

Empowered Communities



Kimberley Land Council

Submission to the Aboriginal Policy and Coordination Unit in response to -
A Path Forward - Developing the Western Australian Government's
Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy

April 2020

1. Introduction

We are encouraged by the WA Government's commitment to working with Aboriginal people on a whole-of-government strategy for better social, cultural, economic, health and cultural outcomes. We welcome the opportunity to make this contribution to developing a shared strategic vision for Aboriginal empowerment in Western Australia.

Empowered Communities has a footprint in three regions in Western Australia: East Kimberley (supported by Binarri-binyja yarrowoo Aboriginal Corporation), West Kimberley (supported by Kimberley Land Council) and Ngaanyatjarra Lands (supported by NPY Lands Empowered Communities).

Aboriginal empowerment is a key principle in the *Empowered Communities: Design Report* (2015) and has two key aspects:

- i. It means Aboriginal people empowering ourselves by taking all appropriate and necessary powers and responsibilities for our own lives and futures.
- ii. It also means Commonwealth, State and Territory governments sharing, and in some cases relinquishing, certain powers and responsibilities, and supporting Aboriginal people with resources and capability building.

The work that has been undertaken since the release of the Design Report provides national and regionally specific insight and evidence around how to do this.

Drawing on this experience, we are delighted to provide this joint submission in response to *A Path Forward: Developing the Western Australian Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy ('the Strategy')*. In summary, Empowered Communities agrees in principle with the goal proposed in the discussion paper: *Aboriginal people, families and communities empowered to live good lives and choose their own futures from a secure foundation*.

We submit that achieving this goal will require renewed focus and attention on how the WA Government can work alongside Aboriginal people in each region in WA to:

- Secure the foundations for individual and families to thrive, walking in two worlds; and
- Build a new partnership between Aboriginal people and government, necessitating shared decision-making and structural reform.

Our submission draws on examples of good practice from the Empowered Communities regions in WA and we focus our response on extending key ideas outlined in the discussion paper (which are broadly supported).

We also attach *Reflections on Lesson Learned: Empowered Communities National Leaders Group* (February 2020) which draws together insights based on what we've learned from 5 years of concerted work implementing Empowered Communities reform across the country.

2. At a glance

Strategic element	What is needed to make this work?
i. Putting Culture at the Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandate location-specific cross-cultural awareness training for WA Government employees and contractors • Work alongside ACCOs to identify and invest in models of service provision anchored in culture • Where agreed with local/regional Aboriginal leadership, include indicators of language and culture in CTG regional implementation plans
ii. Bringing decisions closer to communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and invest in strong and accountable local and regional governance arrangements, which will be a single interface between Aboriginal people and commonwealth, state and local governments • Invest in change management and transition support to enable Aboriginal people to engage in decision making with government as partners. This support would be for both Aboriginal people and Government employees to understand and embed this transition to a new way of working together. • Lock in a model for agreed regions and regional representation (based on WAAAC proposed co-design work in progress), and leverage / ensure alignment for other Commonwealth regional/representation models. Map and support governance and decision making structures and processes down to the local (community) level. • Use regional partnership structures to agree development & investment accords which align with whole-of-government Close the Gap regional implementation plans • Formally recognise and work with EC to strengthen our regional governance arrangements • Select an appropriate WA Government investment stream to be considered through existing EC Joint Decision Making processes to inform the new approach to local/regional decision-making in WA • Engage with EC further on improving data access arrangements for local and regional decision-making
iii. Better service commissioning and grant making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear advice, frameworks and ongoing education & support to departments and staff about how to genuinely co-design in partnership with Aboriginal people • Coordinate regional investment and co-design activities to reduce participation burden on ACCOs and community and increase productivity of investment • Form an active partnership with EC and the Commonwealth in EC regions to work towards regional investment planning, co-commissioning and pooled funding for regional budgets.
iv. Prevention and early intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in community infrastructure as well as local governance and administration to enable self-management of infrastructure • Invest in development of models to assess social and economic outcomes of early intervention and prevention initiatives to support the re-allocation of funding towards these initiatives
v. Boosting economic opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt an approach to development which recognises and values the aspirations and contributions of Aboriginal people and recognizes that investment in social and cultural capital are essential to sustainable development • Invest in supply and demand-side and brokering initiatives to support Aboriginal people to secure opportunities and be successful in taking advantage of those opportunities • Consider whether the Strategy should be the coordinating framework for whole-or-government activity on Aboriginal economic development (or consider subject-specific strategy) • Use regional governance mechanisms and regional plans to design and implement economic development initiatives • Commit to regional Aboriginal procurement targets, and the upskilling, capability build & support of Aboriginal organisations to win business and deliver outcomes
vi. Cultural understanding and respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support mechanisms to promote shared understanding of and respect for the culture of First Peoples in Western Australia, including truth-telling and grants to support the recording, maintenance and recognition of local and regional histories. • Mandate location-specific cross-cultural awareness training for WA Government employees and contractors • Establish and meet WA Public Sector employment targets that match the proportion of Aboriginal people in each region

2. At a glance (continued)

Principles and Framework	What is needed to make this work?
i. Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater emphasis on access to disaggregated data to support Aboriginal-led development • Accountability to Aboriginal people in place for delivery at local/regional level; responsibility shared with Aboriginal leaders
ii. Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in local/regional governance arrangements that support partnership with Aboriginal leadership & align with the outcomes of ‘the Voice’ co-design process • Invest in change management and transitional support for to assist Aboriginal people work in partnership with government through local/regional governance arrangements. • Consider developing a separate Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy • Governance diagrams/mapping should include Commonwealth and Local Government • Instantiate and empower a dedicated leadership and oversight group for this transformational change including Aboriginal representatives and key Government representatives and bodies
iii. Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the establishment of regional action plans in collaboration with Aboriginal representatives and community members, which are aligned with Closing the Gap commitments and ‘Our Priorities’ agenda. • Acknowledge the challenges and risks associated with transformational change, and ensure that there is a realistic long term commitment and investment plan to properly navigate the path to a genuine partnership • Invest in dedicated change management and transitional support for Aboriginal people and across all levels of government to ensure shared ownership and a smooth and systematic transition to a new way of working • Empower a body such as the proposed Office for Accountability and Advocacy in Aboriginal Affairs (OoAAAA), to oversee delivery, remove roadblocks, address risks and issues and refine the plans and priorities over time (which is imperative in a multi-year, multiple stakeholder initiative in an evolving environment) (see below)
iv. Accountability, measurement, evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and resource a statutory accountability body (OoAAAA) which is empowered not only to measure, monitor and evaluate, but to learn, adapt and remediate government’s ways of working, and monitor and resolve blockages in regional agreement-making and implementation • Establish regional-level indicators and data for Close the Gap and Our Priorities, in partnership with Aboriginal leaders and communities. • Invest in longitudinal M&E for learning and adaptation, assessing impact at population level and systems-change (not just performance monitoring)

What else should Government be thinking about?

While the core of the proposed Strategy is solid and we’ve identified specific additions and refinements across the Strategic elements, it is our assessment that the Strategy has the greatest chance of success and shared ownership if additional consideration is given to two key areas that have not been extensively explored within the Strategy, i.e. the current and historic impacts and implications of (1) poverty and (2) trauma on the individuals, families and communities of Aboriginal West Australians. The successful delivery of any strategy that does not explicitly explore, understand and propose how these areas are to be approached and integrated, would surely be at risk. Without fully integrating the foundational elements of financial security and acknowledging and healing from trauma, the effective participation, ownership and leadership in this strategy would be at best constrained and at worst completely compromised for many Aboriginal people.

3. Strategic element: putting culture at the centre

We agree that ‘culture is at the heart of a secure foundation for life’, has an impact on our wellbeing and shapes the futures our children and families choose. Cultural recognition, protection, transmission and strengthening is critical.

Recognition of and investment in language and culture

Cultural authority vests in people rather than organisations but there are things organisations, programs and governments can do to strengthen culture, including:

- Creation and maintenance of a regulatory environment that protects and promotes Aboriginal culture
- Invest in further development of models of service provision anchored in culture
- Support and fund Aboriginal-led practices of language and culture transmission
- Educating the West Australian public and the WA public sector workforce about the value of Aboriginal culture to all West Australians

Models of service provision anchored in culture

Examples of models of service provision that are anchored in culture include:

- art healing projects run by community-controlled art centres
- preservation and revitalisation programs for language education, including language nest programs in schools and early learning
- social and emotional wellbeing programs run by Aboriginal medical services
- traditional healing program (ngangkari) run by Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council
- on-country programs for youth

These models need to be invested in by government, including funding for longitudinal evaluation so we can build a shared understanding about the long-term benefits of culturally-based service provision.

We reject the view that there is some contradiction between maintaining our cultures and achieving development. Instead, we see that failing to successfully tackle the development challenge is the surest way to lose our cultures, leaving us economic, social and cultural paupers.

*Rather, we know that our best chance of preserving our heritage is through obtaining the strength that successful development provides. By taking this path, we strive for a future in which our people retain their languages and succeed in the broader Australian culture—moving with confidence between both worlds.
(EC design report, pg. 9)*

3. Strategic element: Putting culture at the centre

Local/regional frameworks for measuring and strengthening language and culture

Putting culture at the centre means we must also be able to tangibly measure the impact of our efforts through regionally relevant frameworks designed by Aboriginal people. Binarri-binyja yarrowoo provide an example from the East Kimberley on the following page (fig.1).

The ***East Kimberley Language and Culture Indicator Framework*** is currently being tested by member organisations of Empowered Communities East Kimberley.

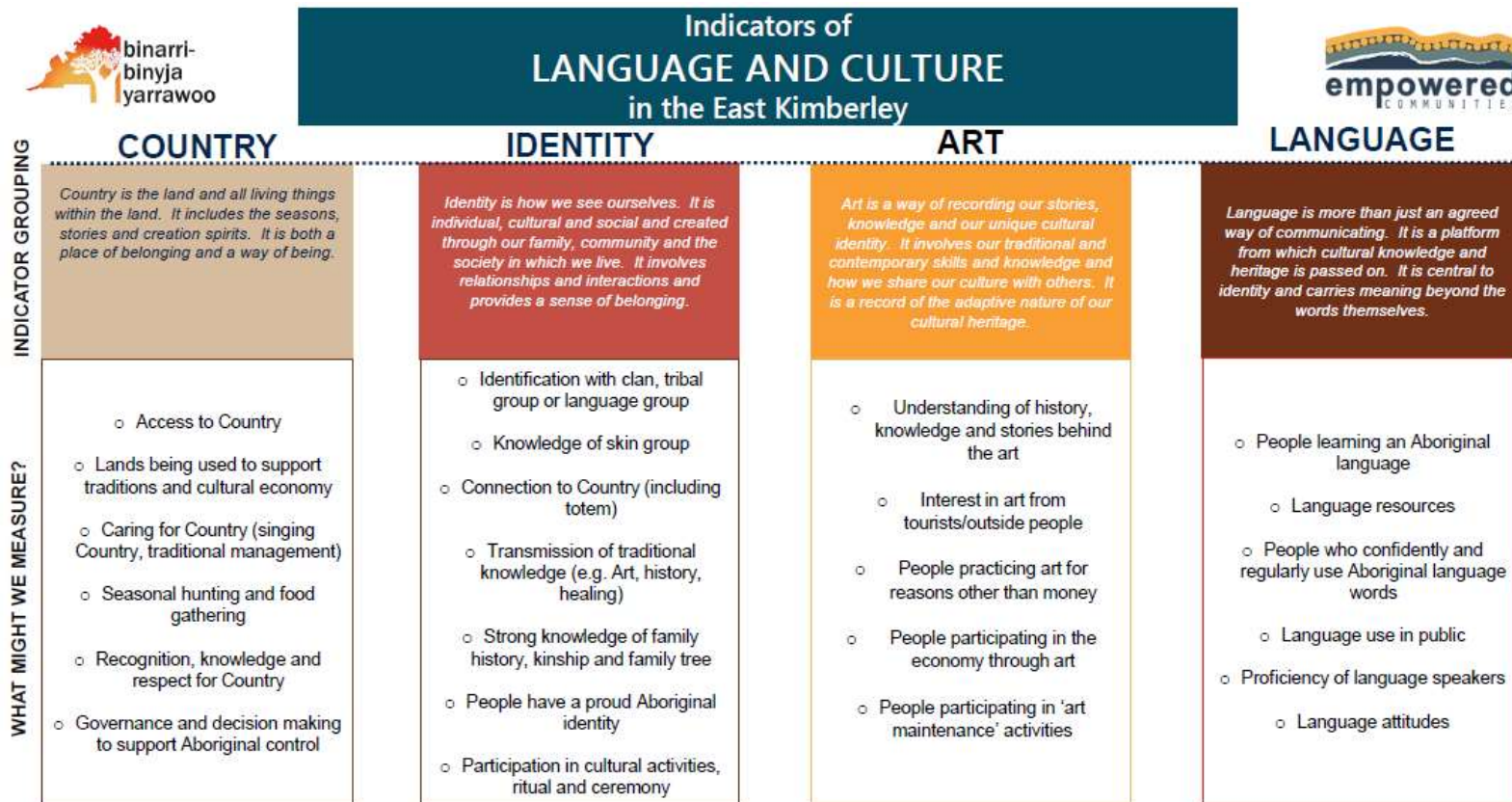
Although there has been reluctance in the CTG Refresh to include a national target for language and culture, it is suggested that regionally-relevant indicators of language and culture be included in CTG regional implementation plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Mandate location-specific cross-cultural awareness training for WA Government employees and contractors
- Work alongside ACCOs to identify and invest in models of service provision anchored in culture
- Where agreed with local/regional Aboriginal leadership, include indicators of language and culture in CTG regional implementation plans

Case Study: East Kimberley regional framework for tracking culture

Putting culture at the centre means we must also be able to tangibly measure the impact of our efforts through regionally relevant frameworks designed by Aboriginal people. Binarri-binyja yarrowoo provide an example from the East Kimberley. The *East Kimberley Language and Culture Indicator Framework* is currently being tested by member organisations of Empowered Communities East Kimberley.



4. Strategic element: Bringing decisions closer to communities

Empowered Communities strongly supports the Government's commitment to bringing decision making closer to communities. It is vital that Aboriginal people have a formal and systemic role in decision making to ensure that investment meets community needs and aspirations.

Agreement making

The primacy of Traditional Owners in native title agreement-making must be respected and well supported. In addition to native title agreement-making, there are other types of agreement-making being progressed in other jurisdictions and these should be explored in WA too. For example: **local decision-making** in NSW and the NT and **treaty** in Victoria, Northern Territory and Queensland.

Partnership and shared decision making

The **principle of subsidiarity** is a key feature of the EC National Model- recognising that decisions should be made as close as possible to the people who are impacted by them. As a part of the EC reform agenda, National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) have committed to **Joint Decision Making (JDM)**- for making investment decisions in partnership with us about activities funded under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). In each EC Region in WA, a JDM framework has been co-designed by local Aboriginal leaders, constituents, and Government. To date, JDM has been applied to approximately \$15m of investment in the Kimberley and NPY Lands (WA only). This now needs to expand beyond IAS funding to other Commonwealth and WA Government investment.

Local/regional governance structures

Investment in **local and regional governance structures** is essential to enable people to engage in decision making with government as partners. This is clearly evidenced by the levels of coordination required to prepare and protect Aboriginal people from Covid-19 in the current State of Emergency. Fuller, mature, settled and enduring local and regional governance arrangements are essential to Closing the Gap.

Ideally, the WA regional Aboriginal representation model being developed by the WAAAC, which will presumably use current "regions" as it's basis and will be co-designed with Aboriginal people across WA and Government, will confirm the regional governance areas and boundaries across WA. These then will be the primary "regions" for engagement between Aboriginal people and WA Government, and should also form the basis for other Aboriginal engagement models such as the Commonwealth's National, Regional and Local Voice and Closing the Gap. Within regions, different regional and local organisations and/or governance structures would continue to have responsibility for different initiatives and outcomes on behalf of local people.

The relationships between local (community) and regional governance models would also require clarity and structure. This is necessary to embed and achieve the two way flow of information, ideas and decision making activities, that are required for effective and timely engagement, collaboration and shared ownership. Only with these structures in place and working well can we expect to achieve the strong community, family and individual outcomes that Aboriginal people are seeking.

'..sustained and measurable improvements in social and economic well-being only occur when real decision-making power is vested in communities that build effective governing institutions reflecting the cultural values and beliefs of the people.'
- ATSIIC Review, 2003

"It's about having our voice heard...We need to, as communities, we need to have an input. We need our decision-making and ideas coming from us. We want to be empowered you know. We want to use this as a tool to be heard and we want to be able to achieve things in life.
- Kulintja Kutju Group member

4. Strategic element: Bringing decisions closer to communities (continued)

Investment in structures must be complemented by **investment in change management and transition support**, to enable people to engage in decision making with government as partners. **Investment in human capability** must support local groups to participate equitably and effectively in the design, negotiation, establishment, implementation and management of initiatives. The approach taken to develop Empowered Communities JDM processes illustrates the time and resources required to support representative, genuine joint decision making forums. With early and ongoing support, new structures can become forums for genuine collaboration and decision-making that meet the needs of people on the ground. Commensurate education & support for Government representatives to understand and own their transition to this new way of working, is also required.

Access to regional demographic, population outcome and expenditure data is also vital to shared and informed decision-making.

Please see Empowered Communities' response to *Privacy and Responsible Information Sharing for the Western Australian Public Sector* (8 November 2019) for more detail.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support and invest in strong and accountable local and regional governance arrangements, which will be a single interface between Aboriginal people and commonwealth, state and local governments
- Invest in change management and transition support to enable Aboriginal people to engage in decision making with government as partners. This support would be for both Aboriginal people and Government employees to understand and embed this transition to a new way of working together.
- Use regional partnership structures to agree development and investment accords which are aligned with whole-of-government Close the Gap and other regional implementation plans
- Formally recognise and work with EC to strengthen our regional governance arrangements
- Select an appropriate WA Government investment stream to be considered through existing EC Joint Decision Making processes to inform the new approach to local/regional decision-making in WA
- Engage with Empowered Communities further on improving data access arrangements for local and regional decision-making

5. Strategic element: Better service commissioning and grant-making

We agree that WA Government needs to change the way services are designed, funded and procured to increase the involvement of ACCOs and support the capacity building of ACCOs to deliver services to our communities. However, we also submit that further innovation in procurement is needed to drive better service commissioning. This will require investment in organisational and human capability, as well as reforms which create an enabling environment in local communities.

Co-design of programs and services

There is an urgent need to **build the capability of WA Government departments and workforce** to engage in coordinated and genuine co-design in partnership with Aboriginal people. Co-design is not consultation. It is a transparent, two-way learning process, which enables Aboriginal people to play a central role in the program or service design-with government and providers. Administrative arrangements need to be introduced to streamline and coordinate investment and co-design in regions. It is still not uncommon for Aboriginal people to be asked to participate in multiple co-design processes by a single agency at the same time. Coordination will reduce the participation burden on ACCOs and community 'end users' and increase the productivity of investments. Ideally, the Aboriginal Policy and Coordination Unit in DPC would oversee WA Government regional co-design work and then include the Commonwealth Government in these arrangements. The Strategy should provide guidance to agencies about whether the Department of Finance *Planning in Partnership Guide: undertaking co-design under the delivering community services in partnership policy* (October 2018) applies to co-design of services targeted to Aboriginal people. This guide should be refreshed in partnership with Aboriginal people.

Examples of successful co-design initiatives include:

- *Empowered Communities East Kimberley partnership with North West Aboriginal Housing Fund to co-design elements of the East Kimberley transitional housing program expansion*
- *NPY-EC leadership of the co-design for school-to-work transitional model*

ACCO procurement share and sector development

Empowered Communities support the Government's intention to **build ACCO's capacity to take more ownership of program and service delivery** in their communities. EC recognises that this process of transition will take time and must be led by local Aboriginal people in **partnership** with government and non-Aboriginal providers. (See [ECEK Partnership Principles](#) for more detail). Sustained investment by government in the community-controlled health sector and the native title sector over the past 30 years has resulted in an institutional landscape that government can work in partnership with. Similar efforts must be made to build a mature Aboriginal community controlled social service sector. In addition to direct investment, **policy and procurement reform** is needed to increase opportunities for ACCOs to take ownership of program and service delivery. Measures such as supporting the growth of local markets, grant and tender processes which enable joint decision-making with local communities, procurement targets, mandatory set-asides, unbundling of contracts, extending contract lengths and lead-times, and requirements to invest in local capacity building and transition to an ACCO.

Co-commissioning and pooled funding

Further innovation in procurement is needed to drive better outcomes from service delivery, including through co-commissioning and pooled funding/regional budgeting in partnership with Aboriginal people (See Reflections on Lessons Learned, EC National Leaders Group, February 2020).

5. Strategic element: Better service commissioning and grant-making (continued)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Provide clear advice and direction to departments and staff about how to co-design in partnership with Aboriginal people
- Coordinate regional investment and co-design to reduce participation burden on ACCOs and community and increase productivity of investment
- Form an active partnership with Empowered Communities and the Commonwealth in Empowered Communities regions to work towards regional investment planning, co-commissioning and pooled funding for regional budgets.

Case Study: Co-design for school-to-work program

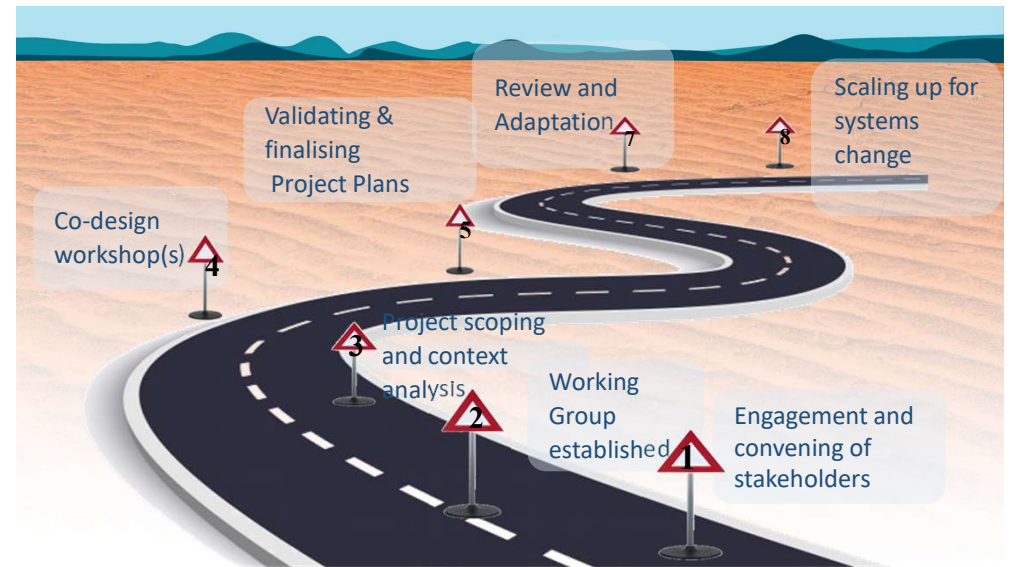
Co-design is a transparent process, involving all relevant parties, with end-users (in this case – Anangu) playing a central role. Ideally, co-design covers all stages of the development process – from identifying the issue, developing strategies and implementation plans, through to final evaluation stages (see figure 4).

Over the past 18 months, NPY-EC has used a co-design approach to address widespread concerns raised by Anangu about the lack of support for young people to prepare for and transition from school into adult life.

Based on this expressed need, in August 2018, NPY-EC convened a Working Group who ran a series of stakeholder workshops across each jurisdiction in to discuss a collective approach to supporting young people in their transition from school-to-work.

Through the course of these 5 co-design workshops held over a 10 month period, NPY-EC has produced an agreed approach and plan of action for an NPY Region ‘transition support’ initiative. This initiative is now working to bring together families, schools and employers across the tristate to collectively contribute to the common goal of supporting young people as they move from school into their next chapter of life.

Fig. 2. EC Co-design project methodology



Critical elements of the co-design process:

- ✓ Participation of a broad range of stakeholders, with local people at the centre.
- ✓ Establishment of a strong governance structure (i.e. working group).
- ✓ Investment of time in the early phases of the process, to enable thorough project scoping, co-design, and validation, and significantly improve the likelihood of community ownership and buy-in and endorsement from funding bodies.

6. Strategic element: Prevention and early intervention

Empowered Communities agrees there is an urgent need to increase expenditure on prevention and early intervention initiatives that improve Aboriginal wellbeing and reduce the demand for tertiary, acute and statutory services. We agree with the key ideas in this section of the discussion paper, including the need for systemic reforms that enable the highest and best use of existing expenditure (better place-based program design, coordination, pooled funding and strategic budget bids, greater involvement of ACCOs and more investment in impact evaluation). This needs to occur across all levels of government and in greater alignment with corporate and philanthropic investment.

Investment in human capability and infrastructure

We agree that many remote communities require infrastructure upgrades. We strongly submit that any investment in infrastructure must be accompanied by investment in human capability (governance, staffing and administration, skills development) to ensure local people can determine the best use of physical infrastructure and play a lead role in the design and delivery of prevention and early intervention initiatives.

Investment in models to quantify economic and social benefits

We submit there is an urgent need for government to invest in and further develop economic models to value social outcomes and quantify the savings that accrue to State and Commonwealth government from early intervention initiatives. Some early examples of this work underway in the WA Government include the Justice Pipeline Project and the Social Return on Investment model developed for the North West Aboriginal Housing Fund. As these models become increasingly robust and sophisticated, government will become increasingly apt to use them to support investment decision-making and we will see shifts in resource flows and use away from tertiary and toward preventative measures.

An important part of the Empowered Communities model is achieving greater productivity from available resources and opportunities and working to stabilise the quantum of funding within regions. This cannot be achieved with Commonwealth Indigenous specific funding only, and will require mainstream Commonwealth and State funding to be brought into scope. Any productivity dividend (savings accruing to government) from increased coordination, local/regional decision-making and innovation in prevention and early intervention should be available for reinvestment into that region.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Invest in community infrastructure as well as local governance and administration to enable self-management of infrastructure
- Invest in development of models to assess social and economic outcomes of early intervention and prevention initiatives to support the re-allocation of funding towards these initiatives

7. Strategic element: Boosting economic opportunities

Empowered Communities strongly support the Government's commitment to boosting Aboriginal peoples' participation and success in the economy. Far from lacking enterprise or endeavour, we need to be supported and resourced to engage with the economy and capitalise on our significant social, cultural and land assets.

Addressing impacts of poverty

Development is a core principle of the Empowered Communities model- to expand the range of choices enjoyed by individuals in all areas of human activity- social, cultural and economic. EC urges the Government to embrace an **approach to economic development** which recognises and values the economic aspirations and contributions of Aboriginal people- in both conventional and 'customary' markets- and recognises the multiplier effects of economic activities which align with Aboriginal cultural traditions and practices.

An empowerment approach must also recognise and respond to **the real impacts of poverty in the regions**. Inefficient and underinvestment in services and financial security has contributed to widespread poverty and disadvantage for Aboriginal people across the State in socioeconomic areas of health, housing, education, income, and employment. These represent significant barriers to people and communities taking advantage of economic opportunities. It is well recognised that access to secure housing is a strong determinant of economic participation due to multiplier effects on health, education and wellbeing. Government has an important role to play as an enabler- **by investing and providing support to set Aboriginal people up for success** in securing opportunities. Empowered Communities recognises that addressing these systemic challenges will take time and require long-term investment from State and Commonwealth governments.

Supply and demand-side initiatives

Empowered Communities agree with the key ideas to boost economic opportunity and the supply and demand-side and brokering initiatives outlined in the discussion paper. In practice, this means:

- providing targeted **economic capability building** such as training and mentoring, local business support, network facilitation, partnership brokering, and access to capital
- facilitating **access to commercial products and services** in regional and remote communities which meet local needs
- investing in industries and activities which **align with Aboriginal aspirations**, cultural traditions and practices, such as land management, ecosystem services and enterprise such as cultural tourism and bush tucker co-operatives
- establishing and meeting **Government procurement targets** and reporting mechanism to measure and monitor progress towards targets
- **collecting, sharing and using data** on employment, procurement and commercial opportunities available in communities as part of regional and local development planning

*Reformed purchasing arrangements should be implemented to ensure that Indigenous people are able to play a stronger role in leading development in their regions. Such reform would reposition Indigenous people so they are no longer merely passive recipients of government-funded services. These changes can provide Indigenous people with more control over areas of both mainstream and Indigenous-specific funding, and provide a mechanism to ensure that government and large external providers are not dominating in areas that rightly require Indigenous leadership and responsibility.
(EC Design Report)*

7. Strategic Element: Boosting economic opportunities (continued)

Regional approach

Current WA Government efforts at supporting Aboriginal Economic Development are diffuse and could be better coordinated and better targeted to regional needs. Key targets set by government to drive Aboriginal economic development should be monitored at regional level (e.g. 3% Aboriginal procurement target). This will ensure regional Aboriginal economic development is promoted and targets are not met by business based in capital cities alone. Current WA Government coordination structures for regional collaboration and planning (e.g. District Leadership Groups) are too heavily focussed on human services. There needs to be better integration between human services and regional economic development.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Adopt an approach to development which recognises and values the aspirations and contributions of Aboriginal people and recognizes that investment in social and cultural capital are essential to sustainable development.
- Invest in supply and demand-side and brokering initiatives to support Aboriginal people to secure opportunities and be successful in taking advantage of those opportunities
- Consider whether the Strategy should be the coordinating framework for whole-of-government activity on Aboriginal economic development (or consider subject-specific strategy)
- Use regional governance mechanisms and regional plans to design and implement economic development initiatives
- Commit to regional Aboriginal procurement targets, and the upskilling, capability build and support of Aboriginal organisations to win business and deliver outcomes

8. Strategic element: Cultural understanding and respect

Empowered Communities broadly support the key ideas proposed to address individual and systemic racism in the WA Public Sector and in the wider West Australian community. This is a good starting point, but what is needed is a **framework for learning that commits to continual learning and improvement** which leads to greater shared understanding of and respect for the culture of First Peoples in Western Australia. Aboriginal leaders, communities and Aboriginal organisations have a role to play with Government in building cultural understanding and respect by sharing knowledge, normalising culturally respectful behaviour, and inputting into program design.

Local cross-cultural awareness training

Whilst EC agree with the cultural responsiveness training and standards within the public sector, this needs to be cemented through investing in the development of localised, compulsory cross-cultural training packages. Location-specific cross-cultural awareness programs can help to increase the cultural responsiveness of the public sector workforce. Mandating the attendance of WA Government workers and contractors will also help increase own-sourced and fee-for-service income of language centres and other providers of these important services, contributing to Aboriginal employment in each location.

Public sector employment target

Remote regions are service economies. Government has a critical role to play in increasing Aboriginal employment in regional economies. Increasing Aboriginal employment supports the development cultural competency of the public sector workforce and is important. This does not substitute for, nor should it displace greater community control over decision-making and service provision.

Agreement-making through truth-telling

Empowered Communities strongly supports the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and the establishment of a Makarrata Commission, to supervise a process of truth telling about our history. We have not abandoned this goal and call on the WA Government to support us in achieving a greater implementation of the statement. Separately, the WA Government does have a role to play in enabling local and regional initiatives around truth-telling.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support mechanisms to promote shared understanding of and respect for the culture of First Peoples in Western Australia, including truth-telling and grants to support the recording, maintenance and recognition of local and regional histories.
- Mandate location-specific cross-cultural awareness training for WA Government employees and contractors
- Establish and meet WA Public Sector employment targets that match the proportion of Aboriginal people in each region

9. Principles and Framework

Principles

Broadly supported, but there needs to be greater emphasis needed on disaggregated data to support Aboriginal-led development and decision making.

Governance

As noted earlier, governance is critical to the effectiveness of the Strategy. Good governance mechanisms will enable Aboriginal people to engage and work with Government in partnership, enable the flow of information, and enable Aboriginal people to have more agency over decisions which affect our lives.

To work, individuals and groups must be supported through a **change management process** from establishment to transition and consolidation. Empowered Communities strongly support the proposal for WAAAC to lead a co-design process for a model for these structures, but note that **local leaders and communities must play a central role in this process**. As the paper notes, these structures are likely to look different in each region- reflecting unique relationships, shared histories, values, experience, knowledge and culture.

A key element of initial and ongoing governance for the Strategy must be the establishment and empowerment of a dedicated leadership and oversight group for this transformational change. The group must include Aboriginal representation, ideally through the planned “representative” WAAAC model as well as other key interested and/or experience regional leaders, working with senior decision makers and strategic participants from Government. Ideally a body such as the proposed Office for Accountability and Advocacy in Aboriginal Affairs would have a key role (see below).

Implementation

EC welcome the Government’s commitment to a robust plan for implementation. As we continue to note, investment in **change management** and **transitional support** will be critical for Aboriginal people and government to move towards a new way of working, and never more so that during the implementation stage. This approach recognises that the success of a reform relies on bringing people along, and this is an iterative and ongoing process.

As part of this approach, Empowered Communities strongly support the commitment to **integration and coordination within and between levels of government and its agencies**. Governments’ ability to communicate, cooperate, and integrate is essential to establishing genuine partnerships, shared power arrangements, and more effective service delivery to Aboriginal people. Further, coordination processes and structures must be transparent and not be used as another forum for top-down decision making.

Further, an **engagement strategy** which is grounded in respect for Aboriginal culture, history and social dynamics, inter-cultural ways of working, and a commitment to building a shared understanding will be critical to working towards a new way of working. Not just to improve coordination and align services with priorities, but to improve responsiveness to community needs and aspirations, and to ensure a broad and shared understanding of priorities and progress.

9. Principles and Framework (continued)

Implementation cont.

Empowered Communities agree that the development of **regional action plans** in partnership with Aboriginal people represents a key opportunity for Government to engage differently- to build partnerships and shared power arrangements. It is Empowered Communities' experience that having a strong community-led plan is essential to achieve sustained positive outcomes. EC also strongly supports the alignment of these plans with the Closing the Gap and 'Our Priorities' agendas, to ensure that outcomes can be monitored and evaluated and learnings incorporated more effectively. We also urge the Government to invest in structures to support accountability, monitoring, and evaluation to provide visibility over and enable learning and adaptation in relation to these regional action plans.

Primary ownership for the ongoing oversight of delivery and reporting on the achievement of the Strategy's outcomes would ideally rest with the proposed Office for Accountability and Advocacy in Aboriginal Affairs. This office could coordinate and aggregate the progress of the various streams and initiatives, providing consistent and regular reporting as well as highlighting potential risks and roadblocks and facilitating their removal, reviewing and assessing the refinement of plans and priorities that would be necessary in any multi-year, multiple stakeholder initiative that is being delivered into an evolving environment.

Accountability, Measurement & Evaluation

Experience from the Closing the Gap agenda has highlighted the importance of investment in not only measurement, monitoring and evaluation, but mechanisms to **embed a continuous improvement approach** and **accountability mechanisms** which ensure responsibility is shared with Aboriginal Leaders and there is accountability to Aboriginal people at local/regional levels.

In each region in WA, Empowered Communities is aiming to achieve more productive program funding and delivery for local communities through data collection, monitoring and evaluation and adaptive practice and the development of regional development agendas. A critical element of this approach is a **commitment to engaging with individuals and families to identify community priorities**, identify what success means to communities in terms of outputs and outcomes, and what the indicators of success should be. It also means engaging with partners, service providers, and government to agree on shared measurement systems, which empower communities to hold others to account.

We also strongly support the establishment of an **independent statutory accountability body** which is empowered to monitor the Government's performance and outcomes on the ground, but urges the Government to ensure that this body has the power and expertise to work with government to learn, adapt and remediate government ways of working. Ensuring that the body has **strong Aboriginal leadership and staff will be critical to the success of this body**.

Further, in development of the performance measurement framework, we urge the Government/WAAAC to develop measures or 'indicators of success' with Aboriginal people. While engagement with collectives such as representative peak bodies and organisations is crucial, involving communities in the process as early and often will empower individuals and lead to more targeted, effective government investment.

9. Principles and Framework (continued)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Governance

- Invest in local/regional governance arrangements that support partnership with Aboriginal leadership and align with the outcomes of ‘the Voice’ co-design process
- Invest in change management and transitional support for to assist Aboriginal people work in partnership with government through local/regional governance arrangements.
- Consider developing a separate Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy
- Governance diagram should include Commonwealth and Local Government
- Instantiate and empower a dedicated leadership and oversight group for this transformational change including Aboriginal representatives and key Government representatives and bodies

Implementation

- Support the establishment of regional action plans in collaboration with Aboriginal representatives and community members, which are aligned with Closing the Gap commitments and ‘Our Priorities’ agenda.
- Acknowledge the challenges and risks associated with transformational change, and ensure that there is a realistic long term commitment and investment plan to properly navigate the path to a genuine partnership
- Invest in dedicated change management and transitional support for Aboriginal people and across all levels of government to ensure shared ownership and a smooth and systematic transition to a new way of working
- Empower a body such as the proposed Office for Accountability and Advocacy (in Aboriginal Affairs), to oversee delivery, remove roadblocks, address risks and issues and refine the plans and priorities over time (which is imperative in a multi-year, multiple stakeholder initiative in an evolving environment)

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Establish and resource a statutory accountability body which is empowered not only to measure, monitor and evaluate, but to learn, adapt and remediate government’s ways of working, and monitor and resolve blockages in regional agreement-making and implementation Establish regional-level indicators and data for Close the Gap and Our Priorities, in partnership with Aboriginal leaders and communities.
- Invest in longitudinal M&E for learning and adaptation, assessing impact at population level and systems-change (not just performance monitoring)

10. What else should Government be thinking about?

While, in our assessment, the core of the proposed Strategy is solid, and we've identified specific additions and refinements across the Strategic elements, it is our assessment that for the Strategy to have the greatest chance of both success and shared ownership it is critical that additional consideration, analysis and inclusion is required for two key areas that have not been extensively explored and addressed in the current draft.

These are the current (and historic) impacts and implications of:

(1) Poverty; and

(2) Trauma

on the individuals, families and communities of too many Aboriginal West Australians.

As noted earlier, inefficient and underinvestment in services and financial security has contributed to widespread poverty and disadvantage for Aboriginal people across the State in all key socioeconomic areas. 2016 census data indicates that WA has some of the highest Aboriginal poverty rates and income inequality in the country- with poverty rates up to 55.3% and the income ratio as low as 0.36 between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the West Kimberley.

There is significant historic and recent research that describes the psychological, emotional, cognitive, social and physical implications of poverty and trauma on individuals, families and communities. Research that reveals how much these factors can inhibit peoples' ability to engage effectively a broader, long term and strategic thinking and to see themselves as agents of change in their own lives and the lives of their families.

The successful delivery of any strategy that does not explicitly explore, understand and propose how these areas are to be approached and integrated, would surely be in question.

Without fully integrating the foundational elements of delivering financial security and acknowledging and healing from trauma, the effective participation, ownership and leadership in the Strategy, for many Aboriginal people would be at best constrained and at worst completely compromised.

