



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



NORTHERN
INSTITUTE
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KEY INSIGHTS: SERVICE DELIVERY FINDINGS

General recommendations for assessing Government engagement and coordination practice

- The identification of a person or people in government who are willing and able to receive and respond to feedback provided by researchers is a crucial success factor in providing feedback to government.
- Individuals within government should be nominated as responsible for particular projects or processes in particular communities and identified as responsible to field questions and comments from community members.
- This could be enhanced by the production of illustrated one-page Plan Language Statements/ information brochures that can circulate within the community, providing details of projects and contact details for questions and comments.
- The employment of a local Indigenous Engagement Officer/Government Business Manager would probably be a cost effective way of allowing government officers to find and engage the right people, to receive feedback, and keep community informed. This person could work at all of the three levels of government.
- A number of the Indigenous researchers involved in this project, saw evaluation research as a unique employment and business opportunity which they were interested to be involved in and to develop further.
- The use of collaboratively developed scorecards and evaluation reports has been trialled as a means for providing feedback to government on their engagement and coordination activities. However, at present, these techniques remain quite time consuming and difficult for those



involved, especially as they are not currently directed towards government workers specifically identified as responsible for particular government projects.

- 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. Such a practice could be funded through adult education and literature production facilities such as those which historically were operated through adult education centres.
- While this project is specifically to do with departments within the Northern Territory Government, a 'whole-of-government' approach where inter-agency collaboration allow for a 'one-stop-shop' approach to engagement for all levels and branches would be a particularly useful initiative.

Emerging Local Indigenous Evaluation and Research capacity

- 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.
- Finding interested researchers, who through choice or circumstance are able to work within the difficulties of this tension, has been an important aspect of the research.
- Several possible local solutions to this problem emerged: Ngukurr community has been happy to work with an Arnhemland man who has lived in the community for many years but is not deeply implicated in local ancestral politics. A community awareness solution was recommended in Ntaria where local people could be mobilised as 'media officers' facilitating the spread of awareness of government projects and contact details. In Galiwin'ku emerging consultant-researchers were been happy to work when also supported by Yalu' and a group of elder advisors.
- Where local capacity exists, individuals and groups need hands-on assistance with business development, including invoicing, contracting and report writing.
- Government agencies and outside facilitators (like CDU) could assist in raising the profile of local researchers, in tendering for projects, in undertaking research-evaluation, and developing authoritative reports.
- Where no existing capacity is evident, the establishment of an Adult Learning Centre which facilitates capacity building as well as government engagement and coordination would be cost effective. Such a centre is currently enjoying success in Yuendumu, and serves a variety of community development interests.



Key learnings about NTG-CDU-Aboriginal Community collaboration.

- The Ground Up research/service delivery practice of the CDU researchers allowed some insight into how assumptions (about engagement and coordination, and by government about Aboriginal communities, by Aboriginal people about government) could be opened up and explored, and new interpretations and solutions posited for old problems. It is difficult for governments to achieve the production of these insights within their own systems.
- Often statements made by Aboriginal people about particular instances of engagement and coordination require a further level of interpretation before the insights they contain can be made clear. This is a key research function of the Ground Up team.
- At the outset of the project, NTG was keen to include two communities from Central Australia where we had no previous research experience or welcome. Little productive collaborative work emerged from either community, which highlights Ground Up's practice of building upon previous successful engagement.
- Some of the key insights emerging from this project were also evident in other GroundUp projects in remote communities undertaken for government and non-government organisations.