

15/07/2021

The Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee members,

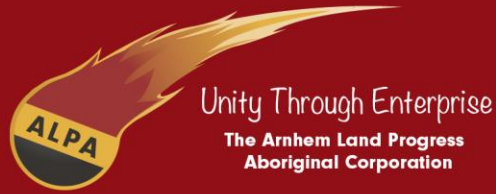
The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation, henceforth known as ALPA, welcomes the opportunity to provide further evidence in relation to the upcoming Community Development Program (CDP) reforms to be considered during the *Inquiry into the Opportunities for Employment and Economic Development for Indigenous Australians*.

The ALPA Board have historically been active in engaging in reform conversations with the National Indigenous Australians Agency and with the recent announcement that the current CDP program is to be reformed to the Remote Jobs program, began discussions about key areas they feel it is important for the program to engage with. They are excited by the opportunities that a co-design models presents and look forward to working with agency to ensure that the program is able to meet the needs of communities across Arnhem Land.

It is apparent to the ALPA Board that programs such as CDP, have the opportunity to support significant change in remote communities and empower Indigenous Australians to make self-determined choices about their future. The CDP program is often times the largest federally funded program in remote communities and can have a much broader impact than just supporting community members into employment. It has the resources available to provide key services to community members at whatever age they are and whatever their individual aspirations are.

This reform process provides an opportunity to utilize a large program to support a broader range of social determinants and the ALPA Board see this program's measure of success as providing a holistic service to community members, that is engaging and focused on providing tailored supports. They believe that these 6 key considerations are how CDP can support Yolngu people to move into employment, engage in business or recognize other opportunities currently available to them.

The Board recognize that there are learnings and positive aspects of previous programs that we need to take into consideration when looking into potential new models and opportunities. These include the wages model within the Community Development and Employment Program, the business and economic growth opportunities and employer subsidies presented within the Remote Jobs and Communities Program and the small business growth through Activity Generated income and funding model encompassed in the current CDP program.



The ALPA Board have highlighted 6 key areas that they believe are crucial for the program to engage with in a meaningful way to actively support remote communities and its residents. These include strengthening cultural frameworks, individual supports, business creation, employment, community based engagement projects and community development.



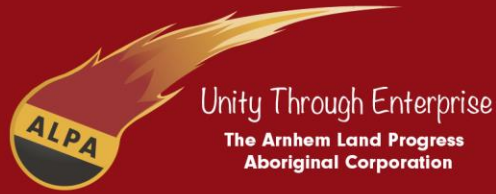
Strengthening Cultural Frameworks:

It is important to recognize the cultural environment that Yolngu people operate within, and the complexities that can present when engaging with programs such as CDP. The journey that a Yolngu person follows during their life means navigating the conflicting priorities of cultural responsibilities and western expectations. At different points in a Yolngu person's life, they will have cultural responsibilities that must take precedence over engagement in government programs and the importance of this this must be recognized and accepted with flexibility to ensure cultural engagement is valued and prioritized.

There are also opportunities for programs such as CDP to further enhance and strengthen these cultural frameworks and give primacy to them by recognizing that Indigenous culture itself is to be valued. The teaching of cultural practices from older generations to younger will support the transition of knowledge and ensure the continued strength of Yolngu culture in Arnhem Land. The active support of Yolngu ceremonies as valid engagement and active involvement considered meeting mutual obligations is considered by the Board as a key measure of success for the reformed program.

The Board believe there is an opportunity to align the service delivery model of the CDP program more closely to those of traditional Yolngu structures and doing so will provide opportunities to employ cultural leaders to support the program. Recognizing that cultural engagement is a valid employment opportunity and not expecting cultural leaders to continue to volunteer their time when engaging in government programs.

The Board believe it is important that these cultural frameworks be considered above all else as they are key to the daily lives and practices of community members in Arnhem Land.



Individual Supports:

Any new program needs to recognize the important supports that each individual needs. Often times there are complex barriers that Yolngu people face in their everyday life, which can prevent them from engaging in. These can include language literacy and numeracy, overcrowding housing, lack of access to consistent medical care and geographical isolation. The CDP reformed program provides an opportunity to define what support means and expand it beyond the sphere of employment, to encompass a broader support model. This may include supporting participants to work through other government systems such as MyGov, Services Australia, navigating the health care systems or even engaging with other stakeholders within the community.

It is important to understanding that supporting individuals will be more successful when working in partnership with them, their families, and other stakeholders. The support has to be an active engagement between the provider and the individual, with the participant controlling the terms of that engagement. A participant has to be provided the opportunity to define the terms of that engagement to ensure their voice is heard and valued.

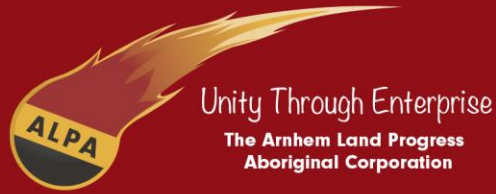
A strengths-based model with a person-centered approach is important to ensuring the support is tailored. It is also important to recognize that people are in different stages of their lives, and they may not be ready to engage with programs such as CDP, which means the support for that person will need to look different again. This control will empower individuals to make choices about their goals and aspirations and increase service provider's abilities to engage in a more meaningful way with program recipients.

Business creation:

The CDP program is a key driver to economic growth in remote communities. It is often times one of the largest programs being delivered and has the highest number of assets that can contribute to business growth. It is important that this be taken into consideration when reforming the program. Previous programs such as the RJCP program provided the opportunity to engage in larger scale enterprise development and long term job creation in the region. An example of these are the 4 enterprises that ALPA discussed during its testimony.

The Board feel it is important to ensure that programs such as CDP have capital investment opportunities for people to engage with, which will support business and economic growth in remote communities. Starting a business in mainstream Australia is often difficult and without capital support, starting a business in remote Australia can be nearly impossible. The communities throughout Arnhem Land have an entrepreneurial history of engaging in trading. The Board feel that there is a key interest in business development in the Arnhem Land region and a recognition from communities, that in order to end welfare dependency, they are going to need the opportunity to start businesses.

The current CDP program has the ability to support small family start-up businesses and sole traders through the Activity Generating Income (AGI) model. It has been highlighted that this provides a safe environment for small businesses to operate with the wrap around supports of the larger program. This model has been successful already in supporting Ganbaya Services in Galiwin'ku from being a CDP activity to an independent business operating within the community. The Board want to highlight how important this mechanism is and feel strongly that it should be continued into any future program to support smaller business opportunities.



The ALPA Board also highlighted the importance of the Community Development and Employment Program Model (CDEP) in supporting the growth of small businesses in the region. This model allowed more Yolngu people to be engaged in employment, while businesses built the capability to transfer them to full time employment. They also recognize that in some areas this did erode the foundation of other employment and believe it should only be used in appropriate circumstances to support business or employment growth into part-time or full-time paid roles.

Employment:

The ALPA Board believe that in order for Yolngu people to make self-determined choices about their future, they need to be financially independent of government and real employment opportunities provide that. They strongly believe that any program into the future needs to continue to provide high levels of support for people moving into employment. The new program needs to continue to facilitate that employment and engage participants actively and ensure they are aware of upcoming opportunities.

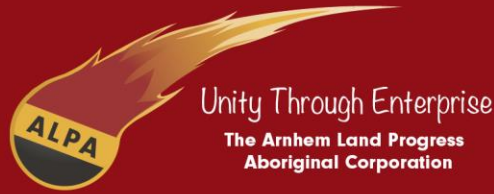
They believe there needs to be a focus on building the skills of program participants through training and upskilling, so they are able to be competitive in the employment market and take up roles that are otherwise given to non-indigenous community members. Recognizing that the requirements for training in remote communities is different and ensuring courses are developed and built with a remote context considered to support the best outcomes.

It is also important to support employers in the region to engage with a Yolngu workforce. An example of this happening successfully was through the wage subsidies model under the RJCP program, where employers had access to ongoing funds while new employees built up skills and confidence in their role. The current program only offers incentives to employers at 26 weeks and that is dependent on employees meeting a number or requirements. The payments are often times difficult to ascertain and some employers do not prioritize Yolngu employment due to this.

Community Based Engagement Projects:

Programs such as CDP, have the opportunity to have broader positive impacts on the remote communities in which they operate. As mentioned previously CDP has a large number of resources at their disposal that can be utilized to support everyday community living and maintenance.

There is often a significant need from community members for support from CDP within the community. This can include projects such as lawn care, furniture building, landscaping, and the building of ceremony structures to name some. Projects such as these benefit the whole community and provide an opportunity for community members to identify needs that are currently outside of any other funding provided to organisations. This allows the program to be a holistic model of service delivery that focusses on supporting Yolngu people in all aspects of their lives.



A key area for the Board is the opportunity for these projects to engage with community members aged between 17 – 30 who are one of the most disengaged groups, with a significant proportion of people not engaging in any Government services at all. Specialized projects designed to engage young adults in community in a positive and constructive way will support the future leaders of Arnhem Land to be strong and confident in their cultural heritage, skills and abilities. Under the current model there are difficulties in engaging with projects like this as they are often more focused on social outcomes as opposed to being mapped to employment opportunities.

The young adults program is just one example of how the Board feel a reformed program, can not only support people into employment but provide a more broad holistic support to the community to engage with all aspects of a Yolngu person's journey as they grow within their communities and culturally.

Community Development:

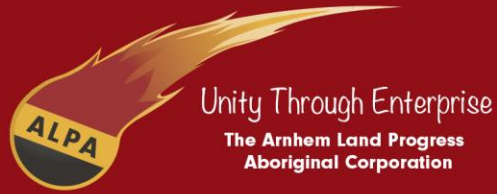
The ALPA Board believe that there is a real opportunity in reforming the CDP program to undertake meaningful community development within Arnhem Land, which will empower communities and individuals to have a strong sense of self-agency and control leading to self-determination. They believe that a program designed to benefit the community will create a more cohesive environment where there is not a requirement for people to choose between their culture and the western responsibilities but rather that they complement each other.

There is an opportunity to recognize the strength of the leadership in remote communities, and provide individuals development opportunities in leadership and governance to support them to take control of decision making in all areas of government policy that they interact with. There is an opportunity to work in partnership with leaders and build programs that not only empower community members but have long lasting positive impacts on strengthening culture, supporting individuals and supporting economic development and business creation.

They believe that a reformed program provides an opportunity for a service hub model, where a service provider can act as a conduit between Yolngu and the numerous services that they are often required to engage with throughout their lives. The service can be a connected referral model with the power balance being shifted from expectations of engagement to active support of community members.

Key to ensuring that any program is delivered appropriately is the performance framework. The performance framework, within which the service provider's performance is measured, often times defines the way in which the service is delivered and what areas are prioritized. Ensuring that performance frameworks align to the key objectives of the program is critical. These measures of success need to be defined with the community in consultation.

In closing it needs to be acknowledged that meaningful community development and business development in remote communities takes time, and there must be a shared commitment between both the community and the government to support this to ensure its successful implementation. Programs such as CDP provide an integral



service to communities and the ALPA Board recognizes the importance of this program. They believe the impact the program can have is much more substantial than it is currently having.

All of the topics within these discussions are things that are needed for CDP and programs like CDP to be successful and for people to transition off of welfare and into employment, business and other opportunities within remote communities.

Kind Regards,

Emma Kelly
General Manager Community Services
ALPA