FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Citi New Zealand
13 November 2025

Citi Foundation selects Te Pou Theatre to accelerate Māori youth employability through performing arts

Te Pou Theatre Trust set to receive USD$500,000 in funding and access to a global learning community and network

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Citi Foundation has awarded USD$500,000 to Te Pou Theatre, a leading kaupapa Māori performing arts venue, to accelerate Māori youth employability.
- The grant supports the "AKO Performing Arts Training Program," designed to equip Māori youth aged 15-24 with essential skills and sustainable career pathways in the performing arts sector.
- Te Pou Theatre is the inaugural New Zealand recipient of the Citi Foundation's Global Innovation Challenge, recognising its innovative approach to empowering young creatives.

Auckland, New Zealand – Te Pou Theatre, a leading kaupapa Māori performing arts venue and production company, has been awarded a Citi Foundation Global Innovation Challenge Grant. The grant of US$500,000 will support Te Pou Theatre's "AKO Performing Arts Training Program," a groundbreaking initiative, designed to equip Māori youth with essential skills and pathways for sustainable careers in the performing arts sector.

The AKO Program, scheduled to run over two years, addresses significant inequities in employment and training for Māori, particularly Rangatahi Māori (youth aged 15-24) in West Auckland. Through a culturally responsive, community-driven model, the program aims to provide hands-on work experience, mentorship, and financial literacy training. It seeks to establish a permanent and sustainable Māori-led learning institution that fosters industry connections and empowers young creatives in Aotearoa's evolving arts landscape.

Te Pou Theatre is the inaugural New Zealand recipient of the Citi Foundation's Global Innovation Challenge. The Global Innovation Challenge provided 50 US$500,000 grants to organisations around the world helping to advance innovative employment solutions for low-income youth, building on Citi and the Citi Foundation's longstanding commitment to young people and their economic futures.

Amber Curreen, Poutoko Whānau of Te Pou Theatre, said, "This support from the Citi Foundation is transformative. The AKO Program is a direct response to the need for accessible, culturally-grounded vocational training for rangatahi Māori in the performing arts. It's about providing not just paid work experience and skills building opportunities but also a sense of belonging, cultural identity, and economic security; supporting Māori leadership in our artistic landscape for generations to come."

Stefan Boisen, CEO, Citi New Zealand, added, "We are incredibly proud to support Te Pou Theatre's Ako Program as the inaugural Aotearoa New Zealand recipient of the Citi Foundation's Global Innovation Challenge. Their innovative approach to empowering Māori youth through performing arts addresses critical social and economic needs, fostering both cultural richness and tangible career pathways. Te Pou's submission truly exemplifies the spirit of innovation and community impact that the Citi Foundation grant recipients strive to deliver."

The program will focus on several key areas:

- **Establishing a Long-Term Learning Institution:** Developing the foundational structure for AKO to become a permanent vocational training arm of Te Pou Theatre.
- **Hands-On Training and Mentorship:** Delivering industry-specific wānanga (workshops) and paid internships, providing real-world experience and professional networks.
- **Kaupapa Māori Success Measurement:** Partnering with Māori research and education organizations to develop evaluation models that prioritise community-led, relationship-building, and holistic growth over traditional Western metrics.
- **Career Pathways:** Equipping participants with employability skills to secure roles in technical, production, and management within the arts, or to establish their own creative businesses.

Through these initiatives, the Ako Program aims to create meaningful change for Māori youth who often face significant barriers to formal education and employment. It will not only foster individual career growth but also contribute to strengthening the Māori creative workforce and enhancing cultural vitality.

For more information, including the complete list of grant recipients, please visit www.citifoundation.com/challenge and follow the impact these organisations are making at #InnovationChallenge on social media.

###

Media contact:
Nick Johnson
+61 418 422 898

About Te Pou Theatre

Te Pou Theatre is a kaupapa Māori performing arts venue and production company based in Waitākere, Tāmaki Makaurau, dedicated to delivering mana-enhancing performing arts experiences for all. It supports the presentation and development of contemporary and community performing arts locally, nationally, and internationally. Te Pou's goal is for tikanga Māori-led performing arts to transform the arts sector and make a lasting difference to society in Aotearoa and the world, by uplifting Māori storytelling, creative development, and sector capacity-building.

About the Citi Foundation

The Citi Foundation works to promote economic progress and improve the lives of people in low-income communities around the world. We invest in efforts that increase financial inclusion, catalyse job opportunities for youth, and reimagine approaches to building economically vibrant communities. The Citi Foundation's "More than Philanthropy" approach leverages the enormous expertise of Citi and its people to fulfil our mission and drive thought leadership and innovation. For more information, visit www.citifoundation.com.