

fwd: Certification

Supplier Certification Process

VERSION 1.0 EXTERNAL



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Definitions

Supplier

This term is used to represent a social enterprise supplier or potential supplier throughout this document.

Buyer

This term is used to represent a buying organisation (who may be private, public or hybrid in nature) throughout this document.

Impact

The positive social, cultural and/or environmental impact that is realised by the Supplier.

1. Supplier Certification Outline

1.1 Purpose

The primary purpose of certification is to provide a *third-party certification mechanism to a social enterprise Supplier that mitigates perceived risks for Buyer organisations*. This is an Ākina certification that has value based on our knowledge, experience and independence as a social enterprise intermediary in New Zealand.

1.2 Key Principles of Certification

1. It is inclusive: The certification is available to social enterprise Suppliers irrespective of their legal form. The evidence that is considered in certification recognises the differences between legal forms utilised in NZ.
2. It is an annual process: Certification applies for a period of one year, and will be renewed (or validated) on an annual basis. This recognises that the social enterprise is a dynamic environment in terms of practice, policy and participants, and that social enterprises themselves will also change over time. Certification also builds upon the relationship with, and information from, the Supplier from the previous year.
3. It aligns with other relevant marks and certifications where possible: The certification is intended to be complementary, and builds upon evidence and requirements of other similar schemes and labels where practicable (e.g. B-Corp).

1.3 What does Certification cover?

Certification covers three main **criteria** (refer to [Assessment Criteria](#) for more information):

1. **Social Enterprise:** The Supplier is, in fact, a social enterprise (SE) in accordance with a definition ([refer to Appendix 1: Section 5.1](#)).
2. **Goods/Services:** Confirmation of the goods and/or services that the Supplier delivers in a business-to-business (B2B) relationship, and the extent to which these are delivered.
3. **Impact:** Confirmation of the positive impact that is realised by the Supplier.

These three criteria are considered in turn in accordance with the certification process.



2. Certification Process Overview

The certification process comprises a series of stages, whereby evidence is collected by Ākina to assess the Supplier against the criteria. The process of collating information and the assessment of criteria is outlined in Figure 1.

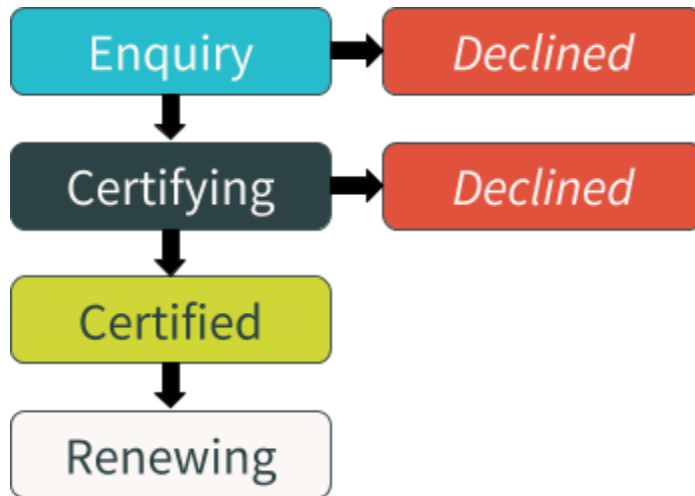


Figure 1: Certification Process Overview

2.1 Enquiry

This is the Suppliers' first point of contact with fwd: and a first opportunity to determine whether the Supplier is qualified to be put through the more rigorous and evidence-based certification process.

- Supplier enquires through fwd.org.nz/supplier-contact (form).
- Enquiry decision is made:
 - **Accepted:** *Supplier is accepted for certification*
 - **Declined:** Supplier is not a SE, is early-stage or does not provide goods/services to businesses.
 - This should be verified by Ākina through email exchange or phone call with the Supplier.
 - Supplier is notified and referred to other Ākina services (e.g. capability building), if applicable.



2.2 Certifying

There are four different stages to certifying a Supplier: Application, Assessment, Review & QA and Awarding Certification.

2.2.1 STAGE 1: Application

The Supplier formally applies to Ākina for certification providing a greater level of detail than was provided in the Enquiry stage.

1. **Application Form:** Ākina provides an Application Form to the Supplier, which the Supplier completes and submits.
2. **Stage 1 QA:**
 - Ākina reviews Stage 1 information and other publicly-available information, in particular:
 - Criteria 1 (SE): Legal form, organisation structure, and basic information
 - Criteria 2 (Goods/services): B2B trade capability
 - Criteria 3 (Impact): Impact and beneficiaries

Ākina establishes a list of any missing information or questions Ākina may have of the Supplier, based on initial information gathered in Stage 1 in order to prepare for Stage 2: Assessment.

2.2.2 STAGE 2: Assessment

Stage 2 involves three steps, including the finalisation of required information and documents through an interview and a legal, financial and branding information form.

1. **Legal, Financial & Branding:** Ākina provides a form covering Legal, Financial and Branding Information to the Supplier.
 - The **legal agreement** outlines Terms and Conditions and gives Ākina permission to include the Supplier's details on the fwd: marketplace.
 - After the Supplier signs and returns the legal agreement, an authorised Ākina representative (GM Operations or CE) signs the agreement before it is returned to the Supplier.
 - The **financial declaration** validates the financial evidence required to support certification. This form must be completed by an individual who can independently validate the information required (e.g. Chartered Accountant, solicitor, auditor or banker).
 - To ensure the Supplier and the Supplier's brand are represented on the Supplier listing on the fwd: Marketplace, Ākina requires the Supplier's **logo**, a **contact profile image** and a **cover image**.
2. **Interview:** Ākina undertakes a Supplier interview to confirm Stage 1's list of missing information and questions (if applicable), and further information about impact.



- Criteria 1 (SE): Purpose and purpose-lock (for Limited Liability Companies, in particular)
 - Criteria 2 (Goods/services): Confirm capability and value proposition
 - Criteria 3 (Impact): Confirm scale of impact, beneficiaries and reporting
3. **Stage 2 QA:** Ākina reviews and finalises all information relating to the Supplier, including:
- Images and logos received and reviewed.
 - Legal agreement signed, received, signed by Ākina and returned to Supplier.
 - Financial Declaration has been signed by an appropriate third-party professional and returned.

Provisional certification applies to a Supplier passing through Stage 1 and Stage 2 as follows:

- **Accepted:** *Supplier is awarded provisional certification if Ākina's criteria are met*
- **Declined:** Supplier is not awarded provisional certification and advised of reasons why this has been declined.

2.2.3 STAGE 3: Review & QA

Stage 3 involves Ākina finalising information for the fwd: marketplace listing, including drafting statements about the social enterprise, the goods/services offered and the positive social, cultural and/or environmental impact.

- Ākina provides a Supplier Capability Statement¹ covering all the information that will be publicly available on the fwd: marketplace to the Supplier and seeks approval (before publishing the content to the fwd: marketplace for Buyers to see).
- The Supplier signs off on the Capability Statement or notifies Ākina of any necessary amendments.

2.2.4 STAGE 4: Awarding Certification

Stage 4 involves the following three steps:

1. **Publish Listing:** Ākina publishes the finalised Supplier Listing, which will now be visible to fwd: Buyers.
2. **Brand assets:** Certification mark is provided to Supplier along with a Supplier Guide that outlines how to use the certification mark and what it means to be a fwd: Supplier.
3. **Publicity:** Ākina may publicly announce that the Supplier has been awarded certification in agreement with the Supplier.

¹ Supplier Capability Statement is a PDF that can be downloaded by Ākina and Buyers from a Supplier's listing page on the fwd: marketplace.



2.3 Security & Access

All certification-related information Ākina holds on a Supplier will be kept confidential and access will only be granted to parties who require access.

Ākina will take reasonable precautions to ensure that information provided to Ākina by or on behalf of the Supplier is not lost, misused, or inappropriately accessed, disclosed, altered or destroyed.

2.4 Certification Anniversary

- The Supplier's certification status lasts for one year and will then be due for renewal.
- The Supplier's certification anniversary will fall on the first of the month. For example, if a Supplier officially became certified on 9 November, the certification anniversary will be 1 December.
- The Supplier will be sent a renewal reminder one month before certification is due to renew.

3. Certification Renewal

The renewal of certification is required annually. This is to ensure the Supplier still meets the certification criteria.

The process involves the following steps:

1. Confirmation that the Supplier seeks to have certification renewed (Opt-In, Opt-Out).
 - a. Should the Supplier wish to opt-out, the Supplier may do so before the certification anniversary and will be removed from the platform on the Supplier's anniversary date.
2. A review of the organisational information held by Ākina, with any necessary updates made.
3. A review of the criteria against the current certification process (this document, or future amendments).
4. Execution of a new Financial Declaration that reflects the current position of the Supplier.

Where possible, updates of information will be predominantly completed by the Supplier independently, with QA from Ākina where required to confirm the certification requirements are met.



Appendix 1 - Assessment Criteria

4. Criteria 1: Social Enterprise

4.1 Definition of Social Enterprise

The definition of social enterprise is central to this aspect of the certification process. As there is currently no agreed or formal legal definition of social enterprise in New Zealand, Ākina have utilised a definition that is based on [Fases, 2010](#):

A Social Enterprise is an organisation that meets the following:

1. **Purpose:** the social, cultural and environmental mission provides a *public or community benefit*² and is the *primary purpose*³ of the organisation.
2. **Trading:** the *majority*⁴ of income is from *trading*⁵ a good and/or a service.
3. **Reinvestment**⁶: the *majority of either expenditure or profit is spent in the fulfilment of the purpose of the organisation*.

This is intended to be a ‘working definition’ for certification, given that it could change over time or with the evolution of special legal forms for social enterprise in New Zealand.

This definition forms the basis of Criteria 1 for the certification process.

² **Public or community benefit:** may include member benefits where membership is open and voluntary and/or benefits that accrues to a subsection of the public that experiences structural or systemic disadvantage. The environmental is also included as a beneficiary in this definition.

³ **Primary purpose:** the social, cultural or environmental mission is central to the organisation, the mission is meaningful, and the organisation demonstrates genuine intent to deliver this mission.

⁴ **Majority:** operationalised as 50% or more for social enterprises that are more than five years from start-up (i.e. the majority of revenue from trade), 25% or more for social enterprises that are three to five years from start-up, and demonstrable intention to trade for ventures that are less than three years from start-up.

⁵ **Trading:** trading activity is defined as the organised exchange of goods and services, including: monetary, non-monetary and alternative currency transactions, where these are sustained activities of an enterprise; contractual sales to governments, where there has been an open tender process; and trade within member-based organisations, where membership is open and voluntary or where membership serves a traditionally marginalised social group.

⁶ **Reinvestment:** the uses of revenue and profit/surplus within the operations of the organisation are aligned with the primary purpose of the organisation and the delivery of that purpose.



4.2 Criteria 1: Certification Process

4.2.1 Context

The question of whether an organisation is a social enterprise, or not, is the most potentially contentious aspect of certification due to the absence of any formal definitions (e.g. Government or peak body organisations) and the ongoing evolution of social enterprise as an emerging sector.

We have set a definition for certification at this point in time and apply it in a considerate and practical way recognising that (a) the definition is temporal, and also that (b) guidance of best-practice for structuring and operating a social enterprise is not coherent and consistent across New Zealand.

The legal forms utilised for social enterprise are varied, and the application of the definition has been considered in accordance with the primary legal forms used; those being a Charitable Trust and a Limited Liability Company (LLC). In addition, whether an organisation holds registered Charitable Status⁷ is also an important consideration. Other legal forms such as an Incorporated Society will be considered on a case by case basis.

4.2.2 Evidence

The application of Criteria 1 (the SE definition), the benchmarks and associated standards of evidence are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Application of Criteria 1

Category	Best Practice/ Benchmark	Test/Evidence	Registered Charity (Trust or LLC)	Charitable Trust	Company (LLC)
Purpose	Social/cultural/ environmental purpose clearly defined, meaningful and central to organisation	Legal Form, public information and governing docs as required (e.g. constitution)	Not required – Use Charitable Purpose (NZ Charities Register)	Not reqd – Use publicly-stated Trust Deed (NZ Companies Office)	SEE TABLE 2 BELOW
Trading	% Revenue from trade (tiered by age)	Financial Declaration	Applied consistently to all entities		
			<u>Year 0-2</u> Stated intent to trade and evidence of trade	<u>Year 3-4</u> >25% of total revenue from trade	<u>Year 5+</u> >50% of total revenue from trade
Reinvestment	The majority of revenue or surplus is aligned to purpose and used to deliver the purpose	Financial Declaration and governing docs as required	Not reqd – no distribution of profit allowed	Not reqd – no distribution of profit allowed	SEE TABLE 2 BELOW

⁷ See <https://www.charities.govt.nz/#>



For a Company (LLC), the following additional best-practice and tests are recommended as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Considerations for Limited Liability Companies

Element	Core Evidence	Best Practice/ Benchmark	Test/Evidence
Purpose clear, defined and locked	Governing Docs + Public Docs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose is defined and publicly stated or available • Purpose is meaningful • Purpose “locked” within Governing documents (e.g. constitution and shareholders agreement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation (available or provided) • Founder/leadership commitment and stated intent • Company activities aligned with purpose • Purpose is targeting meaningful impact and beneficiaries
Reinvestment	Financial Declaration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose (impact) is delivered through day-to-day operations AND/OR • Purpose (impact) delivered through profit/surplus • Profit/surplus generated is appropriately distributed to impact • Governing/operating documents limit distributions appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation (available or provided) • Financial Declaration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Appropriate amount of revenue directed to impact based on industry (COGS, operating structure etc) ◦ Appropriate proportion of profit/surplus distributed to impact ◦ Considerate of required investment in organisation and growth
Reinvestment - Asset Lock (optional)	Governing Doc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution of residual assets on dissolution to social/enviro purpose described in Governing documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation (available or provided)

4.2.3 Assessment Process

The following outlines the broad assessment process at each Stage of certification:

- Stage 1 (Application) - information relating to legal structure, charitable status and organisation structure enables first-pass assessment of Criteria 1 (particularly Purpose, Reinvestment) based on legal form.
- Stage 2 (Assessment) - further information gathered enables better understanding of purpose and impact generated, and purpose-lock (for companies).
- Stage 2 (Assessment) - Financial Declaration and clarifications confirm extent of trading (for all Legal Forms) and Reinvestment/Distribution.

4.2.4 Decision-making

- Entities have the potential to confirm the purpose and reinvestment requirements due to limitations associated with certain legal forms (Charitable Status, or Trust).
- For companies, a combination of information and stated intent has been used as evidence where appropriate. This is due to the early-stages of a use of a definition for certification, and the need to inform and upskill the sector on aspects of best-practice generally.



- Other certifications such as B-Corp confirm both the purpose, and primary nature of the purpose for a Limited Liability Company and have been considered during certification where appropriate.
- The Financial Declaration has been used to gather information relating to proportion of expenditure and/or profit directed toward impact within an organisation. Currently, there is limited sector-level visibility on how organisations currently compare to the ‘majority’ benchmark. Certification will give an insight into best practice, including how considerations such as industry or service category (e.g. some services require greater expenditure allocated to cost of goods) and reinvestment into business growth (e.g. capital) are practically incorporated into the definition. This approach will evolve over time as the understanding of social enterprise operations at a sector level grows.
- Certification signals best-practice within the criteria and assessment, and have the ability to tighten evidence over time. For example, moving impact reporting from a desirable to a mandatory requirement.
- For decisions where there is confusion or contention relating to Criteria 1, the **fwd: Advisory Group** will hold sole and final authority whether Criteria 1 is met appropriately for the certification of a social enterprise.

5. Criteria 2: Goods/Services

5.1 Criteria 2: Certification Process

5.1.1 Context

Not all social enterprises in New Zealand provide goods/services that are of interest to other businesses (both the type of service/good and the scale of delivery). Certification is focussed on business-to-business (or B2B) goods/services, and not goods/services that are provided to consumers (known as business-to-consumer or B2C). The focus on B2B procurement is deliberate to grow trade between Buyers and Suppliers at a level that is significant and meaningful to both the Buyer and the Supplier. This may result in some social enterprises not being certified due to being predominantly B2C in nature, and also for some social enterprises, not all of the goods/services they provide will be certified.

The second focus of Criteria 2 is to confirm the market category in which Supplier operates in, and the particular goods/services offered. Ākina receives this information in good faith as accurate and complete, however certification can actively question any perceived inconsistencies that may indicate their ability to deliver (e.g. by comparing the size of an entity, size of contracts sought and turnover).

While certification forms an opinion on the capability of a Supplier based on the information provided, it is not a guarantee or warranty of capability, readiness and/or performance of the Supplier. It is intended that certification supports, informs and reduces perceived barriers to trade, but doesn’t replace existing Buyer appraisal systems and processes.



Ākina holds a position that is consistent with the [SE Code of Scotland](#):

“The SE Code does not set out to infer a level of quality or that an organisation meets a certain standard in its work. It aims to reflect the values and behaviours that guide how a social enterprise operates as an organisation and the manner in which it seeks to deliver its services or products.”

5.1.2 Evidence

Evidence relating to Criteria 2 includes the following:

- Organisational size and capacity (e.g. employees, turnover)
- Geographical area served (region, NZ and/or international)
- Information to support the capability to provide the service:
 - Insurance
 - Memberships, certifications or accreditations
- Good/service category and description (may be more than 1)
- Previous contract history (range of contract sizes)
- Contracts sought (range of contract sizes)
- Customer history (and referees)

5.1.3 Assessment Process

- Stage 1 (Application) - information relating to goods/services provided by Supplier and track record.
- Stage 2 (Assessment) - confirmation of detail and inconsistencies in goods/services and indication of value proposition. In particular, comparing consistency between Supplier size, contract history and contracts sought.
- Stage 2 (Assessment) - Financial Declaration confirms turnover vs capability.
- Stage 3 (Review and QA) - Confirmation of service statements and value proposition.

5.1.4 Decision-making

- Categorisation of goods/services as B2B is subjective, and confirmed by trading history (previous customers, contract sizes, duration of trade).
- Liaison with Supplier and confirmation of detail usually allows for the adjustment and confirmation of the goods/services offered and determining appropriate contract sizes to be reflected to Buyers.
- For decisions where there is confusion or contention relating to Criteria 2, the fwd: Advisory Group will hold sole and final authority whether Criteria 2 is met and reflected appropriately.



6. Criteria 3: Impact

6.1 Criteria 3: Certification Process

6.1.1 Context

The delivery of social, cultural and/or environmental impact is primary for social enterprises, and impact is key assessment criteria for certification. Impact is a complex area to define, measure and communicate. It also subject to considerable change within the sector as there is a balance sought between an appropriate level of impact assessment, and a practical way to assess impact in organisations that typically lack specialist and available resources.

Certification seeks firstly to confirm that meaningful and significant impact is delivered by a social enterprise for public or community benefit. It is important to note that impact is usually delivered to a subset or aspect of the broader public or community (e.g. people with disability or long-term unemployed), and that the environment can also be considered in a similar way (e.g. climate change). In addition, a social enterprise may deliver multiple forms of impact across social, cultural and/or environmental areas.

The ‘beneficiaries’ of the impact (whether social, cultural or environmental) also need to be clearly identified. While there is no widely-accepted process used for impact definition and measurement in social enterprises, the Ākina certification process has proposed a series of categories for both the nature of impact and beneficiaries to explore whether a consistent approach can be applied. This has been applied in a customised way to ensure the individual differences of each organisation’s impact are captured appropriately. Clearly communicating the impact of a Supplier to a Buyer is necessary, as this is what social procurement is predicated on. To support this, alignment with emerging frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is captured during certification, as such frameworks become more prevalent in both the private and public sector. Further work is required to further align these with established frameworks such as GRI and IR that are used for business sustainability reporting.

The second aspect of impact is to assess and capture the scale of impact. In Australia, this has primarily been focussed on employment outcomes (i.e. the number of jobs created by a social enterprise for disadvantaged groups) given this is a primary interest of Government. Impact measurement and reporting is necessary for a social enterprise, and capability building and the development best-practice is a noted requirement for the social enterprise sector as a whole. Through certification, the scale of impact even at a transactional level is explored, and the need to be able to convey the impact enabled through a transaction with a Buyer is clearly signalled to Suppliers. This will also be driven through real-world procurement transactions as they occur.

Ākina receives impact information in good faith as accurate and complete, however certification can actively question any perceived inconsistencies. For some entities, holding registration as a Charity provides some assurance as to the nature and scale of impact. Despite this, there is a consistent



approach being applied to all legal forms of social enterprise to further understand practice and to see an evolution of how certification considers impact can be achieved.

While certification forms an opinion on the impact of a Supplier based on this information, it is not a guarantee or warranty of the delivery of impact by the Supplier. It is intended that certification gives Buyers a clear definition and expectation of impact, and that measuring and reporting impact forms a key component of the assessment of Suppliers in both procurement and contract management as social procurement practice evolves in NZ.

6.1.2 Evidence

Evidence relating to Criteria 3 includes the following:

- Impact category or categories (e.g. the nature and type of impact, and whether this is meaningful).
- Beneficiaries (who or what benefits from the impact).
- Reporting (impact measured and reported in a publicly available manner).
- Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals.
- The scale of impact (both as a whole organisation and at a transaction level).

6.1.3 Assessment Process

- Stage 1 (Application) - information relating to Impact delivered by Supplier and whether this is meaningful. Indication of impact area and beneficiaries, plus links to impact reporting.
- Stage 2 (Assessment) - confirmation of scale of impact, beneficiaries and reporting in greater depth.
- Stage 3 (Review and QA) - Confirmation of impact statements and value proposition.

6.1.4 Decision-making

- A review of impact, and the value and efficacy of this can be subjective, and will be predominantly confirmed through the interview process.
- There is an opportunity to use a scale such as NESTA (Figure 2) to determine the maturity of the impact framework of a Supplier.
- At this stage the standards of evidence will be used as a guide to understand the nature of impact and measurement of outcomes. In addition, the certification process is making use of categories of impact and beneficiaries to bring some consistency to the way impact is described.
- The scale of impact is an important area where consistency will be important, to allow the aggregation of impact from individual Suppliers at a marketplace level. At this stage, this is understood through an interview process and the emergence of standard measures (e.g. the NZ Wellbeing Framework, SDGs) will allow consistency to be applied to this parameter.



- For decisions where there is confusion or contention relating to Criteria 3, the fwd: Advisory Group will hold sole and final authority whether Criteria 3 is met and reflected appropriately.



Source: Puttick, R. and Ludlow, J. (2012) "Standards of Evidence for Impact Investing." London: Nesta.

Figure 2: NESTA impact measurement scale sourced from *Standards of Evidence for Impact Investing* (NESTA)

Appendix 2 - Categories

7.1 Industry Categories

Advertising & Media	Horticulture & Arboriculture	Personal & Domestic Services
Architecture, Planning & Design	Human Resource Services & Recruitment	Printing & Distribution Services
Building Products & Materials	Industrial Production & Manufacture	Professional, Scientific & Technical Services
Building Trade, Repairs & Maintenance	IT & Telecommunications	Real Estate & Property Services
Business & Administrative Services	Legal Services	Security Services & Equipment
Catering & Hospitality	Library Services	Signs & Barriers
Cleaning Services, Equipment & Supplies	Marketing & Communications	Sport & Rec Equipment & Services
Clothing & Safety Equipment	Mechanical Services	Training & Education Services
Community & Social Services	Merchandise & Personal Products	Transport, Freight & Logistics
Financial & Insurance Services	Mining, Oil & Gas	Travel & Tourism
Fleet Servicing & Accessories	Music, Games, Toys, Arts, Crafts & Educational	Venue Hire
Food & Beverage Products	Office Supplies & Services	Waste Management & Landfill
Furniture & Furnishings	Parking, Traffic Services & Equipment	
Healthcare Services		

7.2 Impact Categories

Health/Wellbeing	Strong, Resilient Communities
Housing	Financial Inclusion/Reduced poverty
Nutrition/Food Security	Environmental Protection
Education/Training	Waste Reduction
Decent Work	Climate Action
Social inclusion/Equality	Other
Maori Development	

7.3 Beneficiary Categories

Children & Youth	Homelessness
Older People	LGBT Community
Families	Long-Term Unemployed
Māori & Pasifika	Marginalised Men
Other Indigenous Peoples	Marginalised Women
Particular Community	People in Developing Countries
People with Mental Illness & Addictions	Marginalised People or Communities
New Migrants or Refugees	Charitable or Not-For-Profit Organisation
People with Disabilities	Animals
Ex-Offenders & Prisoners	Environmental Sustainability
People Experiencing or At Risk of	Spiritual/Religious Community

