



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



NORTHERN
INSTITUTE
People. Policy. Place.

KEY INSIGHTS: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Key Learnings about Government Engagement and Coordination of activities in remote Aboriginal communities.

- Engagement and coordination are quite different practices, but mutually dependent and reinforcing.
- Engagement and coordination are understood and practiced quite differently in Aboriginal communities and in governments.
- Engagement and coordination should not be seen only as something that happens between governments and communities, but also *within* governments and *within* communities. Improving coordination within and between governments is a crucial success factor.
- In Aboriginal communities, 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.
- 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.
- 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.



- Engaging with a ‘community’ is a difficult process. The huge frustrations of government workers (and researchers) finding places, people, and practices for engagement in remote communities are ongoing and increasing. Good local engagement and coordination practices based on shared learning and experience will make the work of government workers and community representatives easier and more productive.

Aboriginal perspectives on Government Engagement and Coordination.

From the local point of view, government engagement and coordination work well when:

- They enhance, and work through, the original and final authority of elders and the right people in the right order and at the right time; these people may be different for different business, but must always include the landowners.
- They reveal the ‘back-story’ behind government projects – the policies, the funding decisions, and the roles of various departments and individuals. Good collaborative planning and evaluation depend upon stories that bring histories out into the open.
- They support the development of new generations of leaders and elders, who will learn how to lead by watching how government people and elders engage each other productively and respectfully. Governments need to take this seriously, also recognising that unemployment poisons young people.
- They implement what could be called a community development approach, recognising that the final goal of effective engagement and coordination is always to bring to life a community of strong, respectful, connected young elders and leaders on country.