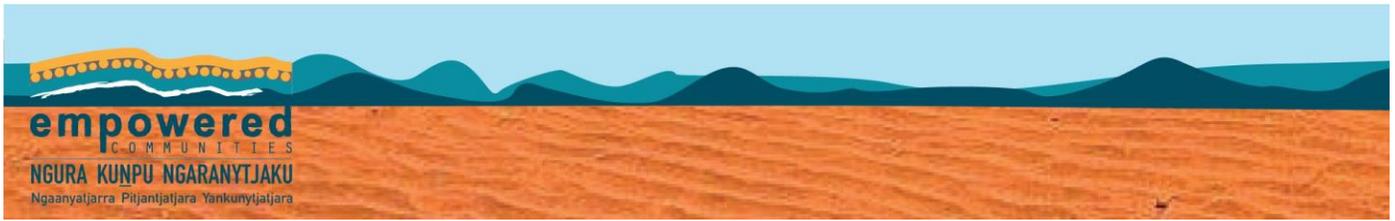
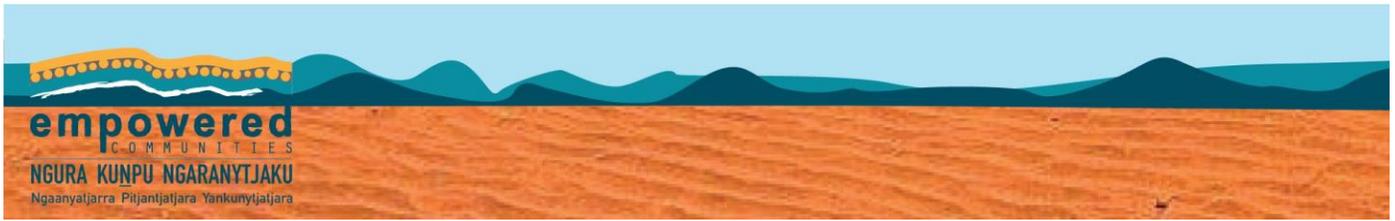


Empowered Communities
NPY Region
Submission - Closing the Gap
November 2019



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1. Introduction

1.1. The scope and context of this submission

The decision to establish a Joint Ministerial Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Council on Closing the Gap is a significant milestone in attempts to close the unacceptable gaps between Aboriginal Australians and the broader community. Genuine partnership and decision-making is vital to achieve sustained outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As Pat Turner recently noted:

“until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are brought to the table as equal partners, the gap will not be closed and progress will not be made..”

Empowered Communities (EC) supports this recent process led by the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks) to seek feedback on priority areas that support Aboriginal-led decision making and service delivery, noting that there is **compelling alignment with the principles driving Empowered Communities (EC)**.

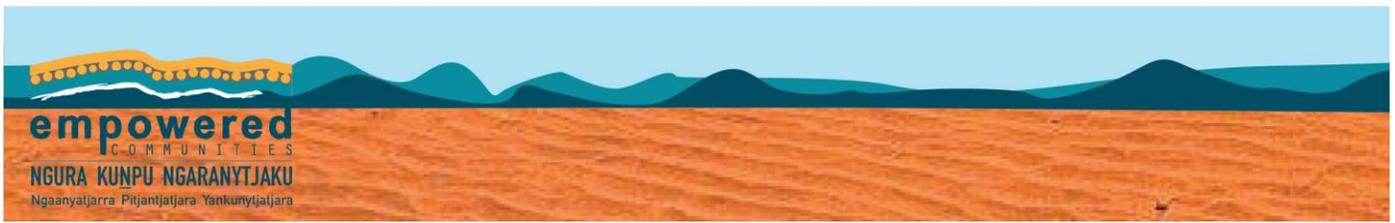
A key focus of Empowered Communities is **empowerment of individuals, families and communities**. **A large part this is achieved** through **joint decision making** and processes, for example, co-design and structures, working groups and place based activity, which enable authority for deciding or acting to rest as close as possible to the people affected by the decision or act (**subsidiarity**), as well as the effective partnerships required for joint decision-making

In the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara’ (NPY) Region, EC is focusing on building strong two-way engagement and communication at both the regional and local levels with communities and families. While this approach involves challenges, our view is that this is a critical process, taking the Closing the Gap approach beyond organisations, peak bodies and committees, to a community and individual level. The Closing the Gap refresh process provides an opportunity for **investment in local governance and ways for communities to exercise agency, decision-making and have their own voice**.

This submission focuses on the alignment between the Closing the Gap approach and EC principles, and how these can be integrated to help build consensus and consistency, especially with regards to engagement with Government.

1.2. What is EC?

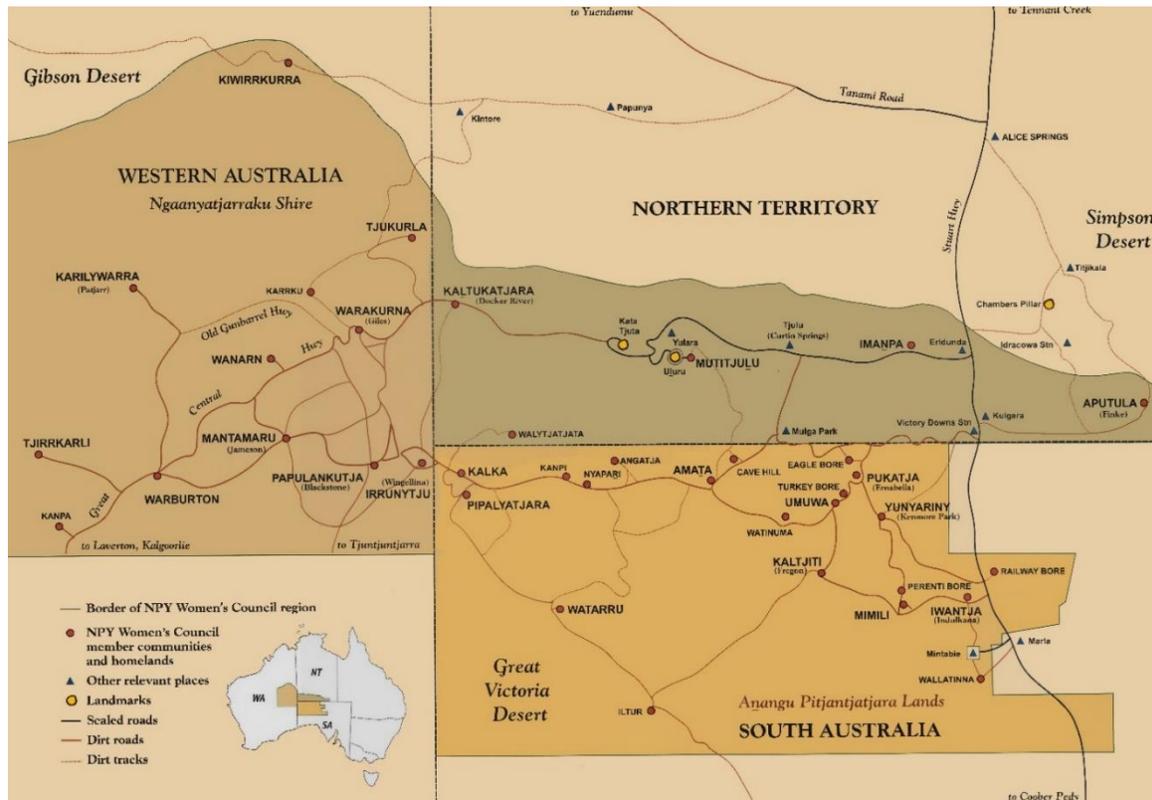
Empowered Communities was launched in 2013 and is a national, Aboriginal designed-and-led initiative to reform the ‘top-down’ approach to Indigenous affairs and create enduring change, through Aboriginal people driving their own development.



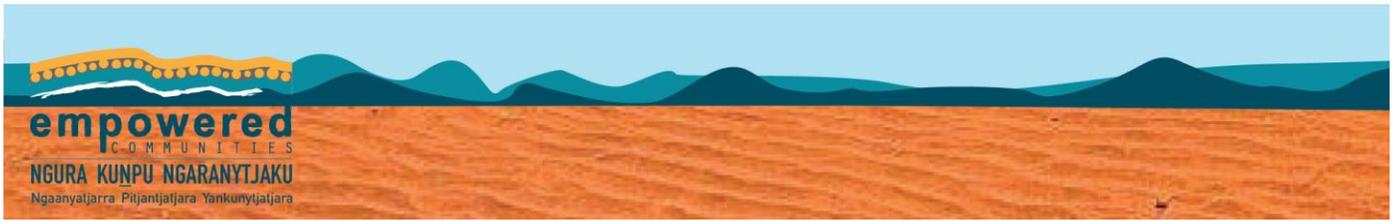
The Empowered Communities (EC) approach is built on the three pillars of **Empowerment, Development and Productivity**, towards closing the gap on social and economic disadvantage and enabling cultural recognition and self-determination of Indigenous Australians. Empowered Communities was formally established in the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands in July 2016 with the funding of the backbone organisation (Secretariat) under the direction and support of a regional steering committee. Prior to this it had been operating under the auspices of NPY Women’s Council since 2014 in support of the initial design work. For more information on Empowered Communities, see (www.empoweredcommunities.org.au).

1.3. Overview of the NPY Region

Central Australia’s Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara’ (NPY) Lands is one of nine EC regions across Australia (see Appendix 1 for map of EC regions). The NPY region spans 350,000 square kilometers across the tristate borders of Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia and is home to around 4500 – 5000 Aboriginal people (Anangu and Yarnangu¹ (Aboriginal people from the NPY Region) in 25 remote communities.



¹ Referred to from here on as Anangu



Anangu maintain a strong connection to culture and traditional values, through *Tjukurpa* (Law), *Walytja* (Family), *Manta* (Country) and *Wangka* (Language). They share languages, cultural and family ties, and a history of unity and collaboration that transcends state borders.

EC is led by an alliance of local Aboriginal organisations:

- NPY Women’s Council,
- Regional Anangu Services Aboriginal Corporation (RASAC),
- Central Land Council,
- Mai Wiru Regional Stores council,
- Western Desert Dialysis (Purple House),
- APY Art Centre Collective,
- with others seeking to join.

A small Secretariat supports the partnership and facilitates the collective action of Empowered Communities in and across the NPY Region.

1.4. Overview of priorities in the NPY Region

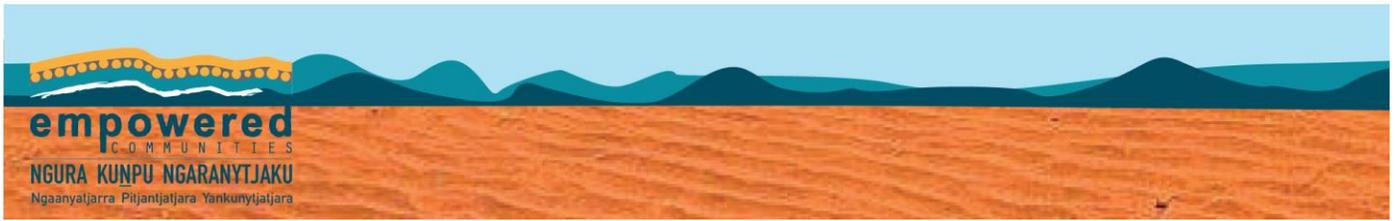
At the outset of Empowered Communities in the NPY Region, the EC Secretariat undertook consultation across all 24 communities, in order to capture a comprehensive view of community priorities and concerns.

The result of EC’s community consultation work was the following six priority areas, based on the national EC priority areas, as confirmed by Anangu in the NPY Region:

- Anangu-led decision making and community empowerment
- Education, culture and youth support
- Work, meaningful engagement and financial security
- Housing and infrastructure
- Keeping people safe
- Taking care for the vulnerable



These identified priorities form the foundation for EC activities in the region, to be progressed in partnership between Anangu, Anangu organisations, Governments and other key stakeholders.



2. Empowerment through Joint Decision Making

Priority Action Area 1

The first priority area for action is to develop stronger arrangements which ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people share decision making with governments on closing the gap.

Empowerment is one of the core principles of the Empowered Communities model, meaning that Indigenous people have the right to self-determination and the right to take responsibility for their lives and futures. It also means that Government has the responsibility to enable this empowerment. Restoring the balance of responsibility between Indigenous people and Government is critical to achieving the objective of Closing the Gap in the life experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across key indicators.

Joint decision making is one means of restoring this balance and is a cornerstone of the EC approach. The Empowered Communities model sees authority for making decisions and acting resting as close as possible to the people affected by the decision or act- ideally individuals and families. While this is the benchmark, EC recognises that Indigenous collective agency is also critical for development.

In the NPY EC Region, as in most remote and very remote regions, service provision is the major interface point between Government and communities. As the survey notes, despite substantial evidence that desired service delivery outcomes are rarely achieved in remote Indigenous Australia without genuine local engagement and involvement, decisions continue to be made without community input. Empowerment and joint decision-making necessitates effective partnership and development practice that requires a shift from top down government-driven service delivery to working side by side. Governments must proactively enable Anangu people and communities to make decisions and set their priorities through demand-driven development principles and practice, as much as supply-driven service delivery.

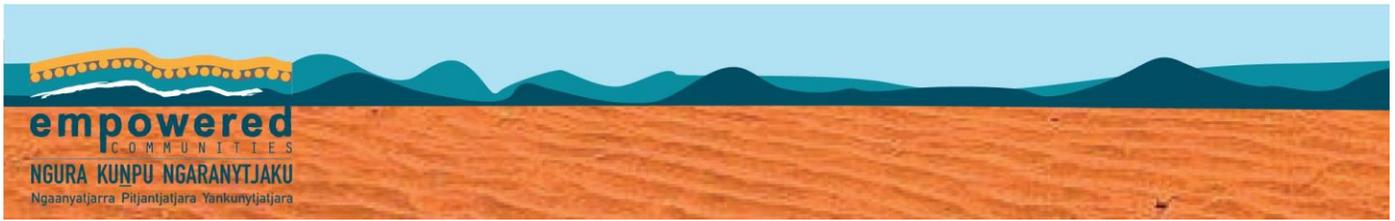
During EC's community consultation process noted above, community members spoke strongly about the lack of control over decisions affecting their communities:

"Government should listen more to Anangu and provide consistent support and services to all communities. There needs to be proper talk by government and service providers with Anangu, remembering that by engaging with communities, you get a good plan that everyone understands."

"Anangu and whitefellas need to work together better"

"We want government to listen and understand and slowly work through things, and respect Anangu land and heritage. Government and welfare are breaking the hearts and spirits of Anangu."

- Anangu community members



In the NPY region, Joint Decision Making is a key mechanism by which EC is working towards **Anangu-led decision making and community empowerment**- through increased transparency, accountability, and more efficient and effective program funding & delivery for the benefit of Aboriginal individuals, families and communities.

Joint Decision Making – *Kulintja Kutju* ('One Vision') Group

In mid-2018, an Anangu representative group- the ***Kulintja Kutju* ('One Vision') Group**- was formed to develop and trial joint decision making in the NPY Region. The group is composed of senior and emerging Anangu leaders and subject matter experts from across the NPY region. The Joint Decision Making process which has been developed is a collaborative means by which funders, providers and local Anangu representatives review and assess program funding.

This process has enabled local Anangu to receive information directly from Government and service providers, make recommendations to Government as to whether programs should continue or not, and suggest changes to improve outcomes for Anangu. In the future, the process will also enable shared decisions regarding indicators for service and program outcomes.

Feedback from *Kulintja Kutju* group members provides some early evidence of the significant impact that this new way of working has had on individuals. The medium to long-term outcomes on program design and delivery will be a focus of our evaluation over time.

The Joint Decision Making Model is complemented by co-design, underpinned by development practice, that seeks to build Anangu ownership, agency and subsidiarity in the region.

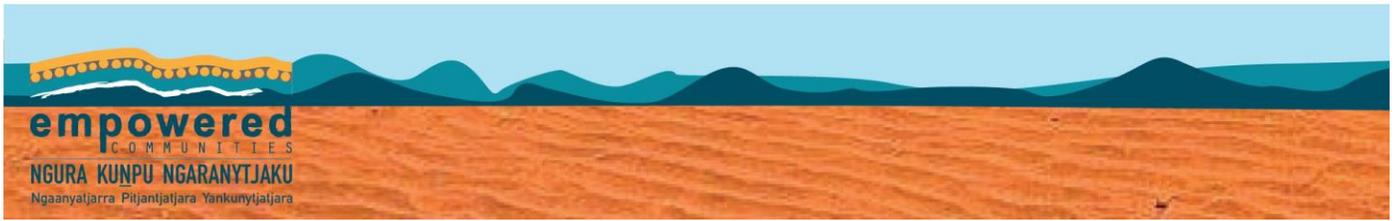
Co-design (or participatory or co-operative design) is a transparent process, involving all relevant parties, with Anangu playing a central role in the program design – from identifying the issue, developing strategies and implementation plans, through to final evaluation stages. This approach is intended to inject new ideas, break down silos, and translate high level strategies into detailed implementation plans. What is delivered is therefore not predetermined, but is a development process negotiated between Anangu communities, Government and service providers.

To date, EC has co-designed a new Emerging Leaders Program in the NPY EC Region, to support young Anangu aged 25 – 40 years to build 'both-ways' capacity as young leaders. We are also in the process of co-designing two major new initiatives for the tri-state NPY EC region:

- A school-to-work transition support model, to provide Anangu school leavers with the preparation and bridging support required to successfully move into work or further study.
- An intensive support for new workers model, whereby Anangu entering the workforce have the holistic, pastoral support required to succeed at and remain in work, and progress through employment in the long term.

In each of these initiatives, broad stakeholder collaboration has been critical to developing a shared understanding of the issue, and in developing best practice, place-based solutions.

Partnerships between families and community, service providers and Government departments are the basis for developing integrated responses towards a common goal.



While this has been our strategy and goal, it continues to be a challenge. To develop an initial set of priorities for the region, we engaged local governance and leadership groups and held open community sessions to obtain a reasonably diverse set of perspectives, opinions and ideas. However, the engagement of more marginal groups or those who don't regularly participate in local governance remains a challenge and one that we acknowledge and build into our engagement approaches to work towards representative engagement and decision-making.

Recommendation

The Closing the Gap refresh process provides a valuable opportunity for Government to adopt and model a shared decision making approach, drawing on empowerment, development and co-design principles and practice. This is an approach which prioritises working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by decisions- not only through their representative organisations- but with individuals and families - who experience the impacts of Government decisions on a daily basis.

Further, a critical aspect of EC joint decision making and co-design processes is shared decisions about measurements of success. To deliver outcomes which provide a real benefit to communities, the Closing the Gap refresh must involve a substantial process of negotiation between Government and Aboriginal people to identify what success looks like in the short and long term and how this should be measured.

3. Empowerment through strong local governance

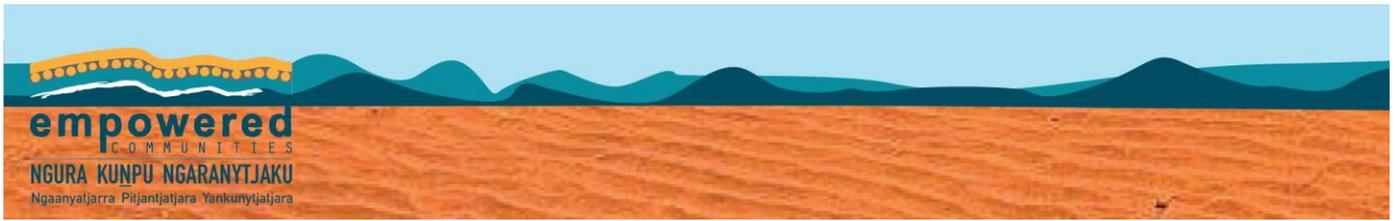
Priority Action Area 2

The second priority area for action proposed to be included in the new National Agreement is a commitment to – and support for – the building of the formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector to deliver Closing the Gap services and programs.

A significant body of international and domestic research indicates that sustained and measurable improvements in social and economic well-being only occur when real decision-making power is vested in communities (UNDP 2009, Sullivan 2007). This supports findings that development approaches must be informed by the **principle of subsidiarity**- that issues should be handled by the most competent and appropriate authority available and adequately funded and resourced to perform that function (Smith 2004, Hunt & Smith 2007).

In recent decades, parliamentary inquiries and research have highlighted the need for a radical transformation in the Government's approach to engagement and service delivery in remote Aboriginal communities (Senate Committee 2008; HoR Committee 2004; PM&C 2013; Senate Committee 2016).

A cornerstone of the EC reform framework is such a transformation- the establishment of structures that enable government and Indigenous people to work together across **local, regional and national**



levels. While national and regional partnerships are required, the key goal is to support mechanisms which enable **local communities to drive their own development**.

Strong Aboriginal organisations have a key role to play in this transformation. As the survey notes, there is strong evidence that Aboriginal community-controlled services achieve better results and ensure that communities get the services that they need. They also provide important points of interface between Aboriginal people and government. Despite this evidence, non-Aboriginal organisations continue to receive the majority of government funding for service provision.

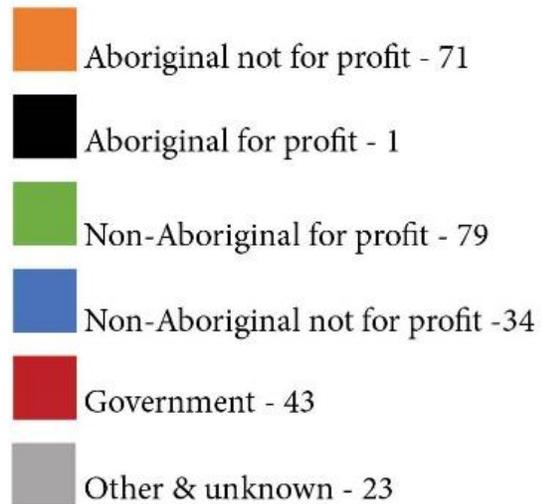
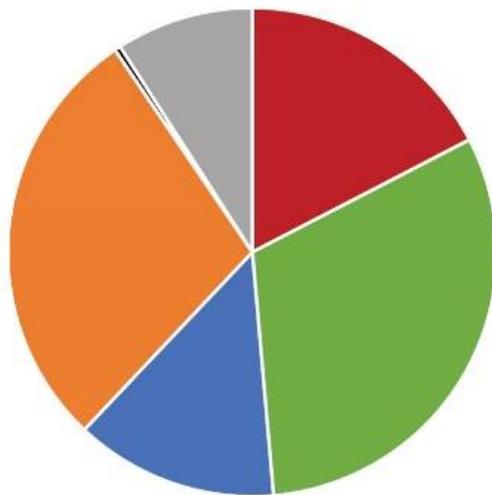
EC’s service audit and mapping of the NPY Region conducted in 2017 revealed that over half of the service providers were non-Aboriginal organisations and only 20% were Aboriginal.

Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands



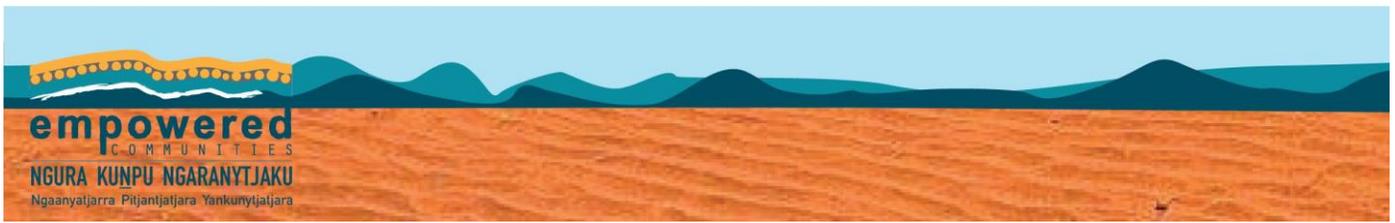
Ngura Kunpu Ngaranytjaku

SERVICES IN THE NPY REGION: WHAT DO WE KNOW SO FAR?



5200
Anangu

252
service providers



In the NPY Region, EC is led by an alliance of local Aboriginal organisations, recognising their representative roles in the region, long-standing relationships with Anangu, and knowledge of how to deliver services to meet the needs of communities. Our partner organisations play a leading role in setting both the strategic vision for the EC NPY EC Region and design and delivery of initiatives to empower local Anangu. Examples are the *Uti Kulintjaku* and Youth projects led by the NPY Women’s Council, the ranger program delivered by the Central Land Council, local stores managed by Mai Wiru and the remote dialysis program provided by Purple House.

While strong Aboriginal service delivery organisations are critical to driving positive outcomes, it is vital to recognise the importance of **strong, representative local structures** which can drive their own social and economic development in partnership with governments and provide a local voice feeding into a regional voice on service delivery priorities as well as broader issues such as culture and leadership.

In the NPY Region, which covers three government jurisdictions, local governance structures vary considerably in size, structure, resourcing and the level of Anangu representation. They range from local Aboriginal corporations, community groups linked to services such as schools and clinics, and local councils and authorities established under government legislation. Land Councils in the region- Central Land Council in the NT and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Land Council in SA- also have their own representative structures composed of elected traditional owners from regions/electorates in each area. In WA, the Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation governs the eleven communities in the region, and its board and community organisations are composed of members elected from communities.

Due to a range of factors including remoteness, poor and fluctuating resourcing, and differing regional, state and territory government structures, local mechanisms often fail to enable communities to have a clear voice, negotiate their rights and interests with others, coordinate local responses, and decide how their affairs are managed.

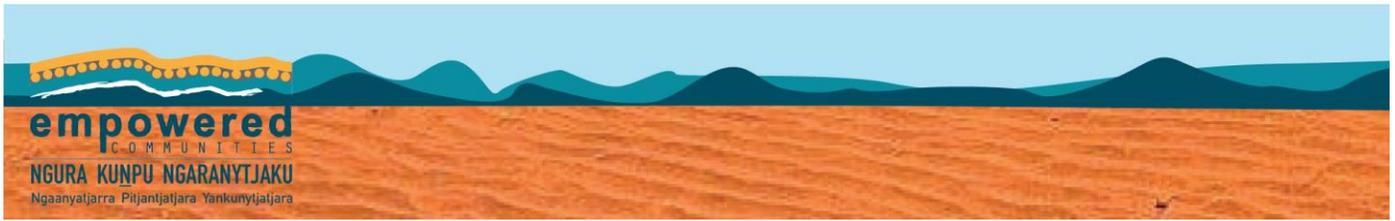
Through the EC engagement process, communities have expressed a clear need for more control at the community level:

“We want strong council and community governance, central service administration on behalf of the community, and more funding direct to the community for them to control.”

“We need one voice, one plan. If there are too many tracks and people, we get lost. We need more money and control of how it is spent in community. We want stronger community control of what and how things happen.”

“Give communities and councils more control over the decisions that affect them and how money is spent in communities. We need a better relationship between community councils and people who make the decisions.”

- Anangu community members



Recommendation

The process to renew the Closing the Gap Strategy provides a valuable opportunity to demonstrate best practice community engagement, recognising that while organisations provide a key avenue for local voices to be heard, they should not be relied on as the only means of obtaining a representative view from community. It also provides an opportunity to contribute to the long-term goal of supporting and resourcing communities and their leaders, and enable development of capabilities which will assist in whole-of-government and community-led solutions.

4. Empowerment through partnership with mainstream organisations

Priority Action Area 3

The third priority area for action proposed to be included in the National Agreement is a commitment by governments that mainstream organisations delivering services and programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do more than they have been to Closing the Gap, and are held publicly accountable for their actions.

EC strongly supports the view that 'mainstream' and 'outside' organisations must work in partnership with Aboriginal people to ensure that the services and programs they deliver are locally led, culturally appropriate and address the long-term social and economic needs relevant to communities.

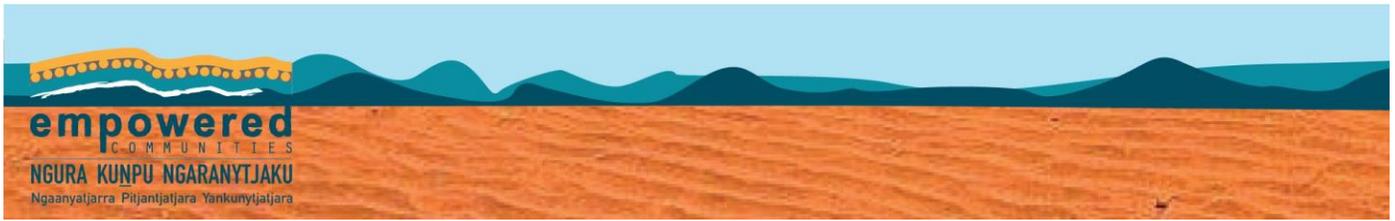
We believe that building the capacity of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver services and programs should always be the primary goal. However, given the current distribution of funding and time it will take to make this shift, in the short term - mainstream organisations should make this a priority and be supported to work in a way which empowers Aboriginal communities organisations, families and individuals.

A critical aspect of this capacity building through partnership is investment strategies and supports which increase the number and skills of the Aboriginal workforce. While there is strong evidence that Aboriginal organisations produce better employment outcomes for Aboriginal people, it is incumbent on mainstream organisations which are well-resourced and have capacity to develop Aboriginal employment strategies, provide employment and training opportunities to Aboriginal people, and resource succession planning. A strong local Aboriginal workforce is a key element in supporting Aboriginal organisations to manage their own local programs and services.

Recommendation

EC supports the commitment to supporting mainstream organisations to work in partnership with Aboriginal organisations, recognising that enabling Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver their own services and programs and drive development is the primary goal.

EC also endorses the APO NT Partnership Principles and the commitment of further resources to APO NT to enable it to develop implementation tools and engage with signatory organisations.



5. Shared measurement and evaluation

One of the key challenges that has faced the Closing the Gap framework to date has been ensuring funding is being directed towards the right outcomes and how to assess whether these outcomes are being achieved- asking what does success look like?

One of the key EC pillars is **productivity**- achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in spending across Indigenous affairs. In achieving productivity, EC places a uniquely strong focus on **individual and family development**, through measures including place-based initiatives, co-design, monitoring and evaluation, and adaptive learning or an in-built flexibility to respond to feedback.

In the NPY Region, EC is aiming to achieve more productive program funding and delivery for Anangu through data collection, monitoring and evaluation and adaptive practice. This approach is being adopted at the regional level through a regional development agenda, program logics, and for example, at the local level - input into co-design of the Fregon Anangu School.

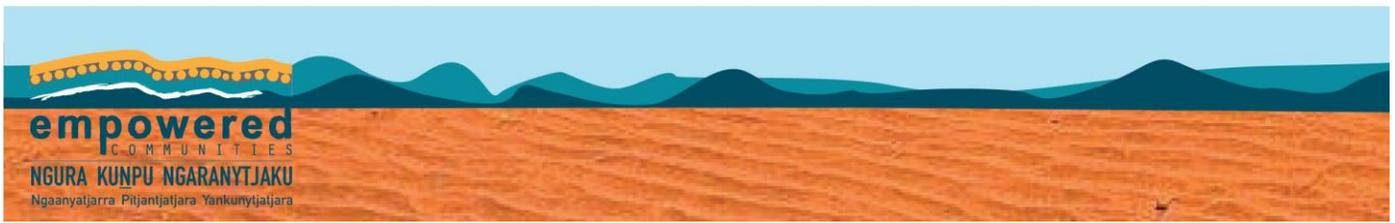
A critical element of this approach is a commitment to engaging closely with individuals and families to identify community priorities, identify what success means to communities in terms of outputs and outcomes, and what the indicators of success should be. It also means engaging with EC partners, service providers, and government to agree on shared measurement systems, which empower communities to hold others to account.

For example, as part of the joint decision making process for regional funding and procurement, the *Kulintja Kutju* Group is working with Government and service providers in its next phase to develop outputs, outcomes and indicators which represent Anangu priorities and measures of success.

While keeping individuals and families at the core of our work requires a significant investment of time and resources, it is one of the primary means of ensuring that EC is accountable to communities and that we are supporting sustained outcomes for Anangu.

Recommendation

EC sees investment of resources and time engaging with communities on outputs, outcomes and indicators as being critical to the success of the next Closing the Gap framework. While engagement with collectives such as representative peak bodies and organisations is crucial, involving communities in the process as early and often will empower individuals and lead to more targeted, effective government investment in the future.



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