

**College:** Tairawhiti Polytechnic  
**Location:** Gisborne, NEW ZEALAND  
**Practice:** Certificate in Forestry  
 Developing a local pool of skilled workers and improving opportunities for the Maori community

<i>Year Started</i>	1997
<i>Budget</i>	\$55,000
<i>Program Participants</i>	300 since inception
<i>College FTE</i>	1,350
<i>Target Sector</i>	Forestry
<i>Staff Size</i>	13 (in the forestry department as a whole)
<i>Structure</i>	Cooperative educational program
<i>Key Outcomes</i>	Filled labor shortages in the local forestry industry Training and placing previously unemployed Maori in skilled positions Increased numbers of self-employed contractors

## Introduction

Unable to find enough skilled workers locally, the forestry industry in New Zealand’s Wairoa region has been forced to import labor to harvest, prune, and plant. This labor import was occurring against a backdrop of high local unemployment, and did nothing to ease the local employment crisis.

An innovative effort, the Certificate in Forestry at Tairawhiti Polytechnic attempts to meet both industry and community needs through one initiative: training local people to be the forestry industry’s skilled workforce. To accomplish this, Tairawhiti Polytechnic acts as the hub of a partnership between industry, local government, national government, and local communities. Such a partnership and training alliance is critical when

the nature of the industry prohibits relocation.

## Community Background

New Zealand’s East Coast Region has the country’s lowest per capita income, lowest education levels, and a declining population. In some areas, local unemployment reaches 90 percent. The population is predominantly Maori—an indigenous people.

The area was traditionally a pastoral region that relied primarily on sheep and cattle exports. The food industry is in decline, however; and forestry and services are increasing, along with a wine sector (small in comparison to the first two). The forestry industry is predicting stable, if not increasing, employment needs in the future (harvest is expected

Program focus	Sector specific	Economic condition	Economic base			Target populations
			Mfg	Agr	Svc	
Technical education	No	Distressed	N/A	N/A	N/A	Economically disadvantaged (unemployed)

Service Area	Gisborne
Total Population	46,000
Median Household Income	NZP 18,000 (\$ 8242)
% Below Poverty Level	28 (dependent on government benefits)
% Unemployment Rate	11-80 in rural areas
% Minority Population	44.9 (Maori)
% Rural Population	95
% Secondary Graduates	28
% Tertiary Graduates	29.7

to increase 250 percent over the next 10 years) and is the most promising employment sector. Indeed, the region's five forestry companies anticipated a collective need for 280 additional skilled laborers in the year 2000 and another 300 in 2001.

## Program Description

In the early 1980s, regional community colleges were created throughout New Zealand to serve the unique needs of local populations by offering primarily vocational courses and applied degrees. Tairāwhiti Polytechnic, established in 1982, began offering the forestry program in 1997. Sixty-five percent of students enrolled at Tairāwhiti are Maori; 98 percent of the forestry students are Maori.

The 18-week accredited course in forestry combines theoretical with practical experience; participants are required to work in the industry in order to complete the program. This is of course a benefit as it exposes workers to potential employers and allows workers to establish a network within the industry.

The course covers topics including forestry safety, first aid, plantation tree planting, growth cycles, pruning, tree thinning and felling techniques, and team dynamics.

Because the program is an attempt to acknowledge and respond to the needs of industry, industry was a key player in establishing the program and remains one in administering it—supporting curriculum development and providing practical oversight for trainees during their field experience.

In an area with very low literacy rates (in one community, 58 percent of the population read

below adult level), training in reading and other basic skills is just as important as training in industry-specific skills. Consequently, the program addresses those needs as well. In addition, the program's training techniques are adapted to fit various learning styles, with an emphasis on experiential or hands-on learning incorporated as often as possible into the curriculum.

## Outcomes

Since its inception in 1997, the program has trained and placed nearly 300 workers in the region's forestry industry. Some graduates have even made the move to self-employment in the industry.

Asked about the program, students have responded positively (assessments averaging 4.25 on a 5-point scale). Participants felt that the program was well constructed, had an appropriate training technique (hands on) and was very useful for future employment. In fact, the most common complaint was not with the course, but with the administration of financial aid. This is particularly significant given that many participants are in debt from enrolling in the program.

Responses from industry have also been positive. Industry is pleased with the increase in the local labor force, but identified areas where modification is needed. For example, some firms would like to see the course expanded from 18 weeks to 34 weeks and move it from certification to degree level. In addition, industry personnel are noticing a decline in skills among the workforce as the program yields to government pressure to increase the number of participants trained.

## Strengths, Challenges, and Replicability

There is still much untapped potential to expand this effort to other regional communities. The community of Nuhaka, for example, has several thousand hectares of forest holdings ready for harvest and additional hectares in various stages of growth. It also has high unemployment. Taken together, with the help of the forestry training program, those two characteristics can become opportunity.

Leadership, in particular the leadership of an individual from within the Maori community who has been "the driver, the person with the vision for

the local Nuhaka community into the future” is a key to the program’s success. He has led by example, accepting debt in exchange for training, and is recognized as a primary motivator for the rest of the community.

Another key component is support—from government, local communities, and industry. The average annual budget, provided by government and educational authorities, is relatively low—NZ pa.120,000 (\$55,000)—and supports both the college and participants. Local communities have also financially supported the program, at one time even contributing the money to purchase a bus to take participants from one Maori community to a nearby town where the course is taught. Industry support is, of course, critical to ensure that the skills taught are those that industry demands. Above all, the support must be consistent and long term; the needs of the communities and the industry cannot be met in one training cycle.

*For more information, contact:*

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