



Te Puni Kōkiri  
MINISTRY OF MĀORI DEVELOPMENT

# What is Succession

Succession is when interests or shares in whenua Māori are passed on to whānau after an owner dies. It's an official process done through the Māori Land Court.



Māori land is governed by Te Ture Whenua Māori Act 1993 (The Act). The Act exists to make sure that ownership of Māori land continues to be held over time by the whānau, hapū and iwi for whom it is taonga tuku iho.

Under the Act, if you have shares in whenua when you die, whānau must officially “succeed” to the land to be recognised as the new owners. Succession is when we hand over the tohu to the next generation to carry on the mahi of kaitiakitanga of our whenua.

The Māori Land Court (MLC) manages the process of transferring ownership through succession. MLC:

- keeps a record of all successions, and
- helps ensure everyone who is eligible to succeed to whenua becomes an owner.

## Who can succeed

According to the Act, when someone dies only those who share their bloodline, or are what MLC refers to as the “preferred class of alienee”, can succeed to their whenua. For example, this could be:

- tamariki, including adopted children and whāngai
- a spouse or partner
- other whānau, like siblings.



Tamariki



Spouse



Whānau

## How shares are distributed

How shares in Māori land are distributed is a decision made between whānau and MLC. Generally though, shares are distributed equally among those who succeed to it. For example, if Mum had 4 tamariki, they could each succeed to a quarter of her shares of the whenua.

## Why succeed

“When you become an owner through succession, you become a kaitiaki for the whenua — part of a long legacy of guardianship. You take on the responsibility of caring for the land and protecting it for our tamariki and mokopuna.”

Being legally recognised as an owner gives you:

- more of a say in how the whenua is used, both now and into the future
- the chance to receive a share of any income the whenua generates.

Succession also ensures that the whakapapa of Māori land is recorded for future generations.

## When to succeed

As succession can only happen after the death of a loved one, you might not want to think about it straight away. It can be a challenging process to work through, especially if you're grieving.

There's no “right time” to succeed — it's entirely up to whānau. Your whenua can't be sold or given to anyone else, so there's no rush. For some whānau, it can be years before we feel ready to succeed, and some of us choose not to succeed at all.

## How to apply for succession

MLC manages the process of succession — it's their responsibility to document who the correct owners of Maori freehold land are. They're also the guardians of that information.

When whānau are ready to succeed, MLC will guide and support you on that journey. It can take time, but MLC will work with you through the process. Their focus is on what you and your whānau need, not how long it takes.