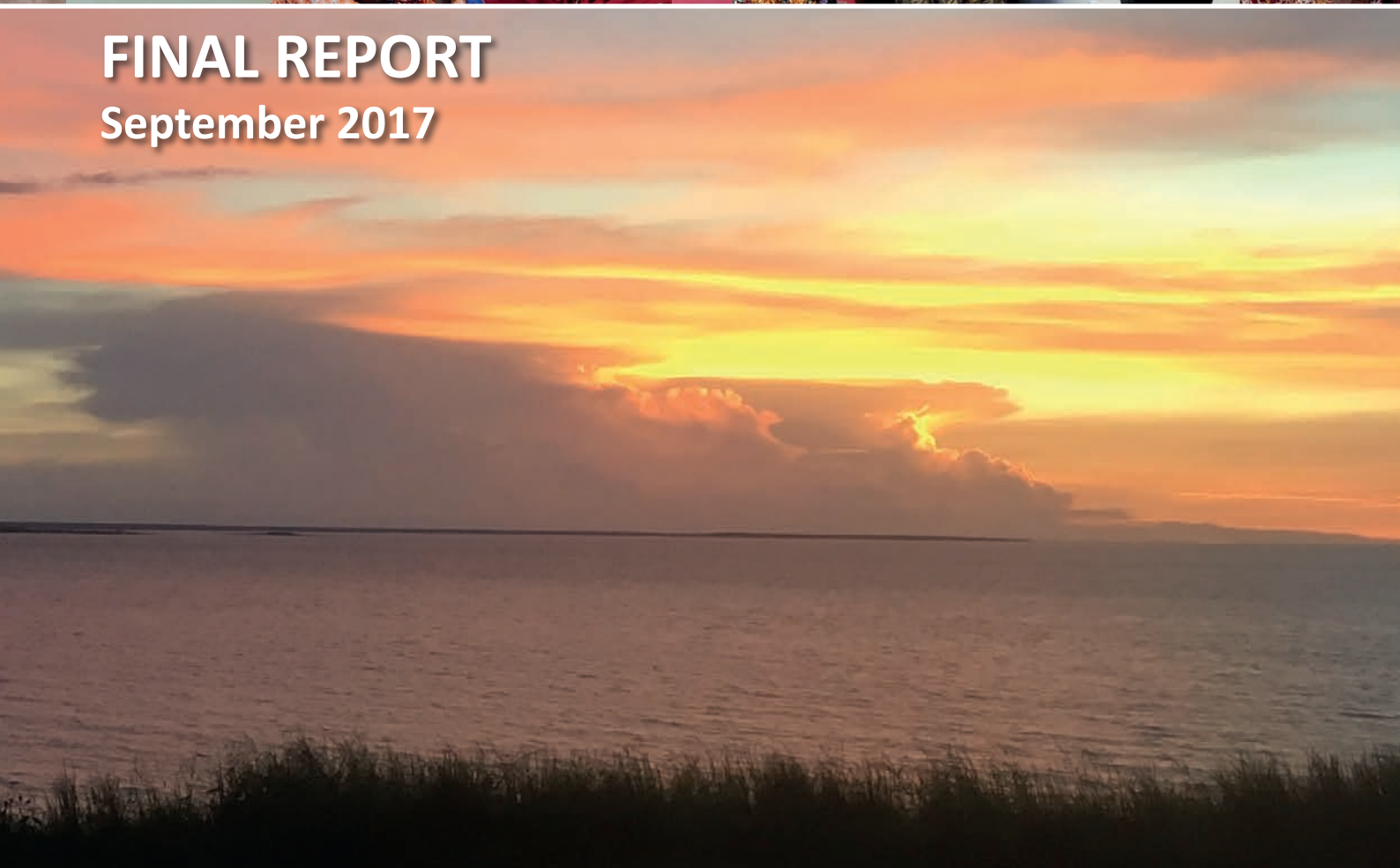


# Remote Engagement Coordination – Indigenous Evaluation Research (REC-IER)



## FINAL REPORT September 2017



Michaela Spencer, Michael Christie, Jennifer Macdonald,  
Matthew Campbell, Helen Verran

Northern Institute  
Charles Darwin University

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Cover images: (background) Gulumangur Mission Beach, Galiwin'ku; (right to left) Ngukurr researchers and mentorees at CDU; Yalu' researchers and advisory group in Galiwin'ku; Yalu' researchers consulting with James Mawutharri in Galiwin'ku; Ngukurr researchers and mentorees interviewing Daphne Daniels in Ngukurr; a gathering at Ngukurr church.

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This document may contain the names and/or images of Aboriginal people who have since passed away.

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# Key Insights

## Engagement and Coordination in Remote Communities: For Government Workers

- Good local engagement and coordination practices based on shared learning and experience make the work of government workers and community representatives easier and more productive.
- The work of '*engagement*', from the community point of view, is most often characterised as sitting down, face to face, talking and listening openly. This can be achieved through good practices in meetings, but will very often involve less formal meetings informing key people and keeping them up to date.
- Government work is most successful when government workers build good *coordination* systems *within government* (with colleagues, across levels of government and different agencies), as well as *within communities* (by tracing broad engagement networks, getting to know individuals and groups, dedicating time to visiting with them in community and reporting to them about the progress of government business).
- For Aboriginal community members, traditional authority is always the starting point, and moving to a community-wide perspective is often difficult. Aboriginal elders see their traditional governance responsibilities to kin and land as primary. The 'community' only exists because of the work of governments (and NGOs), and is maintained by them.
- While within government there is a strong awareness of the differentiation of the three levels of government and of departmental division within them, there is little on-the-ground awareness of these differences.
- Throughout the project there was a persistent challenge around asking people to differentiate between the assessment of government 'engagement' and government 'decision-making', with these practices being synonymous or closely related for many community members.
- Because speaking on behalf a whole community so often entails individuals transcending their traditional responsibilities towards networks of land and kin, and taking on non-traditional understandings of political groups, individuals are seldom willing to speak on behalf of a whole community.
- Good informing entails talking and listening to the right people in the right order (including community elders and traditional owners) and providing good channels for coordination.
- In some communities, the engagement of a 'media unit' producing regular community newspapers, social media, posters etc which detail the business of all levels of government, with contact details for questions and comments would greatly enhance community engagement and coordination.
- Community elders often remind us that good engagement with government is critical to *community development* because it strengthens traditional governance in the context of contemporary issues.

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# Executive Summary

The Department of Housing and Community Development, Northern Territory Government, engaged the Ground Up team at the Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University, to provide research and support around the development of Indigenous-led evaluation of government engagement and coordination activities in four remote Aboriginal communities.

Employing a research approach that we call 'Ground Up', we worked collaboratively with elders, community members and local researchers to clarify local understandings and imperatives of good engagement and coordination. Through this collaborative work, we also developed systems for government to receive, and respond to, feedback on their engagement and coordination activities in remote Aboriginal communities.

The Indigenous evaluation researchers working on the project made clear that good engagement is likely to involve tracing networks of engagement and coordination *within* government, whilst also working with others to trace networks of engagement and coordination *within* the community that uphold and extend through local authority systems. Participating Aboriginal elders continued to express the need for individual government workers to be identified as responsible to 'sit down and talk' about particular projects and be available (e.g. by phone) for receiving questions and comments.

Throughout the project, there has been some tension around the requirement to separate questions of government engagement, coordination and communication from questions of local decision-making and policy formation. Many elders and community members consider these things to be synonymous, and propose that the best way forward is for government practices to recognise and work with the presence of two differing traditions of knowledge, governance and law as a condition for good engagement and coordination.

The character of emerging practices and processes of evaluation have been different in different communities, depending in part on the particular history of the communities, as well as pre-existing research capacity and relationships to research and evaluation work.

In Galiwin'ku and Ngukurr, systems for evaluating government engagement and coordination have been oriented around a local lead researcher who has assumed significant responsibility for the work, and has involved small teams of researchers, working under the guidance of elders. The research teams have attended meetings where Indigenous community members and government staff work together. Crucial to the work of these groups has been the maintenance of the authority of elders in guiding and approving research work and findings, and the training of young mentorees through the conduct of the work.

In the two other project communities – Ali Curung and Ntaria – interest on the part of local researchers to undertake this work has been less forthcoming. In Ntaria, rather than face-to-face research evaluation supporting the process of providing feedback to government, it was proposed that a media centre facilitating a flow of messages might be a preferred mode for delivering feedback from community to government and government to community.

In the Northern Territory Government's *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy*'s levels of Remote Community Participation, the most basic is the practice of 'informing' the community. If this work of informing is done properly – letting the right people know about what is proposed to happen and how decisions will be made, and providing good contact points for discussion and feedback – this is seen as the first step towards 'active participation'.

It seems clear if these processes are to continue, then significant supportive relationships may need to be fostered between community researchers and people in government identified as responsible for particular projects, so that meaningful response to, and learning from, feedback with reference to projects or particular processes can be guaranteed and undertaken.

Over the course of the project, new locally designed practices of Indigenous-led evaluation have begun to emerge and take root through the work of several Indigenous research organisations. These evaluation practices have prioritised the use of video footage to accompany written materials and evaluation reports, and involved collaborative work between local Indigenous researchers and CDU researchers. There is potential for video based evaluation practices, carried out in close to real time, to be maintained and extended as an evaluation approach in the communities where we have worked, and for the conduct of this work to also support professional development of remote Indigenous evaluators and researchers – a key aspect of this project.

Where such work is not possible within communities, other more generalised forms of communication and feedback may be prioritised as a preliminary step enabling gradual building of trust and a precedent for meaningful communication between government staff and community members.

The Northern Territory Government's *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* can be found at: [https://parliament.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/384461/144.-Remote-Engagement-and-Coordination-Strategy.pdf](https://parliament.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/384461/144.-Remote-Engagement-and-Coordination-Strategy.pdf)

The REC-IER project website can be accessed at: <http://recier.cdu.edu.au/>. Links to additional online materials are referenced throughout this report.



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# General Research Findings

## Expanded Summary: Engagement and Coordination in Remote Indigenous Communities

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In recent years, the Ground Up team at the Northern Institute has been fortunate to receive funding to undertake both research and service delivery simultaneously in remote Aboriginal townships of the Northern Territory. The combination of research and service delivery allows for collaborations in which services are designed, delivered and evaluated while simultaneously exploring the assumptions underlying our work and learning from local elders and authorities. In disparate projects in various contexts particular insights have been agreed upon which this paper attempts to summarise and weave together.

Two assumptions sit uneasily together from the outset. The first is that the assumptions and practices of local clan elders and knowledge authorities should be the starting point, and the second is that research and service delivery funding is most often set up in reference to the 'community'. Governance, as fostered by governments within an Aboriginal township, is very often at odds with traditional governance practices. In fact, in previous research at Milingimbi, one elder made clear that neither governance nor leadership have anything to do with community<sup>1</sup>. Governance has everything to do with elders maintaining care and concern for their families, and for their descendants (which in Yolŋu governance includes a network of different clan groups) and leadership has to do with the ways in which country calls people of various related groups to come together to hunt and gather its resources collaboratively and under authority. Government projects aimed at enhancing governance and leadership in remote Aboriginal communities *at the level of the community* are based on quite different understandings of the nature of community and the nature of governance and leadership. Government practices may in fact undermine traditional governance practices.

So what is the status of the 'community'? According to our Yolŋu co-researchers, the community comes to life as an effect of government and nongovernment agencies working at the level of the township. When these agencies engage carefully and respectfully with clan elders, a healthy community emerges. When the Australian Red Cross, for example, organised volunteers at Galiwin'ku after a major cyclone, individuals and groups came together to support others beyond the traditional boundaries of clan care and concern, and from that work, properly organized by the Australian Red Cross, emerged a more healthy and coherent community<sup>2</sup>. In a separate research project to do with disaster preparedness of Aboriginal people living in the long grass in Darwin, the hundreds of people from many different places and groups made clear that they had the capacity, knowledge and experience to organise themselves *as* community in the event of a cyclone<sup>3</sup>. So community in that sense is an *effect* of people in place doing the right thing by each other, beyond the bounds of kinship responsibilities. Community is not a given, it is a possibility – with threats and opportunities which need to be handled carefully.

How might this insight inform the ways that government and nongovernment organisations undertake their work? The first step would be to recognise that there may be a tension between the ancestral practices of care and concern for people-places, and Aboriginal 'communities' as constituted and recognised by the nation state. There is no reason that they should be in conflict. They can and often do support each other. But to work successfully at the community level – as government organisations and nongovernment organisation most often do – requires managing these tensions productively.

Everywhere in Aboriginal Australia elders and traditional owners are recognised as first authorities. As researchers, we start work in each community by talking to them, and they make clear whether and how we can undertake our work. In a project funded to co-design practices for community feedback to the Northern Territory Government about the quality of its engagement and coordination of government business<sup>4</sup>, local Aboriginal co-researchers reminded us of the importance of talking to elders first, and of course, they

recommend the same starting point for government and nongovernment workers wishing to engage with local people and places. (This project focused upon both the Northern Territory Government's (NTG's) Remote Engagement and Coordination, and the development of local Indigenous Evaluation and Research capacity (REC-IER)).

In terms of local Aboriginal polity, beginning with the traditional owners and elders has always been the correct way to engage. But the elders in our research had an additional, more pragmatic and equally important reason for government workers to engage with them: It is only through witnessing such engagement processes that the new generation of leaders will learn the difficult and complex processes of agreement making and conflict resolution. And furthermore, when government representatives and other outsiders fail to engage appropriately and respectfully with elders, this undermines the elders' authority and their ability to govern and 'grow up' the young people they are responsible for.

This was particularly noted in some communities with reference to police interventions with young people who have been involved in property offences. Elders can and should deal with these minor cases, and when police intervene and marginalise traditional discipline practices, their authority, the elders say, is undermined.

So we have found that elders need to be involved in government engagement for a number of reasons. In addition to those outlined above, elders very often don't feel they have the responsibility or the right to speak on behalf of the 'community', that loose affiliation of kin networks constituted by the nation state and more visible to outsiders than to insiders. In the REC-IER project, we found this mismatch between networks of kin and whole-of-community problematic – particularly in 'communities' which had been constituted sometime in the past with different groups of Aboriginal people not historically connected to each other through ceremonial or kinship links. Smaller 'homeland communities' constituted in the proper place by the right people seldom have any such problems. The task we agreed to was to work with and encourage local Indigenous researchers to design processes whereby the government could get a good idea about how well they were doing in terms of their engagement and coordination strategy<sup>5</sup>. In the two desert communities where we worked, local researcher-evaluators were engaged willingly with the process, until they were required to speak on behalf of the project to the rest of the 'community', or to government on behalf of the 'community'.

This could be viewed from the governments' point of view to be a political or logistical problem. How do we identify and support local individuals who will communicate most effectively to governments on behalf of the community? But from the elders' point of view this seems to be more of a moral than a logistical problem. Working within the ethical codes of behaviour inscribed in ancestral practice requires particular sorts of understandings of accountability, responsibility and justice. Moving beyond the local ethical system specific to particular people-places, to speak on behalf of the 'community' (as a political entity conceptualised as universalist, in that it is freed from responsibility to local space history), may involve some compromise of ancestral ethical behaviour.

The one REC-IER research site where the speaking on behalf of community seemed to work best, was where the Indigenous co-researcher was not a person originally from the local area, although he had lived and had a family in that community over several decades. He enjoyed a certain degree of independence from the ancestral politics of local groups but also a certain authority, trustworthiness and credibility. Any decision about who can speak, coordinate and report feedback to government may involve compromise: the willing may be less suitable than the rightful, who may be less willing.

There is also an issue in some communities around who can speak *to* communities. A senior elder at Galiwin'ku talked about the shame and sorrow she felt when hearing young people on the loud speaker, passing on messages to one and all, that they had been persuaded by government workers to disseminate. She feels that these people have been unfairly and unreasonably required to go beyond their personal rights and responsibilities. They have been 'brainwashed' (see p.21 of this report). Only senior people should make

announcements. The government, in her view, pushes younger people to use the loudspeaker so that its workers can avoid sitting down and talking to the right people in the right order. It is wrong to tell people what to do or even to break news to them if they are not in some ancestral relation to you.

Given the difficulty in finding a single individual willing and with authority to speak to community on behalf of the government, insofar as it to some extent contravenes traditional rights and responsibilities, Cassandra from Ntaria proposed that what they needed in their community was a 'media unit'. Her vision was of a local newsletter (and other media like posters, leaflets or Facebook) which reported openly and in a timely fashion all the government work proposed, ongoing, completed and evaluated. Content would be provided by the government departments, with the expectation that contact numbers for individuals in government who could provide information and receive feedback would be provided. Such a practice would allow communities to be better informed and prepared for interactions with government, without creating a difficult position for any local community member. Many Northern Territory Aboriginal communities have had such local newspapers working very successfully in the past. They were often produced by the Adult Education Centre, or the literature production centre in schools with bilingual education programs.

In terms of the NTG's plan for 'Levels of Remote Community Participation'<sup>6</sup> or their proposed 'Influence Model' through Local Decision Making, these comments from community elders imply that there is considerable work to be done on the first level of informing people in community, before subsequent levels (consulting, involving etc) can be achieved.

Finally, our research projects have most often found that the majority of people in remote communities do not differentiate between the three levels of government. While governments have tried to develop whole-of-government policy approaches to their work in Aboriginal communities (through COAG for example), the reality is that different governments and government departments are not well coordinated at the local level. In addition to this, different bodies within the community confusingly work with separate governments and their agencies. The media approach proposed above could contribute to a much more integrated approach by the levels and departments of government engagement and coordination. This would necessitate considerable investment and commitment. But with good support through an Adult Education Centre in each community, such activity would not only enhance the whole of government approach and its engagement and coordination, but also improve the literacy, numeracy, business and governance skills of local adults – as has been demonstrated recently at the Adult Learning Centre at Yuendumu. There are very many persuasive arguments for the re-establishment of Adult Education Centres in remote communities.

## Endnotes

- 1 Lily Roy talking in Dhuwal language translated to English for the Indigenous Governance and Leadership Development Project <http://igld.cdu.edu.au/lily-roy-traditional-owner-at-milingimbi-2>. For the project website visit: <http://igld.cdu.edu.au/>
- 2 <http://groundup.cdu.edu.au/index.php/red-cross-voluntary-service-research/>
- 3 <http://groundup.cdu.edu.au/index.php/disaster-resilience-management-and-preparedness-in-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-communities-in-darwin-and-palmerston/>
- 4 A draft website can be found at <http://recier.cdu.edu.au/>
- 5 REC Strategy: [https://dhcd.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/188523/REC-Strategy-160926.pdf](https://dhcd.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/188523/REC-Strategy-160926.pdf)
- 6 REC Strategy [https://dhcd.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/188523/REC-Strategy-160926.pdf](https://dhcd.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/188523/REC-Strategy-160926.pdf) p9-10

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# Galiwin'ku Report

## Recommendations

- That evaluation of government engagement in Galiwin'ku be considered an iterative learning process in which successful performance is signalled by regular and responsive feedback from government and Yalu' researchers.
- That new government staff entering the community, or existing staff beginning new projects or programs contact Yalu', and seek advice from the Engagement Advisory Group and support from Yalu' evaluation researchers.
- That government staff interested in receiving feedback on their engagement and coordination distribute the Galiwin'ku evaluation scorecard at meetings to invite comments and suggestions from Yolŋu attendees.
- That elder involvement and locally relevant information brochures continue to feature centrally in future engagement, coordination and evaluation activities in Galiwin'ku.
- That the Elcho Island Noticeboard on Facebook be used as a site to announce meeting times and places, and, where relevant, Yalu' researchers be tagged in these posts.
- That at times, further cross-cultural interpretation may be required to render the feedback given by community researchers accessible to government staff. CDU may be available to help.
- That a brief newsletter (produced in hardcopy, and potentially attached to a Facebook post) be considered as a way to report government responses to the feedback provided by Yalu' researchers and advisory group.

## Summary of the project

Research in Galiwin'ku was carried out in partnership with the Yolŋu research organisation, Yalu' Marnjithinyaraw and involved collaborative work between Yalu' researchers, an elder advisory group and the CDU researcher.

The group of elders overseeing the project have indicated they would like new government staff travelling to Galiwin'ku to use them as a 'Galiwin'ku Engagement Advisory Group'. This group could be listed as available to be contacted on the Regional Council website, and they would hope to assist government staff by offering advice around initial engagement for new projects or programs, including whom to speak to, and in what order.

Should any government staff like to receive feedback on their engagement and coordination activities in close to real-time, there is capacity for continuing work between Yalu' researchers and government. Any staff interested in collaborating with Yalu' evaluation researchers can contact Yalu' to discuss this ([yaluoffice@gmail.com](mailto:yaluoffice@gmail.com)). They will be welcomed by the Yalu' director, Rosemary Gundjarranbuy, and will be supported to make connections with the Engagement Advisory Group and Yalu' research team.

This capacity could be further developed with added investment in relationship building and paid evaluation research positions, in particular by having this evaluation facility built into program budgets and promoted or required by department heads.

## What is good engagement in Galiwin'ku?

Early research at Galiwin'ku involved CDU and local Indigenous researchers working together to speak with elders and community members asking them about their experiences of government engagement, as well as what good government engagement and coordination means for them.

Quotes from these consultations appear below, clustered under a set of key engagement concepts and imperatives:

### Authority of Elders

- Decision-making needs to start with traditional owners and elders groups, not at the council office.
- The government officers speaking with elders should themselves be senior enough to make decisions.
- Younger Yolŋu can be 'brainwashed' by the government (and others) to act precipitously, (for example to make announcements on the loud speaker or to call a community meeting).
- Discussions should be had with the right people in a proper context. There is a Yolŋu word for this context: Dhunji.

### Young people

- The purpose of good engagement is to provide role models and a pathway for the next generation. Government departments need to invite young people to meetings so they can learn, listen and watch.
- Working in the right way with young people is a good way for governments and elders to learn to work together.

### Negotiating shared pathways

- Engagement involves beginning with what the community wants, comparing this to what the government wants, and then negotiating a pathway forward together. This includes opening up discussions about where money is coming from, and where it will go.
- When government people come to discuss issues like housing they often push Yolŋu into making decisions quickly, so they can take the answer back on the plane. That is poor engagement. Workers should stay 2 or 3 nights, so they can understand the problem and the decision should be made in the community, not in the departments.

### Local governance

- There is a hope to one-day return to working through a community council, with Balanda (non-Indigenous people) assisting and mentoring. There was one of these in Galiwin'ku as recently as 2007.
- The integrated machinery of government must meet and engage with an integrated working community, meeting with equal opportunity for both.
- Good engagement involves community, parents and organisations and their representatives.

### Employment

- Good government engagement and coordination depends upon a vibrant community, and a vibrant community depends upon employment.
- If government people don't listen to Yolŋu voices, then Yolŋu learn to lean on service providers, getting their instructions from Balanda instead of leaning on each other as Yolŋu – 'if we listen to each other in a good way everything will go well and Yolŋu will be interested to work'.

### Community development

- Every department should have its agenda set locally and maintain this focus consistently.
- It is important that Yolŋu in community can trace the messages and information they have given as they travel into government. That is, that there is a clear picture of how the system works and the 'twisting journey' their suggestions will take when delivered to government departments.





Yalu' researchers  
carrying out  
consultations in  
Galiwin'ku

## Tracing a network of engagement in Galiwin'ku

Good engagement and coordination in Galiwin'ku involves connecting with people, groups and organisations in a manner that respects traditional relations of authority, at the same time as also connecting with government recognised decision-makers and service providers.

There are many different ways that these networks may be traced in relation to new or existing programs in Galiwin'ku. Yalu' and the Engagement Advisory Group are available to help.

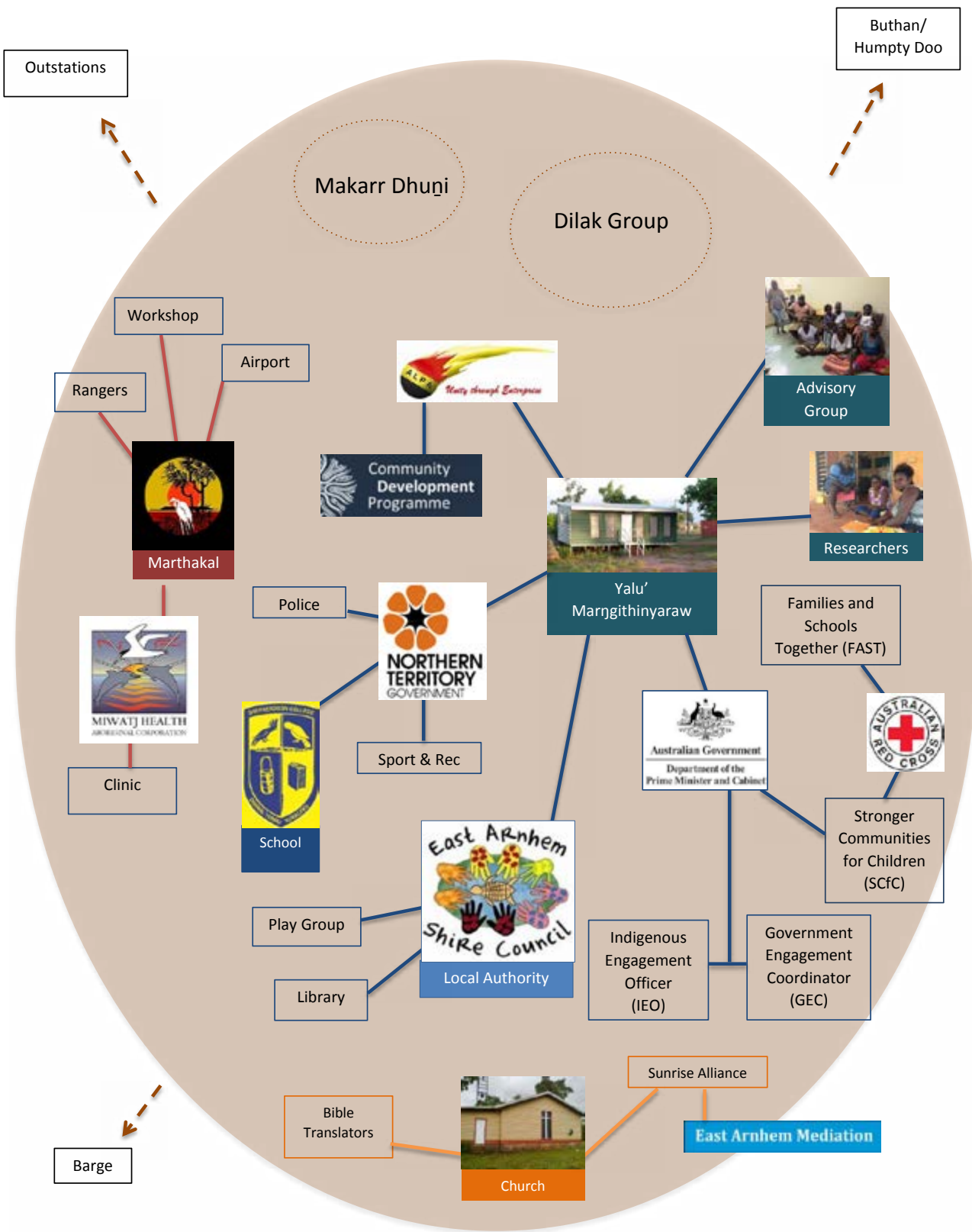
When visiting the community, it is important to consider the particular networks you are tracing. Do they align with guidance you have been given? And do they include all important groups and relevant stakeholders?

When visiting Galiwin'ku, it is likely that:

- Your business will involve meeting a variety of elders, as well as participants and managers from a range of groups and service providers. It is unlikely to be located in only one place (e.g. Local Authority meetings).
- Finding the right people to talk to won't be an immediately straightforward activity. Many senior people are involved with multiple organisations and may move between different workplace locations (e.g. clinic, school, Marthakal office).
- If you have a sense of the network you would like to trace, when one person or group you intend to meet is busy, you can redirect your attention and visit someone else and still remain on task.

Below is a schematic providing an example of some of the groups and organisations you may move between and seek to engage in Galiwin'ku. This is not proposed as a definitive map, but is rather an illustrative device which may help with visualising an engagement network you may trace over the course of a community visit. Yalu' is a central node, and will help you connect to others in the network.

Tracing a network of engagement in Galiwin'ku





## Step-by-step: Initiating good engagement and evaluation practices in Galiwin'ku

Successful engagement in Galiwin'ku will involve clear articulation of government activities, and will maintain and extend through traditional patterns of clan and intergenerational authority.

It is not always appropriate for staff doing government business to approach community members directly, as doing so may circumvent other practices and arrangements of authority already present within the community.

There are resources available in Galiwin'ku to support and evaluate government engagement activities. Below is a step-by-step guide.

**Please note:** There may be a significant difference between the procedure adopted by a staff member who is brand new in a community, and staff who are more experienced. New staff should always try to be inducted into the community by someone who is well known. This is to prevent confusion, and show that the experience and understandings of the previous member are being passed on rather than lost (see video: <http://recier.cdu.edu.au/projects/galiwinku/>).

### BEFORE YOU GO:

- Visit the BushTel website (<http://www.bushtel.nt.gov.au>) for remote travel advice, and to check for any news or incidents in your community
- Work through the BushReady guidelines for considering and planning for a community visit.
- Produce a 1-page information sheet explaining the work you would like to do, including a bio, photo and contact number (for guidance see 'Tips for Message Exchange' on the REC-IER website - <http://recier.cdu.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Message-exchange.pdf>).
- Contact any Yolŋu you will be working with to find out when will be an appropriate time to visit (either personally or through another government worker known in the community)
- If you plan to visit or present at an L.A. meeting, lodge an application to attend and arrange for an interpreter to accompany you (contact details: <https://dhcd.nt.gov.au/publications-and-policies/engaging-with-local-authorities>).

### IN GALIWIN'KU:

- If you would appreciate local assistance with your engagement, contact the 'Galiwin'ku Engagement Advisory Group' and arrange a meeting. This group can be contacted through Yalu' Marŋgithinyaraw face-to-face or via email – [yaluoffice@gmail.com](mailto:yaluoffice@gmail.com).
- Following the advice of the Engagement Advisory Group, begin to visit and talk to: key individuals, Yolŋu organisations and stakeholders (see 'Tracing an Engagement Network').
- In your discussions:
  - Consider making sure that community elders are approached first prior to other groups and organisations.
  - Be clear about the agenda and limitations of your government work.
  - Be clear about where program funding has come from, how it will be distributed, and whether this is negotiable.



- Be open to discussion about how this work may interact with and/or support local agendas, such as: maintenance of traditional law, supporting young people and producing local employment.
- Present, and leave behind, the 1-page information sheet with contact details.
- Discuss or provide details of when you will be back next and for how long.
- Inviting feedback and evaluation:
  - At the end of any substantial meetings, consider handing out a Galiwin'ku Engagement Scorecard so as to elicit feedback from Yolŋu who are present ([http://recier.cdu.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/flier-engage\\_FULL\\_YM.pdf](http://recier.cdu.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/flier-engage_FULL_YM.pdf)).
  - Yalu' researchers are available to attend meetings and provide guidance and advice around any areas of miscommunication or disconnection around messages presented.

#### **FOLLOW UP:**

Follow-up is an important part of the engagement process; both in relation to government business and in response to feedback provided through local evaluations.

Follow-up reports may take a number of forms.

- Oral feedback provided on a return visit.
- A brief hardcopy newsletter reporting on actions arising from previous feedback and evaluation work delivered to relevant parties by hand.
- A brief digital newsletter reporting on actions arising from previous feedback and evaluation work sent by email or Facebook post on the Elcho Island Facebook page.

**Note:** Not all forms of reporting will be suitable in all cases.

#### **BUDGETING:**

If you are interested in seeking the assistance from the Galiwin'ku Engagement Advisory Group, or from local Yalu' evaluation researchers, payment for these services will need to be included in program designs and budgets.

## Local evaluation capacity in Galiwin'ku

Throughout this project, a group of senior Yolŋu advisors and Yalu' researchers have developed an evaluation research approach for providing feedback to government on their engagement in Galiwin'ku.

These researchers and advisors have opted for a formative (rather than summative) mode of evaluation, with feedback intended to provoke learning or new understandings, rather than to offer assessment of actions or programs.

The team of evaluation researchers working in Galiwin'ku have developed research profiles detailing their skills, experience and interests for further research work. All have indicated that they would be interested in continuing to offer evaluation research services in Galiwin'ku, and supporting new researchers to gain these skills.

- Rosemary Gundjarranbuy: <http://iri.cdu.edu.au/rosemary-gundjarranbuy>
- Stephen Dhamarrandji: <http://iri.cdu.edu.au/stephen-dhamarrandji>
- Anita Munyarryun: <http://iri.cdu.edu.au/anita-golung-munyarryun>
- Beulah Munyarryun: <http://iri.cdu.edu.au/beulah-munyarryun>

This team has some early experience with carrying out evaluation research that they have developed in this project. Government staff interested in engaging Yalu' researchers to provide feedback on engagement activities could expect the following process.

### Process for giving feedback to government:

1. Government workers contact Yalu' and/or CDU researchers (phone, email or face-to-face) to let them know of an upcoming meeting e.g. Local Authority, Housing Reference Group, Dilak Group or others.
2. Yalu' researchers seek permission to attend the meeting (phone, email or face-to-face) and take notes, video and photos, and to hand out the scorecard (<http://recier.cdu.edu.au/projects/galiwinku/>).
3. Following the meeting Yalu' researchers meet with the engagement advisory board to show them video footage and discuss the meeting, and events arising. Where possible, Yalu' researchers video record significant comments or discussions.
4. Yalu' lead researcher sends video/photo material to the CDU researcher (including footage from advisory meeting).
5. CDU and Yalu' researcher discuss the footage, and key events/issues arising.
6. CDU and Yalu' researcher develop a report to go to appropriate individuals/agencies in government.
7. Feedback from government returns to Galiwin'ku via Yalu' researchers who can report back at the next relevant meeting and/or by a brief newsletter update on the Galiwin'ku Community Noticeboard on Facebook.



Rosemary Gundjarranbuy  
(Yalu' Director) discussing  
government  
engagement in Galiwin'ku



## Insights from initial evaluation research in Galiwin'ku

The research team at Galiwin'ku attended two L.A. meetings (22 May and 21 June, 2017) for the purpose of the evaluation research, and carried out follow up discussions with the Engagement Advisory Group.

Listed below are some of the outcomes/insights emerging from this work. These are displayed as sample vignettes and a collection of short feedback reports.

### Sample Vignettes



#### **Stephen Dhamarraṁdji from Galiwin'ku**

Responding to an episode where Geoffrey Dhalṁanda arrived at the beginning of the L.A. meeting and asked to speak to the members about an issue of overcrowding in his house, Stephen Dhamarraṁdji (Yalu' researcher) commented:

"That old man came to the L.A. meeting to talk about his house, because most of the L.A. members are also the HRG members. That is why he was there"

*Stephen is drawing attention to the manner in which some of the distinctions between government bodies and their particular accountabilities can seem to disappear on the ground. It can seem strange that an issue may be raised in one forum, but not*

*in another, particularly when the membership of the differing meetings are very similar.*

Link: [http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short\\_reflections/vignette-stephen-dhamarraṁdji-galiwinku](http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short_reflections/vignette-stephen-dhamarraṁdji-galiwinku)



#### **Rosemary Gundjarranbuy (with Danny Daṁatana) from Galiwin'ku**

"Nhaltjan limurr dhu, nhaltjan limurr dhu manymakkum dhuwal nhawin, dhawaṁmaram... rrupiya walal ga gurruṁpan, nhawuku nhaltjan ṁali dhu dṁamamirriyam rrupiya dhiyal communityṁur... Pathway yolṁuw, yolṁunha ṁayi dhu employing the peoplenha to work balanyaṁur malaṁur ṁunhi ṁunhi activities dṁama yuwalknha... Balanyakurru mala ṁunhi dhu ṁayi yothu, nhawi yolṁu, even ṁula nhāmunha'mirri dhungarramirri balanyakurru bala ṁayi dhu marṁgithi..."

"What is a better way for us to come together and talk about this funding? ...they are giving money, how do we develop this money, put it to work in the community here? A pathway for Yolṁu, employing Yolṁu people to work on all those different sorts of genuine activities... Those are the pathways through which young people, all Yolṁu however many years old, that is the way through which they will learn."

*Rosemary Gundjarranbuy is referring to an issue that was discussed at the previous day's L.A. meeting, regarding whether some available funding should be spent on a BMX track or pool. Rosemary is suggesting that good engagement is not about asking L.A. members if they want one facility or another. Rather it involves seeing descisions about expenditure as a means for opening up promising pathways for Yolṁu through building community and jobs.*

Link: [http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short\\_reflections/vignette-rosemary-gundjarranbuy-galiwinku/](http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short_reflections/vignette-rosemary-gundjarranbuy-galiwinku/)



### **Dorothy Bepuka from Galiwin'ku**

"Dilaknha walalawurru dirramu walal dhu dhäruk-bakmaram. Ga balanya lingu mulkurr bawa'mirr mala. Yuwalk dhäwu. Bäyŋu wala li ga bilyun ga waŋa ŋunhi yolthu ga gur'kuryun. Walal dhu waŋa ŋunhi walal ga napurruny barrantjunmaraman communitylil ŋunhi ga loudspeakeryu dhu ga waŋa, napurruŋ ga bilyun communitylilnha bilil walal ŋunhi ga mulkurr rurrugyun balanday walal, ŋunhili banydji djämaŋur. Nhä napurr ŋuli ga dhäkay-ŋäma ŋunhi walal ga announce? ga yätjkurrkum ŋayaŋu bartjunmaraman. Dilaknha walalawurru walal dhu dhäruk-bakmaram."

"It should only be senior people who can make an announcement (on the loudspeaker). Those other people (who make announcements) are crazy. True story. They don't turn and tell us who is pushing them to talk on the loudspeaker to discipline the community. Their

brains have been washed by the Balanda back there in their workplace. What do we feel when we hear that announcement? A bad feeling hitting our insides. Only senior elders have the right to break news."

*Bepuka is drawing attention to the way in which care should be taken when using the loudspeaker, and delivering government messages in Galiwin'ku. Who is on the loudspeaker? Who has given them permission? Is it a message that Yolŋu should to pass to other Yolŋu? Has the message been discussed and negotiated, so that Yolŋu are confident that it is for their benefit? If not, it is likely to cause pain and bad feelings amongst the Yolŋu who hear it.*

Link: [http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short\\_reflections/vignette-dorothy-bepuka-galiwinku/](http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short_reflections/vignette-dorothy-bepuka-galiwinku/)



### **Issue 1: Budget Decisions**

#### *Summary from Yalu' research team:*

There was a presentation from Shane Marshall from the Regional Council. He talked about money, saying that there was a budget available for Galiwin'ku shire. The L.A. committee were asking to put a BMX track for the kids, and there were other funds available if Danny Danjataja (L.A. Chairman) or the community wanted a park or recreational area, cyclone centre, swimming pool...

#### *Comments from Yalu' research team:*

This was good, but what we were seeing is that they were talking about an issue for the community, not an issue that was for individual choice. There should have been a way to involve the community instead of the Local Authority committee getting the story and keeping it there. It could be that in between L.A. and the community there is a gap that needs to be filled.

#### *Comments from CDU research team:*

For Yolŋu, the relevant constituency to discuss or be involved in decision-making is not always the same. While the L.A. members are supposed to represent the community, sometimes it is difficult when their opinion is prioritised over discussions with other relevant people. There may be room for further consideration of appropriate mechanisms for decision-making and communication into and out of L.A. meetings and governance processes.

### **Issue 2: New Cyclone Shelter**

#### *Summary from Yalu' research team*

They are putting a proper cyclone shelter in the community. This is because last year people went to the workshop when the cyclone came, but there was a lot of risk – chemicals in the workshop, and other things. At the meeting, they talked about how contractors have come into the community and they are building a large building opposite basketball court. This is happening now.

#### *Comments from Yalu' research team*

This was good engagement. Well-spoken Balanda, with both Yolŋu and Balanda communicating and listening with each other. Most of the Yolŋu are working with these contractors. Through Birrkpirrk people got training, and now with the cyclone shelter they have been given a proper job.

#### *Comments from CDU research team*

Engagements around the new cyclone shelter at Galiwin'ku are going well. In part because people have a clear experience with what the problem has been and clear explanations of the solution to address them, also because it has demonstrated means for people to transition from training to employment.

### **Issue 3: Multiple modes for engagement and communication**

#### *Summary from Yalu' research team:*

Shane Marshall (East Arnhem Council) spoke at the L.A. meeting. He showed a picture of the multipurpose hall construction site on the projector. Then he led a visit to the construction site where all the L.A. members could see the work for themselves.

#### *Comments from Yalu' research team:*

We went from the office, to out in the field. Everyone was happy to see the shelter this time. It was good and important to talk about all the specifications, and to go down and see the new shelter. It was good when we went out from the office, to the site instead of just talking inside the office. It is good to see what is happening, in a practical way, instead of just making decision inside the office. There should be equal rights for in and out, so we can experience and feel what is actually happening.

#### *Comments from CDU research team:*

Discussion carried out within an office prioritises one (largely verbal) mode of communication and decision-making. Moving outside gave the L.A. members an opportunity to gain a practical and experiential sense of the issue being discussed. This was appreciated and considered valuable.

### **Issue 4: Slow Build Project**

#### *Summary from Yalu' research team:*

A man from the East Arnhem Shire based in Nhulunbuy spoke to the meeting about the Slow Build houses. He showed on the whiteboard screen the old mission houses. This was to give a clear understanding for the committee members about the process of putting in those houses. They were telling the committee, so tenants moving into new houses can understand. Sometimes tenants are confused when they move out of the demountables, he was telling this story to the committee so they can tell others. He showed the L.A. members a diagram, showing how much money has been used for the new houses. Most of the slow build houses are finished, and now there is a job to be done putting a fence around them. Staff will be coming in from Birrkpirrk, helping the contractors putting these fences around. This is including old houses built last year and the slow build houses.

#### *Comments from Yalu' research team:*

The promises that the government made are happening, but we need to focus more on the future. The people who are working on this, will they keep doing this activity or will they move to a wages job? The presentation was good, but can they concentrate and continue good engagement processes out in the field? There are two ways of communicating – inside the office, and out in the field. People in the LA meeting were talking about the budget, but outside is also where people are doing the action. Both of these are part of engagement. Not just the people in the committee, but also those outside in the field.

#### *Comments from CDU research team:*

Good engagement implies more than just good communication. Yolngu in Galiwin'ku consider respectful interpersonal relations to be necessary for respectful communications, but also often emphasise that community building is an important long-term goal that is sometimes even more important than the success or failure of specific face-to-face interactions.



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# Ngukurr Report

## Recommendations

- That evaluation research be recognised as a promising business development opportunity for both senior and emerging community researchers in Ngukurr.
- That new government staff entering the community consider approaching Gumbula Consultancies for support around their engagement and coordination activities, and seek feedback to help develop their practices.
- That accompanying the work of Gumbula Consultancies, further cross-cultural interpretation may be required to render the feedback given by community researchers accessible to government staff (CDU may be available to help).
- That accompanying
- That Ngukurr News be considered as a space to announce meeting times and places, and to provide follow up reports on government business and in response to feedback provided by researchers. Link <https://www.facebook.com/NgukurrNews/> and email any announcements to [ngukurrnews@gmail.com](mailto:ngukurrnews@gmail.com).
- That supporting young people to step into leadership positions be recognised and promoted as a promising locus for collaboration between community elders and government staff.

## Summary of the project

Research in Ngukurr was carried out in partnership with Gumbula Consultancies, and involved collaborative work between several new senior researchers, as well as young mentorees and the CDU researcher.

Throughout the project, Gumbula Consultancies have worked to develop processes for local evaluation of government engagement. Recognising Indigenous-led evaluation research as a business opportunity, they have also worked to build their capacity as an Indigenous business focused around mentoree training and the delivery of research services.

Should any government staff like to receive feedback on their engagement and coordination activities in Ngukurr, there is capacity for continuing work between Gumbula consultancies and government. Staff may contact Ian Gumbula ([mongunu.gumbula@gmail.com](mailto:mongunu.gumbula@gmail.com)) and he will be happy to work with them to design an evaluation plan, and provide feedback on engagement and coordination activities in the community.

If ongoing evaluation work of this kind seems likely to continue in the community, it may be advisable for Gumbula Consultancies and government staff to formalise means for elder advisors to be recognised as a crucial support to this work.

## What is good engagement in Ngukurr?

Initial research in Ngukurr involved the CDU researcher and local Indigenous researchers working together to speak with community elders and members about their experiences of government engagement, and what good engagement and coordination means to them.

Key points from these consultations appear below, clustered under a set of key engagement concepts and imperatives:

### Authority of elders

- The authority of elders remains a crucial aspect of good engagement and coordination in Ngukurr. Elders are the right people to work collaboratively with departments and organisations, such as the police, to sort out problems within the community.
- Senior elders addressing problems together allows them to make connections between various issues and develop more integrated solutions.

### New generations

- Good engagement and agreement making practices provide valuable models for our young people to follow. Good engagement is undertaken with our young people in mind.
- Government workers not engaging properly with the right community members can undermine the elders' authority in the eyes of the young people and produces a 'gap' between young people and the land.

### Back-story

- Government needs to know that there are traditional rules concerning certain areas of the community, and this may have an impact on housing or other issues and decisions.
- Good engagement and coordination include making clear where money is coming from and where it will go.

### History

- There is a significant and fundamental difference between Aboriginal and Munanga (European) cultures, and learning how to recognise and live with this is not always something that has been done well.
- The old village council used to be a good way for the Munanga and the elders to agree on what government business was to be undertaken, its budget, and time lines, local workers etc. It took seriously the clan affiliations and responsibilities elders, just like the Ngukurr Language Centre does today.

### Community development

- Good engagement involves good communication about what is happening, as well as strong contributions by elders and other community members to the making of community. Work 'done from the inside' keeps people-places strong.
- Good engagement entails understanding and respecting the life and culture of Aboriginal people, and providing good feedback and recognition.



## Tracing a network of engagement in Ngukurr

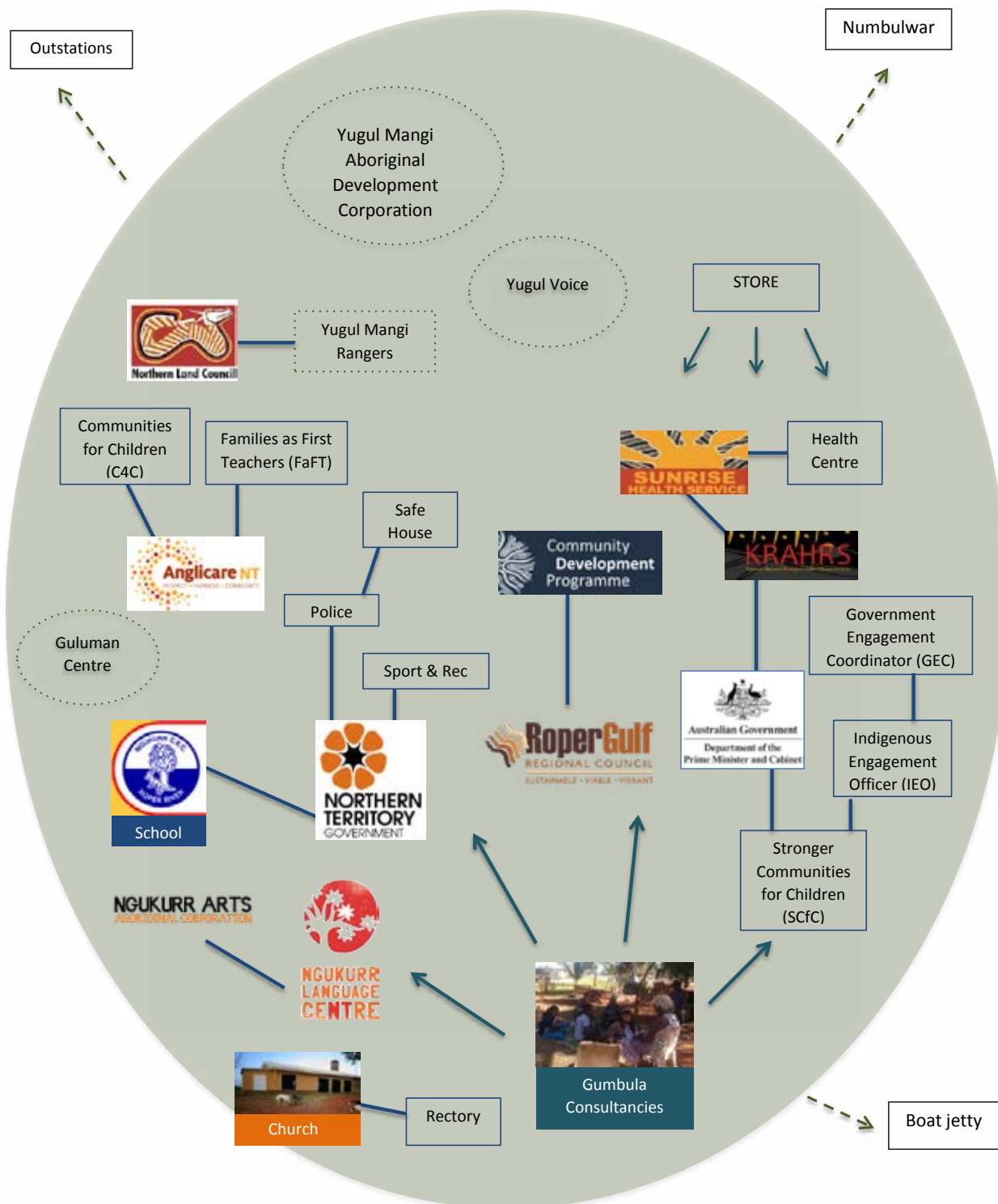
The research work carried out in Ngukurr has revealed that there are significant levels of fragmentation within the Ngukurr community and that there is not always good coordination between various groups and organisations and community members.

Weaving connections between these groups is likely to be a crucial aspect of good engagement and coordination in Ngukurr. Depending on the business at hand, the networks you engage and produce may be different. Seeking assistance from Gumbula Consultancies, the Local Authority, or government staff familiar with the community, is advisable.

As your work proceeds, it is important to keep checking on the networks you are tracing. Do they align with guidance you have been given? And do they include all important groups and relevant stakeholders?

Below is a schematic providing an example of some of the groups and organisations you may move between and seek to engage in Ngukurr. This is not proposed as a definitive map, but is rather an illustrative device that may help with visualising an engagement network you may trace over the course of a community visit. Gumbula Consultancies is an organisation that is able to flexibly connect with others in the network, and they can help you.

## Tracing a network of engagement in Ngukurr



## Step-by-step: Initiating good engagement and evaluation practices in Ngukurr

Successful engagement in Ngukurr will involve clear articulation of government activities, and will maintain and extend through traditional patterns of clan and intergenerational authority.

It is not always appropriate for staff doing government business to approach community members directly, as doing so may circumvent other practices and arrangements of authority already present within the community.

There are resources available in government and in Ngukurr to support and evaluate government engagement activities. Below is a step-by-step guide.

**Please note:** New staff should always try to be introduced to community by someone who is well known. This is to prevent confusion, and show that the experience and understandings of the previous member is being passed on rather than lost.

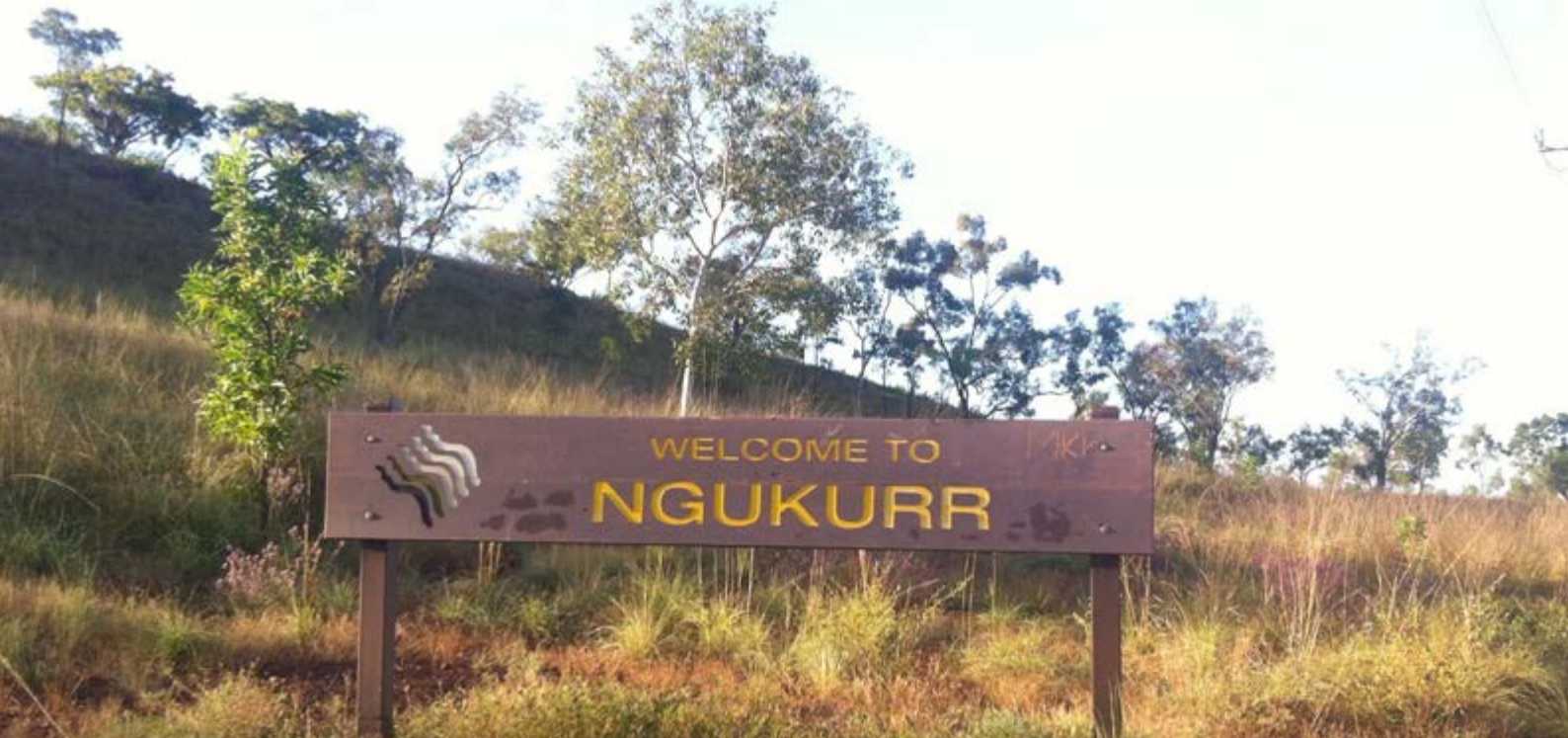
### BEFORE YOU GO:

- Visit the BushTel website ([www.bushtel.nt.gov.au](http://www.bushtel.nt.gov.au)) for remote travel advice, and to check for any news or incidents in your community.
- Work through the BushReady guidelines for considering and planning for a community visit.
- Produce a 1-page information sheet explaining the work you would like to do, including a bio, photo and contact number (for guidance see 'Tips for Message Exchange' on the REC-IER website <http://recier.cdu.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Message-exchange.pdf>).
- Contact any Ngukurr residents you will be working with to find out when will be an appropriate time to visit (either personally or through another government worker known in the community).
- If you plan to visit or present at an L.A. meeting, lodge an application to attend and arrange for an interpreter to accompany you (contact details: <https://dhcd.nt.gov.au/publications-and-policies/engaging-with-local-authorities>).

### IN NGUKURR:

- If you would appreciate local assistance with your engagement, contact Gumbula Consultancies and arrange a meeting (via email - [mongunu.gumbula@gmail.com](mailto:mongunu.gumbula@gmail.com)).
- Following the guidance of these senior researchers, or other advisors (e.g. L.A. members or NTG Regional Development Officer), and begin to arrange meetings with key individuals, Indigenous organisations, and other stakeholders (see 'Tracing an Engagement Network').
- In your discussions:
  - Consider making sure that community elders are approached first prior to other groups and organisations.
  - Be clear about the agenda and limitations of your government work.
  - Be clear about where program funding has come from, how it will be distributed, and whether this is negotiable.
  - Be open to discussions about how this work may interact with and/or support local agendas, such as: maintenance of traditional law, supporting young people, and producing local employment.





- Present, and leave behind, the 1-page information sheet.
- Discuss or provide details of when you will be back next and for how long.
- Inviting feedback and evaluation:
  - Researchers from Gumbula Consultancies are available to attend meetings and provide feedback on engagement activities, as well as advice around any areas of miscommunication or disconnection around messages presented.
  - Feedback will come in the form of video footage and notes, and may include an interpretation provided by a CDU researcher or other government staff member.

#### **FOLLOW UP:**

Follow-up is an important part of the engagement process, both in relation to government business and in response to feedback provided through local evaluations.

Follow-up reports may take a number of forms.

- Oral feedback provided on a return visit.
- A brief hardcopy newsletter reporting on actions arising from previous feedback and evaluation work delivered to relevant parties by hand.
- A brief digital newsletter report on actions arising from previous feedback and evaluation work, which can be submitted to be printed in Ngukurr News (email [ngukurrnews@gmail.com](mailto:ngukurrnews@gmail.com)) and which would then be distributed around the community, and would be available on the Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/NgukurrNews/>.

**Note:** Not all forms of reporting will be suitable in all cases.

#### **BUDGETING:**

If you are interested seeking the assistance from Gumbula Consultancies, payment for these services will need to be included in program designs and budgets.

## Local evaluation capacity in Ngukurr

Through the project, researchers with Gumbula Consultancies have connected with a range of stakeholder groups in Ngukurr. They have received strong support from community members and other organisations (e.g. Roper Gulf Regional Council) around this emerging community evaluation research work.

The team of senior evaluation researchers working in Ngukurr have developed research profiles detailing their skills, experience and interests. All have indicated that they would be interested in continuing to offer evaluation research services in Ngukurr, and supporting new mentorees to gain research and evaluation skills.

- Ian Gumbula: <http://iri.cdu.edu.au/ian-gumbula>
- Mercy Gumbula: <http://iri.cdu.edu.au/mercy-gumbula>
- Gwen Rami: <http://iri.cdu.edu.au/gwen-rami>
- Gumbula Consultancies: <http://iri.cdu.edu.au/gumbula-consultancies>

Government staff interested in developing their engagement and coordination capacities in Ngukurr may choose to work collaboratively with Gumbula Consultancies towards this end. They may expect the following process.

### **Process for giving feedback to government:**

1. The research team have suggested that providing feedback in close to real time (e.g. in relation to recent meetings or other events) provides the best opportunity for mutual learning between various parties involved.
2. Government workers can contact Ian Gumbula via phone or email (see web profile above) to discuss dates of upcoming meetings and potential evaluation work.
3. Gumbula Consultancies will seek permission to attend these meetings, either face-to-face or through a letter.
4. The research team, including senior researchers and mentorees, attend the meeting and take notes, videos, audio and photos.
5. Senior researchers work together to send videos/photo material to the CDU researcher, or a broker in NTG.
6. CDU researcher or NTG broker and Ian Gumbula discuss the footage, photos and key events and issues that arose in the meeting.
7. Ian Gumbula works with a CDU researcher or NTG broker to generate a written report that provides feedback to relevant individuals and/or agencies in government.
8. Feedback from government returns to Ngukurr via Ian Gumbula and the Ngukurr research team, who would report back at the next relevant meeting. Feedback from government could also be reported through publication in Ngukurr News and tabled as an item at the next LA meeting.

## Outcomes and key learnings from initial evaluation research in Ngukurr

The research team at Ngukurr attended a number of meetings over the course of the project for the purpose of conducting evaluation research – the L.A. meeting (17 May 2017), the Yugul Mangi Board meeting, the Yugul Voice meeting, the Stronger Communities for Children board meeting, and the joint Ngukurr School and Language Centre meeting (all June 2017).

Listed below are some outcomes/insights emerging from this work. These are displayed as sample vignettes and a short feedback report.

### Sample Vignettes



#### **Daphne Daniels from Ngukurr**

Responding to a question about how the community can find out about the engagement and communication occurring in the Local Authority meetings, Daphne talks about the burden placed on a small number of community members being expected to communicate messages to the whole community.

“They [the LA meeting] should do the message because I myself am struggling to do the message from here to there as a Local Authority member. I have found it is too much for me.”

*Daphne is talking about government-community communication. L.A. members are finding it difficult to carry the burden of explaining to others in the community what has been happening at the meeting. She is pointing to a moment where it becomes difficult for the L.A. member, who initially had sat in the meeting and acted as a community representative, to now transcend traditional responsibilities to report to ‘the community’.*

Link: [http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short\\_reflections/vignette-daphne-daniels-on-the-burden-of-communication-in-ngukurr/](http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short_reflections/vignette-daphne-daniels-on-the-burden-of-communication-in-ngukurr/)



#### **Ian Gumbula from Ngukurr**

With regard to the Yugul Voice Meeting in June 2017, Ian highlighted that the only people that were allowed to attend were Yolŋu. There were no Balanda at the meeting, except for one man from Yugul Mangi Aboriginal Development Corporation who took minutes. The reason the meeting was run like this was because at the last meeting Balanda kept talking over the top of Yolŋu and they dominated the conversation.

“Having a meeting with just Yolŋu leaders where they could have a conversation and make decisions for their own community is a strong example of local decision making.”

*Ian Gumbula is talking here about elders making decisions for their own communities, and re-asserting their authority. When a meeting is run by Yolŋu, for Yolŋu, communication, engagement and understanding is at its best.*

Link: [http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short\\_reflections/vignette-ian-gumbula-on-elders-making-decisions-at-ngukurr/](http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short_reflections/vignette-ian-gumbula-on-elders-making-decisions-at-ngukurr/)





**Daphne Daniels from Ngukurr**

“Young people don’t want to attend, but if you want to know why you have to look back to the governance training, it wasn’t a priority of the organisation, but it is a priority for us.”

*Daphne is talking about young people in Ngukurr not attending L.A. meetings. Elders recognise that attending the L.A. meetings is an important learning experience for young people learning how to do governance in the community. However, they are finding that young people do not want to attend, and they see this as an outcome of them not being included in the governance training programs set up at the initiation of the Local Authorities.*

Link: [http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short\\_reflections/vignette-daphne-daniels-on-l-a-attendance-at-ngukurr/](http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short_reflections/vignette-daphne-daniels-on-l-a-attendance-at-ngukurr/)

## Sample Feedback Reports

### **Issue 1: Communication within the L.A.**

#### *Summary from Ngukurr research team:*

At the meeting, the communication from the Shire was always delivered by a Munanga (white person). They work in that job and understand the business of the Shire very well. Their presentation was good, and detailed. But it is likely that the community, through the L.A. members, would not understand or engage with what was being said.

#### *Comments from Ngukurr Researchers:*

The most of the discussion in the meeting happened after an Indigenous person spoke – after Ian introduced the REC-IER project and when Tony Jack delivered messages about the Roper Gulf Shire. This is when L.A. members feel more empowered to talk.

#### *Comments from CDU Researchers:*

A good guide to positive and productive engagement is the level of enthusiasm and participation from people in the room. This is often a better guide to levels of understanding, than asking people if something is clear or if they have understood.



Gwen Rami (Ngukurr researcher) works with mentorees uploading evaluation materials at Ngukurr Art Centre

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# Ntaria Report

## Recommendations

- That existing 'community representative' organisations, in particular Wurla Nyinta and the Local Authority, be seen as the appropriate organisations to guide the introduction and negotiation of externally generated initiatives.
- That these organisations be considered as able to offer guidance to government staff initiating new activities in the community. However, they are not available to 'oversee' the projects that they approve.
- That each new project or initiative should work in the community to identify, work with and be accountable to the 'right' people relevant to this particular work.
- That new government staff be advised that responsibility around engagement and decision making for a particular project cannot be known in advance. It will be apportioned to different people and organisations depending on the issue being discussed.
- That a position for a 'local media officer' be created in Ntaria. It would be the job of this person to provide a message and information exchange service for and in the community.

## Summary of the project

The work at Ntaria encountered a number of difficulties. Research was carried out in partnership with Tangentyere Research Hub, but without any community-based researchers being identified within the community at the start of the project.

While initial discussions were promising in terms of identifying a local person/ people who could be engaged as local researchers, the reality was that those identified were not keen to do the work. When interested community researchers were identified, the Tangentyere employment systems proved to be a problem for this project.

Designed around an organisation based in, and focused on, Alice Springs, meant that the potential employee/s needed to travel to Alice Springs to undergo induction. Unfortunately this proved logistically too difficult, so the local researcher was engaged through CDU, despite the fact this meant there was no formal accountability between the researcher and project coordinator in the community.

There continues to be very little engagement research capacity in this community, however consultations have yielded insights regarding appropriate forms of message exchange, and feedback around appropriate actions at the 'inform' end of the engagement spectrum.

## What is good engagement in Ntaria?

The outcomes of REC-IER at Ntaria reflected those emanating from the Indigenous Governance and Leadership Project (<http://igld.cdu.edu.au/>), also conducted by Tangenteyre under the auspices of CDU. The main concern expressed was around who the research was for, and who would benefit from it. This reflects the fact that the community receives a lot of attention from 'outsiders', and so means that engagement and coordination are critical for projects to succeed.

Key points from discussions at Ntaria appear below, clustered under a set of key engagement concepts and imperatives:

### Following the right process

- Any externally generated initiative should be introduced to the community first through Wurla Nyinta and the Local Authority
- The Indigenous Engagement Officer (IEO) can assist people to then connect to the right senior people in the community for the particular initiative
- Negotiating with the right people can take time and effort, but needs to be done, however the right people may not want to be involved, meaning that alternative strategies must be developed

### Community benefit

- People bringing externally generated initiatives must be prepared to work with local people to ensure that their project delivers benefit to the people of the community - it must be more than just words
- Local people should be engaged and properly paid for this work
- Engagement and coordination should lead to things happening in the community that the community want to see happen

### Information provision

- People must be given information about projects in a way that is accessible to them
- Care should be taken to provide information about projects. There is often a lack of information about projects, even though there are a great number going on

### Recognising community complexity

- Ntaria is home to people from five Land Trusts, as well as from other places. Understanding something of the complex history of Ntaria/ Hermansberg (which takes in both the origins of the community as well as the recent past) helps outside people to understand how to work respectfully

### Jobs

- It is a good job for a local person/ people to assist with engagement work so that people can know about, and participate in, what is going on in the community
- It would be beneficial for a range of jobs to be available, including those that are challenging and help the community to address its concerns

## Tracing a network of engagement in Ntaria

Good engagement and coordination in Ntaria involves connecting with people, groups and organisations in a manner that respects traditional relations of authority, at the same time as also connecting with government recognised decision-makers and service providers.

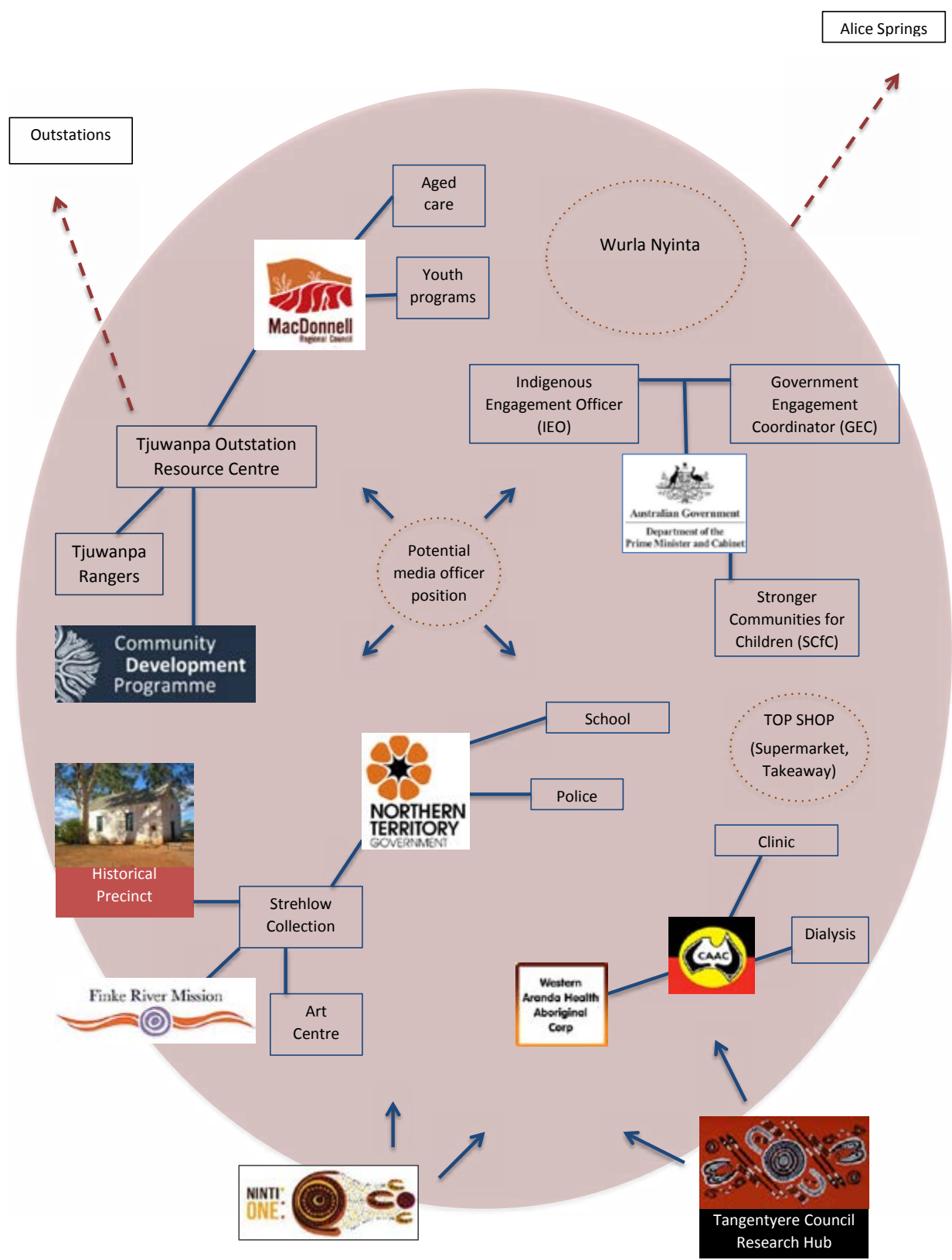
There are many different ways that these networks may be traced in relation to new or existing programs in Ntaria. When visiting the community, it is important to consider the particular networks you are tracing. Do they align with guidance you have been given? And do they include all important groups and relevant stakeholders?

When visiting Ntaria, it is likely that:

- Your business will involve meeting a variety of Elders (potentially through the Wurla Nyinta), as well as participants and managers from a range of groups and service providers. It is unlikely to be located in only one place (e.g. Local Authority meetings).
- Finding the right people to talk to won't be an immediately straightforward activity. This is why seeking advice from the Wurla Nyinta, as well as colleagues familiar with the community, is an important first step.
- If you have a sense of the network you would like to trace, when one person or group you intend to meet is busy, you can redirect your attention and visit someone else and still remain on task.

Below is a schematic providing an example of some of the groups and organisations you may move between and seek to engage in Ntaria. This is not proposed as a definitive map, but is rather an illustrative device that may help with visualising an engagement network you may trace over the course of a community visit.

Tracing a network of engagement in Ntaria





## Step-by-step: Initiating and evaluating engagement practices in Ntaria

There are key people in Ntaria whose engagement, in the eyes of most people, is critical to the success of government initiatives. However, as mentioned, there is a long-standing distrust of research, as well as general suspicion about agendas 'coming in from the outside'.

There are resources available in government and Ntaria to support and evaluate government engagement activities. Below are some suggestions:

### BEFORE YOU GO:

- Visit the BushTel website ([www.bushtel.nt.gov.au](http://www.bushtel.nt.gov.au)) for remote travel advice, and to check for any news or incidents in your community.
- Work through the BushReady guidelines for considering and planning for a community visit.
- Produce a 1-page information sheet explaining the work you would like to do, including a bio, photo and contact number (for guidance see 'Tips for Message Exchange' on the REC-IER website - [http://recier.cdu.edu.au/tips\\_and\\_suggestions/message-exchange-from-government-to-community-and-within-community](http://recier.cdu.edu.au/tips_and_suggestions/message-exchange-from-government-to-community-and-within-community)).
- Contact any people you will be working with to find out when will be an appropriate time to visit (either personally or through another government worker known in the community).
- If you plan to visit or present at an L.A. meeting, lodge an application to attend and arrange for an interpreter to accompany you (contact details: <https://dhcd.nt.gov.au/publications-and-policies/engaging-with-local-authorities>).

### IN NTARIA:

- Any initiative should be first introduced through the already existing formal 'community level' bodies. Two forums, the Wurla Nyinta and the MacDonnell Regional Council Local Authority, are seen as the primary 'community' level organisations through which to initiate engagement; they are identified as the appropriate places for mediating the bulk of 'primary' engagement work. However it is important to note that this does not necessarily mean they are the only or right space for engagement to occur.
- Meeting with these organisations, there are discussions which may be had around who could and should hold responsibility (around engagement and decision making) in relation to the work at hand. This may be 'allocated' to different people and organisations depending on the issue being discussed. This cannot be known in advance.
- The politics of research (and evaluation) mean that the recommended configuration for message exchange in Ntaria is through a local media - like program. Such a configuration frees the local people doing the work from being implicated in the issues being discussed, meaning that they can convey information without being responsible for it or its outcomes.

### FOLLOW UP:

Follow-up is an important part of the engagement process, both in relation to government business and in response to feedback provided through local evaluations.

Appropriate follow up procedures can be decided during initial discussions. Possibilities may include:

- Oral feedback provided on a return visit.
- A brief hardcopy newsletter reporting on actions arising from previous feedback and evaluation work delivered to relevant parties by hand or published/circulated by a media officer.

## Local evaluation capacity in Ntaria

There continues to be little formal local evaluation research capacity in Ntaria. There was concern expressed by the researcher engaged on the project that they may be implicated in the outcomes (or lack of them) from the research. That is that they would be seen by those that they interviewed as somehow being responsible for making sure that the concerns that people expressed were acted upon.

In order to work through these complexities, any future potential researchers will need support, but the nature of that support is impossible to know in advance. This means it is not the provision of training that is required, rather having someone available who can regularly engage to work through the challenges and pitfalls that emerge throughout the process.

The local researcher and others indicated that there is a role for local people to play in the communication of messages from the government to the community and vice versa, and that this would be a valuable thing for improving the outcomes from government investment and service delivery. Such a role was positioned as a media role rather than a research role.

For such a role to succeed it would need to be appropriately resourced and housed, preferably under the auspices of an organisation that would allow it to operate at arm's length. Anyone appointed to a 'media' type role would need training and assistance to enable them to work with people from outside the community (including governments) to design and deliver messages that gave people the information they need.

## Outcomes and key learnings from initial evaluation research in Ntaria

### Sample Vignette



#### Cassandra Stuart from Ntaria

"We need someone like a 'media officer' Hermannsberg is a pretty big place. Because of the distance from town, we are kind of the first community that gets trialled for everything. If someone can put it out there to make a job available for two people or just a small group to do some advertising, to get a little newsletter happening. There are projects that happen here with the community lease project, the cemetery project, when organisations pay rent, government organisations, whatever businesses are here, they pay rent back to the community, they get this lump sum, part of it goes into a big fund for projects to benefit the whole community... Put it all together on one newsletter, Community newsletter, it's out there, people can see if things are happening, some stuff works, some doesn't,

it's out there. Facebook? I don't know. A picture tells a thousand words. It's advertised 'Oh this doesn't work because of such-and-such'. Build employment, build people's courage up to feel proud about their community, themselves, and families."

*Cassandra is talking about a way of getting the community to know about and respond to the many different things that are happening at Hermannsberg, much of which entails government engagement and coordination. It would enhance employment without making any individual or group responsible for dealing directly with government on a range of issues.*

Link: [http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short\\_reflections/270/](http://recier.cdu.edu.au/short_reflections/270/)



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# Ali Curung Report

## Summary of the project

Ali Curung was suggested as a site for the REC-IER project by the staff from the then Department of Local Government and Community Services. Staff at CDU and Tangentyere Research Hub were reluctant to agree to taking on the site, having no connections to Ali Curung. However, through networks within Tangentyere a process to explore the possibility of conducting the project was developed, and the Research coordinator, after a series of trips to the community and to Tennant Creek, established some links and identified a potential local researcher. Following a presentation at the Ali Curung Local Authority meeting a researcher was engaged to conduct the on-ground aspects of the project.

Ali Curung (previously Warrabri - the name changed in 1978) was established following a water crisis at Philip Creek Native Settlement, and comprised people from four main language groups from the wider area - Warlpiri, Warramungu, Alyawarra and Kaytetye. Ali Curung is politically complex as a result of this 'four tribe' composition and the fact that it is on Kaytetye land.

The first difficulty confronting the project was the difficulty posed by the Tangentyere employment systems. Designed around an organisation based in, and focused on, Alice Springs meant that the potential employee/s needed to travel to Alice Springs to undergo induction. This proved too difficult to organise, so after lengthy negotiations it was agreed that the induction process would be run in Ali Curung. The Alekarenge School kindly allowed Tangentyere to use a room for the induction.

The research coordinator made a number of trips to Ali Curung to work with and support the local researcher. Unfortunately, it became clear that the local researcher, despite assurances to the contrary, was not doing the work required. Shortly after, the local researcher was unable to be contacted, and their whereabouts unclear, meaning that no further progress could take place.

After advising the NTG REC-IER Steering Committee, it was agreed that we would need to find another strategy, the first idea being to work through the Local Authority. The CDU researcher talked with people in the Tennant Creek office of the Department of Housing and Community Services to develop the plan and travelled to Ali Curung and Tennant Creek to develop a plan for working through the LA. However, due to a senior staff member going on extended leave, and their replacement having no history with Ali Curung or its Local Authority, it was recommended to the Steering Committee that the project be disbanded in Ali Curung. This was subsequently done.

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# Conclusion

The Remote Engagement and Coordination – Indigenous Evaluation Research (REC-IER) Project was carried out between March 2016 and October 2017. During this time, CDU researchers worked collaboratively with members of an NTG Steering Committee and Indigenous researchers and research organisations in the remote communities of Ali Curung, Galiwin'ku, Ngukurr and Ntaria to develop systems and processes for evaluating government engagement and coordination.

The project was commissioned by the Department of Housing and Community development to address a pressing need for evaluation of government practices in general, and government engagement and coordination in particular, within remote Aboriginal communities.

It was recognised by local researchers in the communities where we worked that this was a new initiative that had not been attempted before. Previous forms of government evaluation have typically involved external evaluators approaching communities with predetermined criteria for success, and pre-determined methods for assessing when and how those criteria had been met.

Through the REC-IER project, Indigenous researchers, working under the guidance of elders and knowledge authorities, initially conducted consultations so as to learn what counted as good engagement and coordination amongst community members where they lived. They then also worked collaboratively with CDU researchers to negotiate and design processes for giving feedback to government on their current engagement and coordination activities, with a view to supporting and validating good practices, and providing guidance around possible improvements where appropriate.

The character of this research, and its outcomes, have varied from place-to-place. While in both Galiwin'ku and Ngukurr, there was significant support for the work, and a strong interest in its continuation, in Ntaria and Ali Curung community members were much more reticent, indicating that slower work or a different approach to evaluating government practice may be advisable in these places.

Emerging out of this work in Galiwin'ku and Ngukurr, there have been clear indications around what is important for government staff to understand and respect when working in remote communities. There has also been a strong interest in the use of video and short reports from community-based researchers as a means for identifying, and celebrating or improving, government engagement and coordination activities. The development of these feedback materials to date has been in collaboration with CDU researchers, and if pursued in future would most likely continue to be produced through continued partnerships between community researchers and university or government staff.

For further details of this research not included in this report, please visit the REC-IER website: <http://recier.cdu.edu.au/>. Or contact Michaela Spencer, CDU: [michaela.spencer@cdu.edu.au](mailto:michaela.spencer@cdu.edu.au) or Peter Gamlin, NTG: [peter.gamlin@nt.gov.au](mailto:peter.gamlin@nt.gov.au).



Researchers at the end of the day  
at Yellow Water, Ngukurr

