

PRINCIPLES FOR A PARTNERSHIP-CENTRED APPROACH FOR NGOs WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Purpose

These principles are designed to guide the development of a partnership-centred approach for non-Aboriginal NGOs engaging in the delivery of services or development initiatives in Aboriginal communities in the NT.

Objective

Development of these principles is underpinned by the strong aspiration of Aboriginal community controlled peak organisations in the NT to work with and secure the support of non-Aboriginal NGOs towards the essential goal of strengthening and rebuilding an Aboriginal controlled development and service sector in the NT. It is about putting Aboriginal people back in the driver's seat.

Context

These principles embody the spirit and substance of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). They have been developed through an understanding that a fundamental shift is required in policy approaches towards Aboriginal communities from a narrow service delivery focus to one based on a development approach. It is understood that to be effective, these principles require a corresponding commitment from government to provide an enabling environment to properly support and resource action under the principles.

Principles

In supporting these principles, non-Aboriginal NGOs agree to undertake to:

1. **Consider their own capacity:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs shall objectively assess whether they have the capacity (either in service delivery or development practice) to deliver effective and sustainable outcomes in the NT context.
2. **Recognise existing capacity:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs will recognise the existing capacity and particular strengths of Aboriginal NGOs and identify how they can contribute to further developing this capacity.
3. **Research existing options:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs shall thoroughly research existing Aboriginal service providers and development agencies before applying for service delivery contracts or prior to considering community development projects.¹

¹ APO NT should be contacted for advice where there appears to be no relevant Aboriginal organisation/s providing services or undertaking development work. <http://www.apont.org.au>

4. **Seek partnerships:** Where there is an Aboriginal NGO willing and able to provide a service or development activity, non-Aboriginal NGOs shall not directly compete with the Aboriginal service provider, but will seek, where appropriate, to develop a partnership in accord with these principles.
5. **Approach to partnership:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs will be guided by the priorities of the Aboriginal NGO in developing a partnership. Partnerships will be based on building and strengthening, rather than displacing, Aboriginal organisational capacity and control. Processes for developing partnerships will need to recognise the inherent power imbalance between large NGOs and small Aboriginal organisations, and will need to allow sufficient time for partnership development.
6. **Recognise, support and promote existing development practice:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs acknowledge that many Aboriginal organisations already have robust and effective development practices embedded in a cultural framework, although some of this may be implicit and undocumented. Non-Aboriginal NGOs agree to recognise and support these practices, including through partnership arrangements.
7. **Work together with Aboriginal people to create strong and viable Aboriginal organisations:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs recognise Aboriginal organisations and communities as lead agents in creating sustainable governance and leadership in Aboriginal communities in the NT, and agree to work within structures and processes that provide Aboriginal decision-making control. This may require formal delegation of power and the dedication of self-generated resources to assist with this process.
8. **Ensure Aboriginal control, not just consultation:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs agree that Aboriginal organisations need to be in the 'driver's seat' and have control of development initiatives, services and programs delivered to their communities. This should include having input to decisions regarding resource allocations and staffing.
9. **Develop a clear exit strategy:** Where the desired outcome is for local Aboriginal organisations to deliver services or provide a development role, non-Aboriginal NGOs will develop a mutually agreed, transparent exit strategy in consultation with their partners. Contracts with government should incorporate a succession plan and long term planning for local Aboriginal organisations to deliver services, with appropriate resourcing included.
10. **Ensure robust evaluation and accountability:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs will develop a robust accountability framework and evaluation process together with partner Aboriginal organisations and communities.

11. **Cultural competency and appropriate development practice:** Aboriginal organisations and non-Aboriginal NGOs will seek to work together to share learnings and establish effective development practice and cultural competency standards for development projects and service delivery initiatives.



About these principles: These principles were developed through a collaborative process led by Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT), Strong Aboriginal Families, Together (SAF,T), National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, ACOSS and NTCOSS, with input from a forum in February 2013 that brought together twenty seven non-Aboriginal NGOs with Aboriginal peak organisations. For further information see <http://www.apont.org.au>