

The model would also provide an opportunity to ask questions about how the current Ministry of Education GMA (Governance, Management, and Administration) guidelines *protect* Tongan language and culture which is central to Tongan identity.

**Participant quote:** *“We are not a one size fits all model”.*

**Participant quote:** *“[the Tongan model] would be about us, we are in there, it would be our own”.*

**Participant quote:** *“Yes. Governance is created... we shouldn’t ask questions from the Palangis. We need to ask new questions...Tongans talk in multiple layers. For ECE agenda, the education is transformative not just technical”.*

**c. What indigenous Tongan values or cultural principles conceptualise governance?**

There was a collection of twelve indigenous Tongan concepts that were identified by respondents. Overall, there were seven concepts identified which were inclusive of concepts coined identified the late Queen Salote Tupou III’s ***Faa’i Kave’i Koula***:

1. ***Faka’apa’apa (Respect)***: This concept was identified by most Tongan participants. It is also one of the concepts from the *Faa’i Kave’i Koula*. Participants identified that this concept denotes the spirit of commitment, excellence and sacrifice in governance and educational achievement. Educational research identified *faka’apa’apa* as a core value for Tongans, the philosophy that guides Tongan

relationships. Faka'apa'apa operates from a collective perspective where the good of the collective is valued over the individual while recognising the differences and the uniqueness of individuality (Fua, 2007).

2. **Vā (Relationships):** The combined concepts of tauhi and vā were the second most common concept and one of the concepts of the *Faa'i Kave'i Koula*. It should be noted that many Tongan participants used the term 'va' interchangeably with the concept of 'fonua' (land) and kakai (people). There were also the combined concepts of *tauhi and fonua* (caring for the land/people). The combined concepts of *tauhi fonua* were used interchangeably to describe 'va'. The combined concepts of *tauhi kakai* - caring for the people was used interchangeably. At least two participants identified *tauhi va* to Tangata Whenua.
3. **Mamahi'i me'a (To stand/to fight for).** This concept was identified by the third majority of Tongan participants. It is also one of the concepts from the *Faa'i Kave'i Koula*. Participants identified that this concept denotes the spirit of commitment, excellence and sacrifice in governance and educational achievement.
4. **Anga Fakatokilalo (To have humility).** This concept was identified by the fourth majority of the Tongan participants. It is also one of the concepts from the *Faa'i Kave'i Koula*. This concept guides the first principle of faka'apa'apa (respect).
5. **'Ofa (Love/Compassion).** This concept guides the first principle of faka'apa'apa which is designed to honour and protect the other by showing compassion. Tongans believe that in displaying faka'apa'apa/'ofa to others, others will subsequently display faka'apa'apa/'ofa to oneself (Fua, 2007).
6. **Koloa (goods, wealth, abundance).** This concept was referenced by several of the participants during the talanoa when they spoke about the children enrolled into the ELS, the responsibilities of Board and parents which included trust, understanding and peace.
7. **Nofo (to live/to reside).** This concept is related to 'fonua' (land) and kakai (people). One participant quote: The 'nofo' concept is the condition to explore. One of the Tongan participants asked what does 'nofo' mean to Tongans and all Pacific peoples?

## **What difference would an indigenous Tongan governance model make for your Centres and the future generations of governors and leaders?**

*Participants were unanimous.* All the Tongan participants confirmed that there would be a difference in having a Tongan governance model due to the benefits it would make to the future governors and leaders. This included:

- Centre Tongan *people's values* in reconceptualising how governance and/or how decisions are made within the context of tauhi va, tauhi fonua, tauhi kakai in Aotearoa New Zealand which means – the caring of relationships, caring for land and caring for people. Validation of the Tongan lived experience in governance journey in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Recognition of *spiritual and cultural identities* that exists within Tongan lived experiences of governance
  - The role of *spirituality* in the principles and processes of Tongan governance.
  - The role of *culture* based on the use of Tongan ancestral knowledge and Tongan language.
- The importance of *context*: creating an enabling environment to embed, reclaim and protect Tongan identity, language and culture through governance to the teachers, staff, parents and learners. The acknowledgement of the context of the GMA requirements.
- Acknowledging fonua: Aotearoa New Zealand is a *fonua*, a country with its own history, context and relationships. This includes the opportunity to re-establish the pre-existing relationship that Tongans have with Tangata Whenua. An example is through the Tongan Royal Family and the Māori Kingitanga.

**Participant quote:** *"This would be important and deep philosophical work. We need to talk about ourselves. Not take the Palangi version of us".*

**Participant quote:** *"It's about identity - our Tongan identity. Tongan governance is different all-round, from the structure, policies, procedures, the roles and responsibilities a member holds from top tier to the team on-floor... we need a cultural-fit".*

**Participant quote:** *"It will remind us of who we are, because we do things Tongan... We also have to build awareness of Tiriti o Waitangi".*

**d. What difference would an indigenous Tongan governance model make in the Governance, Management and Administration (GMA) and licensing requirement?**

*Participants were unanimous.* All the Tongan participants confirmed that an indigenous Tongan governance model would make a significant difference in the Governance, Management and Administration (GMA) and licensing requirements. For many of the Tongan participants, there was a constant reference to the role of spirituality in their governance role either in how they developed their vision for their organisation or in how they interacted with each other and staff.

The Tongan participants were able to identify and reconcile new opportunities to better understand and use the current GMA services.

**Participant quote:** *"I would be more 'mafana makehe' (very excited) if there was a Tongan model. At the moment we are forced to contextualise GMA to fit us within the scope of the regulations and not the other way around. For example, 'tauhi va' comes into play with Human Resources".*

**Participant quote:** *"When we have our own Tongan governance, it will help our Board understand the Ministry's governance. The GMA".*

**Participant quote:** *"As Paulo Freire says, it would be about us".*

**e. What actions could be taken to address the gaps and needs in governance within the discussed context?**

*The Tongan participants* identified the following gaps and needs in their governance experience:

- **'Centre' Tongan people's values to introduce something new.** The Tongan participants have expectations that the Ministry and ERO can and should create something specific for Tongans, something new.
- **More Tongan resources:** Review how funding for Pacific ELS is governed so that funding to be based on 'best practice' as opposed to ratio funding. For example, we have 2 teachers to 5 infants – only 1 teacher is funded. Some Tongan respondents shared that they had not met the Senior Pacific Advisor in Auckland for many months and were not sure where to access support, resulting in frustration and lack of trust. Thus there is an opportunity here to strengthen the Ministry's capacity for Tongan representation.

- **More Tongan teachers:** Expand the recent initiative for Pacific Immersion Teachers Allowances (PITA) to be inclusive of all ECE teachers and not just for certified teachers.
- **More Tongan language:** Board members to get Tongan centric professional development. Also, for Board members to be active in incorporating Tongan language, culture and governance principles into their decision-making.
- **Succession Plan for Tongan Leadership:** Board members of Tongan Akoteu with a direct relationship with a Church, identified the need to self-reflect on appointment of Church officials into their Vice Chair and Chair roles. In providing stability and long-term leadership, there is a need for Boards to better succession plan the next generation and to review policies for Board appointments.

**f. When should these actions take place now or later?**

*Participants were unanimous.* All the Tongan participants confirmed that the need for these gaps and needs in governance to be addressed: immediately.

**Participant quote:** *"The sooner the better".*

**Participant quote:** *"As soon as they can. It would be good for us and the rest of the sector".*

**g. What are your board processes for meetings and how do you handle reporting from ERO (Education Review Office) reviews?**

For the Tongan Akoteu participants, they identified that their Board had regular meetings where agendas and minutes were applied. Timeliness and availability of Board members often made it a challenge. Most Tongan Board meetings were held exclusively in lea faka-Tonga, Tongan language. A small number of Tongan ELS held bi-lingual Board meetings in Tongan and English. The Tongan Home-based services in this research were privately owned and confirmed that they had meetings on a needs-only basis. All Board meetings started and ended in prayer.

The make-up of the Tongan Akoteu Board of Trustees included the role of Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Centre Manager, at least one senior teacher and at least one parent representative. The tenure of each role was at least two years, except for Tongan Akoteu that was Church based. The Chair role was gifted and taken up by the Church

Reverend and the Vice-Chair role was gifted and taken up by Church Stewart for three years.

*Participants were unanimous* in that they had direct dealings with the Education Review Office (ERO) officials who were transactional in their dealings. Participants were *also unanimous* in receiving an ERO report, having the responsibility to either lead or be part of the team responding to an ERO report or host an ERO site visit to their Akoteu or Home-based service. In general, most participants confirmed that they prioritised the report from ERO to ensure that they remained compliant.

One Tongan ELS exceeded the ERO expectations, which is captured below.

**Participant quote:** *“In the 1980s to 2000, ERO were seen as the fakamaau (judge). Tongan teachers would air their issues about staff, management to ERO, that was their thinking at the time. Later in 2016, ERO reframed again. They used the Māori ‘Pou’ for their review. In 2022 – to now, they have moved to using Papatuanuku and Ranginui with three stages – Aka Nuku, Aka Rangi, and Aka Matua (tbc). ERO hasn’t defined what Aka Matua is and so that means their approach is problematic. Our home-based service has already exceeded what Aka Matua looks like with our published works and conferences”.*

**Participant quote:** *“Anything from the Ministry is a top priority. In our 2018 audit we identified we needed stronger processes and there was some pressure on our teachers... We had a few things that were picked up. It was a pity, a few minor things but we didn’t query it as we were so tired, you just change it and get on”.*



# Traditional Samoan and Tongan governance

The PAG asked the project team to provide an overview of the respective and established governance models from Samoa and Tonga that operate in those countries. This information will serve to provide added context for people unfamiliar with Samoan and Tongan cultures and who may use this report to inform future decision-making.

## Samoan Fa'amatai - Chiefly system

The *Fa'amatai* system is a traditional Samoan governance structure relevant to early learning services in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly those serving Samoan communities. Here's an overview of Fa'amatai and its relevance:

Fa'amatai Background:

1. Fa'amatai is the Indigenous political system of Samoa, central to the organisation of Samoan society.
2. It regulates authority and articulates customary governance in both American Samoa and the Independent State of Samoa.
3. The system is centred around matai, which are titled family chiefs holding authority and responsibility for the welfare of their extended families ('aiga).
4. Fa'amatai operates within the broader context of fa'aSāmoa, the Samoan way of life, encompassing customs, traditions, and social norms.

## Tu'i Tonga - Monarchy system

The Tongan Tu'i Tonga monarchy dates back to 900 to 950 AD with the first Tu'i Tonga named 'Aho'eitu. The Tu'i Tonga system has been in existence for more than 1,000 years and the current monarch is Tupou VI, King of Tonga 'Aho'eitu 'Unuaki'otonga Tuku'aho married to Queen of Tonga, Nanasipau'u Vaea. The Tongan Royal Family observe and maintain their ancestral relationship with the Māori Kīngitanga to the current day.

The Tu'i Tonga background:

1. Tongan society is based on a ranking system that displays inequality while recognising the differences of relationships and context.
2. The context of place/land (fonua) and relationships (va) continually defines the ranking system and faka'apa'apa is the guiding principle for this system.
3. At the societal level, the monarch is the Hau - Tu'i / Paramount chief.
4. The Hau is followed by Nobles, or 'Eiki and then followed by commoners.

5. At village level, the highest-ranking person is the Noble, followed by his talking chief, *matapule*, and the Noble's people, who are his clan or *Kainga*.
6. Within an extended family, the '*Ulumotu*'a or eldest son, and the *Mehikitanga*, the eldest daughter share a unique partnership in leading the extended family.
7. Women, as sisters, are ranked higher than their brothers.

## Challenges and Opportunities

While the need for a culturally aligned governance model is clear, integrating such a model within the existing Aotearoa New Zealand model presents several challenges:

1. **Regulatory Compliance:** Any new governance model must meet Aotearoa New Zealand authorities' legal and regulatory requirements, which may only sometimes align with traditional Samoan and or Tongan practices.
2. **Balancing Cultural Values and Modern Needs:** A balance must be found between maintaining cultural integrity and meeting the demands of contemporary organisational management and use of modern technology.
3. **Cross-Cultural Understanding:** Developing and implementing a Samoan and/or Tongan governance models will require increased cultural awareness and understanding from external bodies, such as MoE and ERO. There is also a need to acknowledge that Samoan and Tongan governance models align directly with community expectations. Any attempt to conceptualise a Pan-Pacific governance model would fall short of community expectations and would serve to increase the use of the English language.
4. **Adaptation of Traditional Concepts:** Traditional Samoan or Tongan governance concepts like Fa'amatai (chiefly system) or Tu'i Tonga (Monarchy system) must be adapted to fit within the context of early childhood education centres in Aotearoa, New Zealand.
5. **Intergenerational Perspectives:** Differing views between older and younger generations within the Samoan and Tongan communities on how governance should be structured and implemented may pose challenges.

This report can significantly enhance the effectiveness and cultural relevance of governance practices in Samoan Aoga Amata, Tongan Akoteu and Home-based as well as in other Pacific-led organisations in Aotearoa, New Zealand, by addressing these challenges and developing a governance model that authentically reflects Samoan and/or Tongan cultural values while meeting Aotearoa New Zealand's regulatory requirements.

# Key Samoan Themes

Participants viewed governance not merely as a structural model but as a practice deeply rooted in Fa'aSamoa (the Samoan way of life). Governance is seen to preserve and nurture Samoan cultural values, including respect (Fa'aaloalo), love (alofa), and service (tautua).

The themes connect the intricate relationship between safeguarding culture, empowering communities, and addressing the practical requirements of governance in ELS. The results indicate that creating a Samoan Indigenous Governance model can significantly improve the effectiveness of governance practices and their cultural resonance in Aoga Amata and similar Samoan-led organisations in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

- 1. Collective Decision-Making (Soālaupule)**

Collective decision-making processes were strongly emphasised. Participants highlighted the importance of inclusive governance, where all community members' voices are valued, acknowledged, and considered.

- 2. Need for a Samoan Indigenous Governance Model**

There was unanimous agreement on the importance of developing a Samoan Indigenous Governance model for Aotearoa, New Zealand. Participants expressed that existing Western models often fail and are not fit for purpose to resonate with Samoan cultural values. They can also be inaccessible and complicated, particularly for elders who bring life experience, wisdom and foresight to the board.

- 3. Vā as a Foundational Concept**

Vā (the respectful, nurtured space between people) has been recognised as a critical aspect of Samoan governance. This relational approach underpins Samoan social interactions and aims to ensure harmonious relationships with all stakeholders. This includes non-Samoan and New Zealand-born Pacific individuals who may not understand the Vā. See the glossary for more details about the concept of Vā.

- 4. Fa'amatai as a Governance model**

Participants suggested that the traditional Fa'amatai (chiefly system) could serve as a basis for developing a modern governance model aligning with Samoan cultural values.

- 5. Empowerment Through Cultural Alignment**

An Indigenous governance model was seen as a tool for empowering the Samoan community, potentially increasing community engagement and improving outcomes in Samoan-led organisations.

## 6. **Balancing Cultural Values with Regulatory Requirements**

Participants emphasised the need for a governance model that upholds Samoan cultural principles while meeting MoE educational regulations and licensing standards.

# Recommendations for Samoan Governance

Based on the findings of this report, the following recommendations are proposed for the Ministry of Education to support the development and sustainability of a Samoan Indigenous Governance model within Early Learning Services Centres in Aotearoa, New Zealand:

## 1. **Culturally Responsive Policy models**

- **Action:** Develop and implement policy models that recognise and support Indigenous governance models, specifically those that align with Samoan cultural values.
- **Rationale:** By creating policies that accommodate cultural governance practices, the Ministry can help reduce the tension between Samoan cultural practices and Aotearoa New Zealand's regulatory requirements.

## 2. **Support for Leadership Development**

- **Action:** Establish leadership development programs specifically designed to train future Samoan leaders in culturally responsive governance.
- **Rationale:** These programs should equip leaders with the skills to navigate their communities' cultural expectations and the education system's regulatory demands.

## 3. **Resource Allocation and Support**

- **Action:** Provide targeted funding and resources to support the implementation of Samoan Indigenous Governance models in Early Learning Services Centres.
- **Rationale:** Adequate resources are essential for these centres to fully implement governance practices that are culturally aligned and effective in meeting the needs of their communities.

## 4. **Inclusion of Cultural Competency in ERO Reviews**

- **Action:** Incorporate cultural competency criteria into the Education Review Office (ERO) evaluation process, ensuring that ERO reviews consider the unique cultural practices of Samoan governance.

- **Rationale:** This would help ensure that Samoan Centres' governance practices are fairly evaluated, and their cultural practices are respected and supported.
5. **Community Engagement and Consultation**
- **Action:** Establish ongoing consultation talanoa with Samoan communities to ensure their voices are heard when developing governance policies and practices.
  - **Rationale:** Engaging with the community ensures that governance models are developed responsive to their needs and aligned with their cultural values.
6. **Long-Term Sustainability and Cultural Preservation**
- **Action:** Develop strategies for the long-term sustainability of Samoan Indigenous Governance models, focusing on preserving language and cultural practices within Early Learning Services.
  - **Rationale:** Sustaining these models over the long term is crucial for preserving and passing on Samoan cultural identity to future generations.

## Final thoughts about Samoan governance

The Ministry of Education has a unique opportunity to have a significant impact on preserving and promoting Samoan cultural values within the governance of Early Learning Services in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

By embracing the recommendations outlined above, the Ministry can create an educational environment where Samoan, Tongan, and all children can thrive while upholding their cultural identity and preparing to succeed in the broader Aotearoa New Zealand society.

Supporting Indigenous governance models not only benefits the Samoan community but also enriches the overall cultural diversity and educational landscape of Aotearoa, New Zealand. It's crucial to anticipate the predicted growth of the Samoan population within the next two decades. The development of a Samoan governance model aligns with the Ministry's Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030 and the Ministry for Pacific Peoples Pacific Wellbeing Strategy and Pacific Language Strategy.

# Key Tongan Themes

The findings of this research demonstrate that governance for Tongans is based on *spiritual* and *cultural* identities to maintain positive *long-term* relationships that protect the land, people and language. Seven indigenous Tongan concepts were successfully identified as principles for Tongan governance that can be further developed into a Tongan governance model:

1. *Faka'apa'apa (Respect)*
2. *Va (Relationships) inclusive of Tauhi Vā (Caring for Relationships) and Tauhi Fonua (caring for the land/people) - inclusive of Tangata Whenua.*
3. *Mamahi'i Me'a (To stand up for/to fight for).*
4. *Anga Fakatokilalo (To have humility).*
5. *'Ofa (Love and/or compassion).*
6. *Koloa (Goods, riches, wealth and/or abundance)*
7. *Nofo (To live and/or to reside).*

Support and assistance needed by Tongan participants were identified at strategic and technical levels:

1. **A strategic new long-term commitment.** The Ministry to develop something new for Pacific peoples. This long term includes the ways of working with the Ministry and ELS providers, support for parents, teachers, students and community engagement which can include inclusion of relationships with Tangata Whenua.
2. **A Tongan Governance Model.** All the Tongan participants confirmed that an indigenous Tongan governance model would make a significant difference in the Governance, Management and Administration (GMA) as it would serve to *protect* Tongan language and culture which is central to Tongan relationships, identity and what counts as achievement into the future.
3. **Faa'i Kave'i Koula: Concepts of a Tongan governance.** Participants strongly identified with the principles from the late Queen Salote Tupou III's *Faa'i Kave'i Koula*. This may serve as a basis for further development of a governance model.
4. **Sustainable Financial and Human Resource:** All the Tongan participants identified the strengthen of their identity but the need for more financial resources for teachers, more training for Board and staff and for the Ministry to increase their Tongan capacity and capability for their Auckland staff.
5. **Appropriate Tongan language-based Training.** Board members to get Tongan centric professional development. In providing stability and long-term leadership, there is a need for better succession planning for the next generation of Tongan governors.

# Recommendations for Tongan Governance

The following four recommendations are for the Ministry to develop into the future:

***Develop a renewed and long-term commitment for Tongan language and learners:*** All the Tongan participants identified their passion to protect the Tongan language within their families and early learning services. One Tongan respondent identified that this Lalanga Pule project represented an opportunity for Tongans to undertake decolonisation and to combat hegemonic pedagogy where indigenous knowledge (including language) is not valued.

***Protect and grow Tongan language teachers:*** Most Tongan participants identified the need for teaching staff to achieve pay parity as the cost of living has increased. Boards and Centre Managers identified that increasing staff salaries was important to recruit and retain quality staff. Two Tongan participants shared that they were recruiting for new teaching staff.

***Build a Tongan governance model centred on Faa'i Kave'i Koula principles:*** All the Tongan participants identified the need for a Tongan governance model and so this would build a case for the Ministry to invest in a dedicated and long-term approach to develop a Tongan governance model that centre's Tongan values, concepts and practices.

***Increase Tongan capacity and capability:*** While several Tongan respondents acknowledged how much they enjoyed the Ministry's professional development workshops, they also wanted to see more Tongan representation and engagement within the Ministry for their services. New Zealand Census data shows that Tongans are the second biggest Pacific population in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## Final thoughts about Tongan Governance

From a Tongan *fefine*/women's research perspective, the development of a unique Tongan governance model in the Tongan language is important work to re-affirm concepts already within the Tongan community. The governance work requires further reflection, further community engagement and consideration about *decolonisation*.

One key distinction that has shown in this research is the governance relationship between the Tongan Royal Family who observe and maintain their ancestral relationship with the Māori Kīngitanga to the current day. An example of this existing relationship is that Tongan participants were able to share their deep understanding and application of *fonua* - comparable to *whenua* which is a core concept within te Ao Māori context.

Looking at government strategies, the development of a Tongan governance model is aligned with the Ministry's Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030 and the Ministry for Pacific Peoples Pacific Wellbeing Strategy and Pacific Language Strategy.

For the Ministry of Education, a new Tongan governance model is an example of the Vision for Pacific Education which is for *Diverse Pacific learners and their families are safe, valued, and equipped to achieve their education aspirations*.

In the Ministry's 30 Year Action Plan there is reference to five key shifts. A new Tongan governance model contributes to all the key shifts, bearing in mind that Tongan participants want a Tongan model not a Pan-Pacific model.

## **A Shared Understanding of Samoan and Tongan Governance in Aotearoa New Zealand**

The Ministry's PAG asked the project team to confirm if the Samoan and Tongan participants have a *shared* understanding of governance.

In response to this request, the Project Team has put together this statement based on the findings and also based on the *shared* whakapapa that Samoans and Tongans have with indigenous Māori peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand.

*"Both Samoan and Tongan respective cultures are unique, and the source of their own governance models based on their own existing indigenous philosophies, knowledge systems, historical processes and tangible and intangible structures.*

*Samoans and Tongans recognise their own people's wealth and assets, resources, measures, benchmarks, and achievements, as defined by their respective cultures.*

*At a minimum, a shared understanding of Samoan and Tongan governance in Aotearoa New Zealand means acknowledging and activating the shared ancestry (whakapapa) that Samoans and Tongans have with indigenous Māori aiga/kainga of Aotearoa New Zealand".*



## Final Recommendations

To introduce any indigenous Samoan and/or Tongan governance models, it is important to make long-term and sustainable improvements to protect and nurture Indigenous knowledge, including Samoan and Tongan people's knowledge, in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system. The challenges that influence the value of all indigenous knowledge, including Samoan and Tongan knowledge, philosophies, and ways of working, need to be acknowledged and addressed.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is no literature addressing Samoan and Tongan governance principles or models. However, indigenous Māori governance models are recognised.

This report brings together indigenous Samoan and Tongan principles of governance based on insights from Samoan and Tongan governors and from early learning services sector. These principles can be later developed and supported into governance models to be applied in Pacific early learning services and services in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond. The Samoan and Tongan participants did not advocate for a Pan-Pacific governance model.

Both the Samoan and Tongan views on governance emphasise the importance of the collective, protecting and nurturing relationships, and the power of cultural identity through language.

With strong growth in the Pacific Peoples population forecast for the coming decades, it is time to invest in the development of indigenous Samoan and Tongan governance models—for the revitalisation of their language and culture for the benefit of all of Aotearoa New Zealand. Samoan and Tongan governors are clear about the benefits they see in these models for greater educational achievement for future generations.

One of the limitations of the Ministry's Governance, Management and Administration (GMA) is that it still requires Samoan and Tongan governors to contextualise it to their own cultural settings. *One size does not fit all*. Therefore, Samoan and Tongan governance models would enable respective Samoan and Tongan ELS to help themselves – unlock the potential of Samoan and Tongan ancestral knowledges, languages and ways of being, learning and achieving.

Some of the Samoan and Tongan pioneers in the sector have a long history of finding their own solutions with limited government support. They have had to address many interrelated barriers to achieving their governance goals for their respective early learning services.

More support and effort are needed to develop respective Samoan and Tongan governance models and for these models to be 'centred' in the Samoan and Tongan ELS settings and other settings that are interested in how Samoan and Tongan communities speak their languages, learn, and achieve.

**Samoan and Tongan governors at ELS show the need for and value of:**

- Increase Samoan and Tongan services and competencies to reach and better help their own governance and management structures, teachers, parents, and learners, wherever they are in Aotearoa. An example is for the Ministry to increase its Tongan capacity and capability per Tongan population growth.
- Co-create professional development training models relevant to Pacific ELS' needs.
- Promote longevity of contracts built on trust to ensure that stakeholders engaging with Samoan and Tongan ELS can meet the diverse needs of their Board, management, parents and learners.
- Improve collection of and access to Samoan and Tongan governance data to better understand these diverse needs and to reflect cultural understandings of Samoan and Tongan ELS across the country.

In responding to these needs, we recommend that the Ministry put effort across all elements, based on the key messages we have heard from our engagement:

Invest immediately into short-term outcomes:

1. Increase pay parity for teaching staff at all Samoan, Tongan and Pacific ELS
2. Resource and commission the development of individual Pacific governance models
  - A Samoan governance model
  - A Tongan governance model

## Invest in the long-term outcomes

3. *The need for a long-term commitment to all Pacific ELS.* The Ministry to develop and invest in a new long-term strategy to develop a series of governance models for all the Pacific ELS, starting with the Samoan and Tongan models. A Pan-Pacific model has not been identified as a need.
4. Ensure Samoan and Tongan ELS providers have the development, governance, and administrative support they need to be sustainable through high-trust and long-term contracting.
5. Work with industry training organisations and other crown entities to create a viable career pathway to ensure succession planning for the currently ageing workforce in Samoan and Tongan ELS'.
6. Build cultural competency in the Ministry and ERO to understand and support Samoan and Tongan ELS, especially where Samoan and Tongan-focused providers are not available and where data is lacking.
7. Partner to gain cross-government commitment for Pacific governance, particularly on improving Samoan, Tongan, and/or Pacific peoples' access to other governance forums, education, and sharing of lived experience in governance to further centre Indigenous governance knowledge and practices.

# Appendix A: Methodology

## Qualitative report Design

### Overview of the Qualitative Report Approach

The design for this report is rooted in a qualitative approach, which is particularly well-suited for exploring complex, culturally embedded phenomena such as governance within Samoan Early Learning Services. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, experiences, and cultural values, enabling the researcher to capture the richness and nuance of the data. Because the report aimed to explore the need for developing a Samoan Indigenous Governance model, it was essential to employ culturally sensitive methods to elicit meaningful insights from participants.

### Use of the Talanoa Method

The **Talanoa method** was central to the data collection process. Talanoa is a traditional Pacific dialogue and storytelling approach characterised by open, respectful, and relational conversations. It aligns closely with Samoan cultural practices, where communication involves exchanging information, building relationships, and understanding the relational context (Vā).

Talanoa is inherently culturally sensitive, as it allows participants to express themselves in a manner that is comfortable and aligned with their cultural norms. The method encourages a fluid exchange of ideas, stories, and emotions, which helps to capture the depth of participants' experiences and perspectives on governance.

In the context of this report, Talanoa facilitated a relational approach to data collection in which the researcher and participants engaged in a dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding. This approach ensured that the participants felt heard and valued, which is crucial when discussing culturally significant topics such as governance.

Thaman (1992) created the Tongan Kakala Model, which provides a culturally grounded model for conducting and analysing research within Pacific communities. This model is particularly well-suited to research that seeks to

understand and integrate Indigenous knowledge and practices into contemporary contexts.

The Kakala Model comprises four key stages:

1. Teu (Preparation),
2. Toli (Gathering),
3. Tui (Weaving), and
4. Luva (Gifting).

Each of these stages has informed the report approach and thematic analysis in the following ways:

#### Teu (Preparation)

- Context- and Objective-Setting: The preparation stage involved setting the cultural and methodological groundwork for the report
- This included a deep engagement with Samoan cultural values, such as
  - Vā (the respectful space between people)
  - Fa'aaloalo (respect)
  - Tautua (service)

The researchers familiarised themselves with these concepts to ensure the report was conducted culturally respectfully and yielded relevant results.

#### Toli (Gathering)

- Data Collection: The gathering stage focused on collecting rich, culturally relevant participant data. Using the Talanoa method and the Koko Model (Young, 2022), the reporters engaged participants in open, relational conversations that allowed them to express their experiences and perspectives on governance within the ELS. Participants were encouraged to respond in whichever language they felt most comfortable with. Responses in Samoan were translated into English by Salā Marie Young.
- Initial Coding: Data gathered from these conversations was initially coded to identify key features related to the report questions. The coding process was guided by the participant's responses and the cultural values identified during the Teu stage. Artificial intelligence tools were used in the last stages of the coding process, abiding by data governance best practices to ensure the confidentiality of information.

### Tui (Weaving)

- Theme Development: In this stage, the reporters synthesised the coded data into broader themes that reflect the complexity and richness of the participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2016). The weaving process involved carefully combining different strands of data to create a coherent narrative that accurately represents the participants' views on governance, cultural preservation, and their challenges.
- Cultural Integration: The themes reflected the data and were deeply integrated with Samoan cultural principles.
  - For instance, themes such as Vā as the foundation of governance and Soālaupule (collective decision-making) were woven into the analysis to highlight how these cultural concepts are central to the participants' understanding of governance.

### Luva (Gifting)

- Presentation of Findings: The final stage of the Kakala Model, Luva, involves presenting the findings as a “gift” to the community and stakeholders. This stage reflects the reciprocal nature of the reporting process, where the knowledge and insights gained are shared with the community in a way intended to benefit them.
- Recommendations and Practical Applications: The findings, insights, and recommendations are presented not just as academic outputs but as practical tools that can inform the development of a Samoan Indigenous Governance model. This “gift” is intended to support the community in preserving its cultural identity while adapting to the regulatory requirements of Aotearoa New Zealand's educational system.

## **Appendix B: Incorporation of the Koko Model (Young, 2022)**

The report also utilised the Koko Model developed by Young (2022) to further enhance the cultural sensitivity of the data collection process. The Koko Model is specifically designed for engaging in culturally respectful and meaningful conversations with Pacific communities. It builds on the principles of Talanoa but provides additional structure to ensure that the conversations are deep, purposeful, and culturally safe.

The Koko Model is grounded in Samoan cultural values, making it appropriate for this report. It emphasises the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment for participants to freely share their experiences and insights without fear of judgement or misunderstanding.

While the talanoa method is open-ended, the Koko Model introduces a degree of structure that helps guide the conversations toward specific topics, such as governance, cultural preservation, and the challenges the participants face. This structure ensures that the data collected is rich and relevant to the report questions while allowing for the natural flow of conversation.

### **Findings**

#### **Theme 1: Vā as the Foundation of Governance**

##### **Description**

Vā, Anae M, (2016) the relational space between people is a fundamental concept in Samoan culture and governance. It emphasises the importance of maintaining and nurturing relationships through mutual respect (Fa'aaloalo), love (Alofa), and service (Tautua). In governance, Vā is the bedrock upon which decision-making processes are built. It requires that all interactions, discussions, and decisions honour the relationships within the community, ensuring harmony and collective well-being.

Vā manifests as a commitment to inclusive and collaborative decision-making in the governance of Early Learning Services. Leaders and board members prioritise the well-being of their relationships with each other and the community, understanding that strong, respectful relationships are essential for effective governance. This approach contrasts with more hierarchical or individualistic governance models, emphasising the collective responsibility to nurture and protect the Vā.

## Supporting Evidence:

Here are some insights from participants that illustrate the importance of Vā:

**Participant response:** *"It is our Christianity, the vā and fa'asamoa between the one person and another, and between another organisation and another organisation. And another village and another village. That's why it is easier to use the vā because it's not an individualistic concept. It's very collective, it's very community."*

**Participant response:** *"Even if a Samoan doesn't want to practise the vā, the vā is always there. Even if you try to put your Samoan to the side, the vā is always there because you can't just be the vā by yourself."*

**Participant response:** *"They [ERO] don't apply the same vā back to us"*

**Participant response:** *"O le vā feiloa'i po'o le vā fealoloa'i (see glossary for definitions). This is important, especially between the teachers, parents and children. This practice is filtered down to the children. They observe how the adults nurture the vā by sharing, communicating and talking"*

**Participant response:** *"I think the vā is a concept that is important to all Pacific. ...It's not unique to Samoa. It feels really different, you feel like you are dumb, that you don't know anything when the two systems - the Western system and what we see as our system of operating in Governance...there will also be the superior one. Once there are two systems that operate together to achieve an outcome for education or early childhood, when these two worldviews are coming together... the only way we can achieve these outcomes is when we are equal"*

*These examples emphasise that vā is not merely a cultural concept but a guiding principle that influences all aspects of governance, from meeting conduct to decision communication and implementation.*

## Kakala Model Alignment:

This theme is closely aligned with the **Teu** stage of the Tongan Kakala Model. **Teu** represents preparation, which, in the context of governance, involves carefully nurturing and maintaining relationships before any decision-making occurs. Just as a garland (Kakala) requires careful selection and preparation of flowers, effective governance requires the cultivation of the vā.

In practice, Teu in governance means ensuring that all relationships are strong, respectful, and based on mutual understanding before proceeding with governance



activities. This relational preparation is crucial because it ensures that decisions are made to respect the community's interconnectedness and maintain the harmony of relationships (vā).

## Theme 2: Soālaupule: Collective Decision-Making

### Description

**Soālaupule** refers to the practice of collective decision-making, which is a cornerstone of Samoan governance. In this approach, decisions are made through a communal process that values the input and perspectives of all members involved. Soālaupule is deeply rooted in the Samoan cultural emphasis on community and relational harmony (Vā). It ensures that governance is not the domain of a single leader but a shared responsibility among all community members. (Te Mana Ola: Pacific Health Strategy, 2023)

In governing ELS, Soālaupule involves board members, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in discussions and decisions. This inclusive approach helps ensure that the decisions reflect the community's collective will and are more likely to be respected and upheld by all members.

### Supporting Evidence:

Here are some insights that reflect the theme of Soālaupule in practice:

**Participant response:** *"We can look at the village concept of Matai, the way they do decision making and how they collaborate, include and discuss what is best for everyone in the village, then we can hear the voices of all the board governance, teachers, parents, community and all stakeholders. To me, that is our village. Even though it is a saofa'iga (bestowal of title) of a matai in the village, it includes taule'ale'a (untitled men) ma aumaga (untitled women). Many hands make the load easier. "*

**Participant response:** *"I think it's important to have young people in the circle of Matai so that they can hear and listen to the fa'aSamoa because all of the people involved are Matais and it's not a matter of who has a big Matai name, but you get to hear a different kind of language. This is what I always say to our parent representatives. You'll be sitting across the table from people who are speaking so much Samoan-ness into the decision making. Because you can't train this; you can't duplicate it"*

These examples emphasise the communal nature of decision-making in Samoan governance, where the process is as important as the outcome.

### **Kakala Model Alignment:**

This theme aligns with the **Toli** stage of the Tongan Kakala Model. **Toli** involves gathering flowers for the garland, metaphorically representing the gathering of input, ideas, and perspectives in the decision-making process. In Samoan governance, Toli ensures that every voice is heard and considered and that decisions are made collectively rather than unilaterally. By aligning Soālaupule with Toli, the report highlights the importance of gathering and valuing communal input as a critical step in governance.

## **Theme 3: Governance as Cultural Preservation**

### **Description:**

Governance in Samoan culture is not just about making decisions or managing an organisation; it is also a powerful mechanism for preserving and transmitting cultural values and practices. Through governance structures, Samoan cultural principles such as respect (Fa'aaloalo), love (Alofa), and service (Tautua) are upheld and reinforced within the community. The governance practices within Early Learning Services play a crucial role in ensuring that these values are passed on to future generations, helping maintain the Samoan community's cultural identity in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

This means that governance decisions are made with cultural preservation in mind, whether in the curriculum taught at the Centres, the way meetings are conducted, or how relationships are managed within the governance body.

### **Supporting Evidence:**

Participants' views on governance as cultural preservation:

**Participant response:** *"Choosing from Fa'amatai (chiefly system) or 'aiga potopoto (family gathering) means we can understand and relate to its cultural principles because we grew up with this model and approach"*

**Participant response:** *"There are Samoan parents who can't speak Samoan very well. And they wanted us to speak some English and I said you either come knowing that our values are Christian and fa'aSamoa, or you take your child to another Aoga Amata... because this is the one time you are going to bring your child to a preschool, and you will see your child's learning story in the Samoan language. Once they are in primary, intermediate and college you won't have anything in Samoan language again. So, I would rather treasure... even if they don't understand"*

*about the story now they have a record written about their child in their language.  
How do you place a value on that?"*

These examples highlight the connection between governance and cultural preservation in the Samoan context.

### **Kakala Model Alignment:**

This theme is aligned with the **Tui** stage of the Kakala Model. **Tui** refers to the weaving of the garland, where individual flowers (or, in this case, cultural values) are woven together to create a unified whole. This stage represents the integration of Samoan cultural values into the governance model, ensuring that these values are preserved and actively practised within the community. By linking governance to Tui, the report emphasises how governance practices can serve as a vehicle for cultural preservation, weaving the fabric of Samoan identity into the everyday operations of the Centres.

## **Conclusion**

The governance of Early Learning Services in Aotearoa, New Zealand, delves deeply into Samoan cultural values such as Vā (the relational space between people), Soālaupule (collective decision-making), and Tautua (service). These values form the foundation of the Centres' decision-making processes and governance structures, demonstrating a dedicated effort to preserve and pass on Samoan cultural identity to future generations.

The Tongan Kakala Model underscores the significance of preparation (Teu), gathering (Toli), weaving (Tui), and gifting (Luva) in identifying governance concepts and shaping practices.

The report emphasises that effective governance in these Centres goes beyond mere compliance with regulatory models, emphasising the importance of upholding and preserving the cultural values of the Samoan and Tongan communities.

While the report acknowledges the tension between cultural practices and the regulatory requirements of Aotearoa, New Zealand's education system, as well as the challenges posed by resource constraints and the need for more culturally responsive leadership training, it underscores the necessity of a governance model that is both culturally aligned and adaptable to the regulatory environment in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

# Appendix C: Glossary of Terms

## **ako**

- To learn, to study, to receive education.

## **'aiga**

- Extended family units in Samoa are central to Samoan society and the Fa'amatai system. The 'aiga is considered the heart and core of Samoan culture (aganu'u).

## **'aiga potopoto**

- Refers to Samoan culture's extended family, kin, and relationship networks.
- It serves as the foundation of the faletalimalo (a metaphorical house representing Samoan social structure).
- 'aiga potopoto plays a crucial role in connecting, supporting, and elevating Samoan people in various aspects of life, including:
  - Spiritual responsibilities
  - Physical characteristics
  - Social relationships
  - Emotional wellbeing
  - Psychological functioning
  - Economic viability
  - The Samoan identity of self is developed, nurtured, and replicated within the context of the aiga.
- 'aiga potopoto encompasses various roles and statuses within Samoan society, such as:
  - Matai (chiefs, family leaders)
  - Religious leaders (ministers)
  - Elders
  - Feagaiga (covenant relationships)
  - Taule'ale'a (untitled men)
  - Aualuma (unmarried women)
  - Tama'iti (children)
- In diasporic contexts (e.g., New Zealand, America), the concept of 'aiga potopoto has evolved to include:
  - Traditional family structures
  - Diverse ethnic mixes
  - Extended networks of Samoans in the local area or city
- The 'aiga potopoto is closely linked to the concept of va fealoalo'ai (relational space), emphasising the importance of maintaining respectful relationships within and outside the family structure.
- A Samoan proverb that reflects the importance of aiga potopoto is "o le tagata ma lona tofi," meaning that each person has a designated role and responsibility within the family network.
- In summary, 'aiga potopoto is a fundamental concept in Samoan culture that represents the extended family and relationship networks, serving as the core of Samoan identity, social structure, and cultural practices. (Scroope, 2017)

## **Alofa**

- Love or compassion
- One of the fundamental values in fa'aSāmoa (the Samoan way of life)
- It encompasses a broad concept of love that includes kindness, care, and concern for others

## **A'oga Amata**

Refers to Samoan early childhood education centres or preschools. Samoan immersion or bilingual early childhood education services provide care and education for young children, typically from 6 months to 5 years old.

- Aoga Amata centres aim to promote and preserve the Samoan language (gagana Samoa) and culture (aganu'u Samoa) among young children.
- These centres often incorporate Christian values and fa'aSamoa (the Samoan way of life) into their educational philosophy.
- Aoga Amata are part of the broader early childhood education system in New Zealand and are subject to licensing and review by educational authorities.
- They play an important role in supporting Samoan families and communities in maintaining their cultural identity while providing early childhood education services.
- Many Aoga Amata centres originated from community initiatives, often associated with Samoan churches, to create spaces for children to learn and be immersed in Samoan language and culture

## **Vā**

- The space between two objects or people
- In the context of human interaction and relationships, vā refers to the relational space that connects people
- It is a concept that underpins Samoan and Tongan social interactions and is considered the context by which meanings are given to things
- Vā is conceptualised and lived out holistically, informing principles that define and govern appropriate conduct and language between people

## **Va fealoalo'ai**

Refers to the relational space in Samoan culture that emphasises respectful relationships within and outside the family structure.

1. It represents the internal boundaries of the faletalimalo (a metaphorical house representing Samoan social structure).
2. These boundaries serve to protect the family while maintaining safe limits with those outside the family construct.
3. A well-known Samoan expression related to va fealoalo'ai is "la teu le va," which means to "nurture, cherish and take care" of the relational space, first within one's family and then with the wider community.

4. The internal boundaries of va fealoalo'ai encompass practices such as:
  - Aga'alofa (love/charity)
  - Fa'aaloalo (respect/deference)
  - Agaga fesoasoani (support/helpfulness)
  - Fealofani (relational harmony)
5. The relational space requires continuous attention to avoid being "soli" (trampled).
6. It is critical in therapeutic work with Samoan families or communities, as it helps people understand their appropriate connections with one another.
7. Lack of awareness or understanding of va fealoalo'ai can lead to dishonouring the relational space and trampling the sacredness of people's dignity.
8. When vā fealoalo'ai is violated, it can result in communication breakdown or withdrawal from participation until the space is restored and healed.
9. Healing the va is represented by the notion of "teu," which means to restore it back to its rightful condition and purpose.

Understanding and respecting va fealoalo'ai is crucial for maintaining harmonious relationships in Samoan culture and is particularly important for practitioners working with Samoan individuals or communities. (Seiuli 2013)

## **ELS**

### **Early Learning Services**

#### **Fa'aaloalo**

- Respect
- One of the core values of Samoan culture
- It guides how Samoan people interact with others and show deference, especially to elders and those in positions of authority

#### **Faamaoni**

- It's important to note that in Samoan language, the prefix "fa'a-" often means "to make" or "in the manner of", and "maoni" on its own means "true" or "real". So "fa'amaoni" literally translates to "to make true" or "in a true manner", which aligns with the concepts of honesty and faithfulness.

#### **Fa'amatai**

- The indigenous political system of Samoa is central to the organisation of Samoan society. It is the traditional form of governance in American Samoa and the Independent State of Samoa, regulating authority and articulating customary governance.

#### **Fa'aSāmoa**

- The Samoan way of life encompasses customs, traditions, and social norms. It's not only a customary body of law but also the identity of Samoan people, guiding how they carry themselves through the world. Fa'aSāmoa is based on a network of values including 'autasi (consensus), alofa (love/compassion), Fa'aaloalo (respect), and mamalu (dignity).

**Faka'apa'apa**

- Respect
- One of the core values of Tongan culture that operates from a collective perspective.
- Prompts the protection and honour of individual differences and uniqueness.
- Values equity more so than equality.

**Fono o Matai**

- Village councils composed of matai, responsible for decision-making and governance at the village level. These councils are part of the social structure around which Samoan society revolves.

**GMA**

Governance, Management, Administration:

**Kainga**

- A Tongan concept that means relation, relative.
- Often used in a collective, to be related to/in a relationship.

**Kakala Model**

- The Tongan Kakala Model, created by Thaman (1992), provides a culturally grounded model for conducting and analysing research within Pacific communities.
- The Kakala Model comprises four key stages: Teu (Preparation), Toli (Gathering), Tui (Weaving), and Luva (Gifting).

**Koko Model**

- The Koko Model was created by Marie Young (2022) for her Master's thesis to help guide her talanoa particularly for sensitive subject matters.

**Koloa**

- A Tongan term that means goods, wealth, riches, possessions
- What one values - both tangible and intangible
- *Koloa 'ia* means to be in abundance.

**Mamahi'i me'a**

- A Tongan term that means to be zealous for, stand up for, strive for or fight for

**Matai**

- Titled heads of Samoan extended families or chiefs. They hold authority and responsibility for the welfare of their extended families. Both men and women have equal rights to matai titles, although women comprise a relatively small percentage of matai.

**'Ofa**

- Love or compassion
- One of the fundamental values in Tongan culture
- It encompasses a broad concept of love that includes kindness, care, and concern for others

**Saofa'iga a Matai**

A ceremony where matai titles are bestowed.

**Soālaupule**

- This is a traditional Samoan inclusive decision-making process that aims to reach a general consensus. The word can be broken down into two parts:
- "Soa" means to share
- "Laupule" means power and leadership
- Is a strategy used by Samoans to empower people to make contributions in decision-making processes and procedures. It emphasises collaborative empowerment and is practised in various contexts, including within the matai (chiefs) system, extended families, and church meetings.

**Talanoa**

- Talanoa is a well-known Pacific concept. It refers to a form of dialogue that brings people together to share ideas, create knowledge, and foster relationships. An inclusive, participatory, and transparent process of conversation. (Vaiioleti, T. M., 2006)

**Tauhi**

- In Tongan culture, this concept means to tend, look after, take care of or to minister to.
- Often applied with tauhi fonua (serve/protect the country), tauhi kakai (service/protect people).

**Tautua**

- A servant, to serve, to be of service
- In Samoan culture, tautua is a fundamental concept that emphasises the importance of service to one's family, community, and society as a whole. It is often associated with the idea that leadership comes through service.

**Wero**

- Challenge - this is the primary meaning of wero, especially in the context of traditional Māori protocol.



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# **Malo 'aupito Fa'afetai lava**