

Anangu Want Jobs

A regional co-design approach to the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program

Indigenous Skills and Employment Program Discussion Paper Submission
from



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1. Executive summary

Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Empowered Communities (NPY EC) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the new Indigenous skills, engagement and employment Program (ISEP) to be implemented from 1 July 2022.

Governments have a critical role in closing the gap in employment through flexible, locally informed investment. Oriented around the new way of working in partnership with Indigenous communities through co-design and drawing on the lived experience of Aboriginal people based on NPY EC's work in the region, this submission provides a unique opportunity to develop effective place based solutions that are informed by local knowledge, expertise and opportunities. ISEP can help deliver on that promise.

As a very remote region in central Australia, NPY presents ISEP with an opportunity to explore some of the specific regional challenges and barriers that are experienced here. These challenges and barriers characterise our current and historic experience of employment, access to work and supporting Anangu to find and get the benefits of relevant, meaningful jobs and careers.

To set the scene in a meaningful way we will explore five (5) key factors that we believe are core to understanding both the employment and structural landscapes of our region. These factors include:

1. Remoteness
2. First language precedence (Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara languages)
3. Thin labour market
4. Impacts of intergenerational welfare
5. The need for a person-centred approach

Working through the meaning and relevance of each of these areas, we present what we see as a compelling case for acknowledging the specific features of the NPY region and therefore the need for a specific approach and opportunity under ISEP to achieve the outcomes that everyone wants to see.

From our consultations and conversations, we know that many Anangu want jobs. Anangu want the opportunity to participate in the workforce and to contribute to positive outcomes in their own lives, in the lives of their families, their communities and the region. They want to enjoy the financial benefits of working.

We know that the desire to work and the pathway to employment for many Anangu is constrained by a range of structural, educational and historical factors, as well as the need to navigate personal, family and community challenges on the road to being a worker.

We explore the work that Empowered Communities has been facilitating in the areas of education and employment. This focuses our attention on work that has come from the priorities of Anangu, shared in regional consultation and distilled by the NPY EC Regional Steering committee with the support the Secretariat, to create an initial NPY Regional Development Roadmap. The EC priorities around education and employment are closely aligned to, and consistent with, the aims and approaches outlined in the ISEP proposal.

We look at how the NPY EC priority initiatives of *School to Work Transition* and *Intensive Support for New Workers* directly align to and can inform the ISEP principles and approach. These are current examples of how improving employment opportunities and outcomes for Anangu can be addressed. These two initiatives

could be strong opportunities, based on co-design and delivery already in progress, for investment through ISEP.

We then respond specifically to the questions raised in the ISEP discussion paper, providing insights based on local knowledge and experience. In responding, we reference more of the work that Empowered Communities is doing, which provides demonstrable examples of how we have been embedding co-design and Anangu voices in our work. We believe that these examples show how the ISEP and Closing the Gap principles and approaches for genuine engagement with Anangu at the centre are already being implemented in our region.

We highlight some of the region specific approaches that have worked or are seen as important in our region. These reflect a need for a significant shift in what initial success looks like and an acceptance that there are some fundamental building blocks for Anangu employment that need to be established.

Real flexibility and commitment in ISEP to fill some of these region specific and local gaps presents a significant opportunity to deliver a model that has the best opportunity achieve long term positive outcomes for Anangu around successful, meaningful employment.

2. Introduction – the case for doing things differently

Supporting strong economic participation and development for Anangu and Yarnangu¹ of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands requires a distinct, targeted approach, potentially different from other regions in Australia.

Specific barriers to employment including isolation, remoteness, language, challenges with personal documentation, complexity of pre-employment checks, inflexible employment conditions, as well as relatively recent colonial contact², have a critical and pervasive impact in this cross-border region of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

“We want the whole community to get up and into the rhythm of work” – Margaret Smith, NPYWC Director

Anangu want jobs.

Anangu employment aspirations, however, require that employers and workers must not only navigate structural, social and historical barriers, but also find ways to enable and encourage Anangu to meet the challenges of working well in two worlds.

Indigenous-specific employment investment via a well-designed Indigenous skills, engagement and employment program (ISEP) can inspire new funding priorities and approaches that ensure Anangu employment aspirations can be supported effectively at regional and local levels.

With first nations people at the centre, Empowered Communities (EC) continues to forge a new partnership model with governments across Australia. This new way of working together, or *tjungu*, is influencing structural changes within government and building Indigenous agency on the ground. The views and suggestions outlined in this submission draw on Anangu defined priorities concerning education and work from NPY EC’s co-design approach – where the lived experience of Anangu and the views of other stakeholders/professionals are respected as equally valuable and legitimate perspectives in identifying needs and outcomes.

In education and work, the case for doing things differently in the NPY region centres on five key considerations that we believe underpin the unique challenges of our region and therefore require a specific and targeted response. Acknowledging and embedding these factors in the ISEP structure can transform the way governments work together with Aboriginal people in very remote Australia toward stronger regional economies and better long term employment outcomes.

The five critical areas to be addressed are:

- Remoteness
- First language precedence (Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara languages)
- Thin labour market

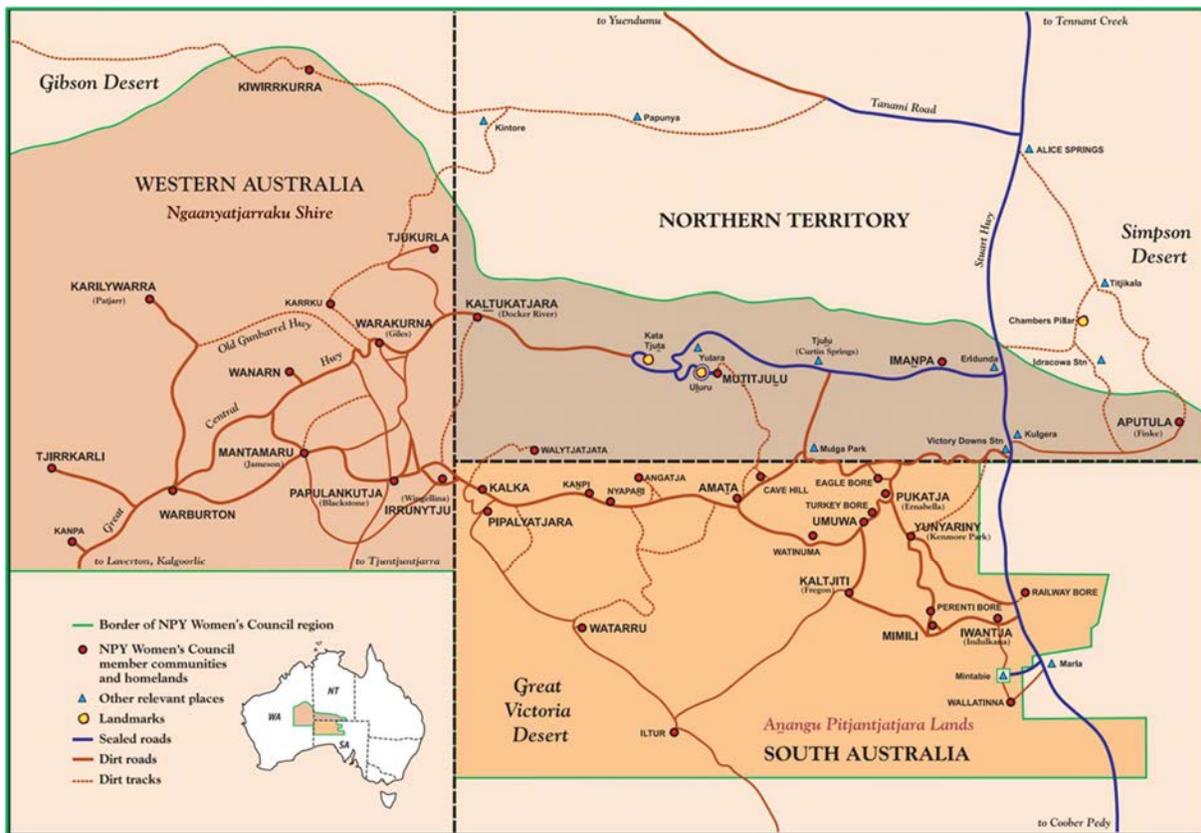
¹ The term Anangu will be used to refer to both Anangu (Pitjantjatjara & Yankunytjatjara speaking people) and Yarnangu (Ngaanyatjarra speaking people)

² Many Anangu were living traditional “bush” based lives into the 1950s and 1960s

- Impacts of intergenerational welfare
- The need for a person-centred approach

2.1 Remoteness

NPY region and communities are considered to be very remote. The region covers 350,000 square kilometres across the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia with approximately 26 communities and an Anangu population of some 5,000 people. It is a region more sparsely populated than Mongolia – a nation with one of the lowest population densities in the world.



This remoteness has contributed significantly to the historic and ongoing challenges for the region. Remoteness means that:

- 1) There is effectively no local access for Anangu to mainstream services including postal, banking, Centrelink offices and other personal and financial services. This exacerbates challenges for people with regard to identification, certifications and access to / replacement of documentation for personal and work related purposes (bank/credit cards, birth certificates, licenses, work certifications etc.), as well as resolution of issues and queries etc
- 2) It is more challenging and costly to deliver basic services to communities. Factors at play include higher transport, logistical and operational costs, challenges for recruitment and retention of staff (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal), accessing training and building a workforce skills

- base, and limited accommodation in communities for service provision. The lack of basic service delivery has major impacts for local people and families in managing life and work challenges.
- 3) There are relatively small and mobile populations in each community. The mobility of people and families throughout the region (including across borders) means that community populations can change materially and quickly depending on circumstances (sorry business, cultural business, community unrest, regional events including sport). Systems and structures (including resourcing required to deliver services as well as the available workforce) can, therefore, be hard to predict and adapt in a timely and effective manner.
 - 4) Distances from major regional centres and limited or no local economic development opportunities (mining, tourism or agriculture) provides little incentive or opportunity for Government or third parties to really invest in the region and/or communities, which further limits employment opportunities and growth.
 - 5) For employers, these higher logistical and operational costs and challenges in providing services apply to both community-based and 'drive in/drive out' (DIDO) services. DIDO employment models present significant challenges in hiring and retaining staff. Non-resident workers face additional expectations and pressures from living and working in remote communities including the cumulative impacts of regular and significant travel and time away from home. This means that there is a smaller pool of interested and available staff/candidates and employees who often require greater support including access to good supervision more flexible workplace conditions, and extensive cross cultural training.

These factors play out in the need for strong supports and structures for both Anangu and non-Anangu staff working in remote communities, and often result in higher levels of staff turnover. Turnover impacts on financial, intellectual property, continuity of service and quality of service delivery for employers.

There is a flow-on impact to providing effective and supportive workplaces and structures for Anangu staff in remote communities. Anangu workers require and rightly expect strong, consistent, relational support from managers and colleagues. This is difficult to provide when managers are generally not co-located.

The interconnectedness of these factors needs to be acknowledged and accommodated in the ISEP guidelines in order to find locally relevant ways to close the gap for better employment outcomes in remote regions such as the NPY region.

[2.2 Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara language precedence](#)

Anangu have a strong first language tradition with 80% of Anangu speaking a first language at home and many children not regularly speaking English until they start school. Most Anangu speak English as a third or fourth language in conjunction with their First Language and a range of other regional Aboriginal languages. Further, for Anangu, like all Aboriginal cultures, written language came as a result of invasion. In central Australia, languages were only written from the late 1930s. In the ensuing years, the focus and approach to First Language versus English language education, resources and support has varied greatly.

As a consequence there are large sections of the current NPY population who have medium to low levels of English language ability as well as very low levels of literacy (in both First Language and English) and low

numeracy levels. Many Anangu are leaving school without the expected or required levels of English literacy for employment.

In order for Anangu to access services and participate in the workforce there is a requirement to

- a) provide initial and ongoing LLN support for people to improve their language (English) skills as well as their literacy and numeracy skills (in First Language and in English) in line with the type(s) of employment they are seeking
- b) provide information in First Languages and ideally in a format that is visually/orally based to allow for limited literacy. Experience shows that having audio-visual (AV) materials with narration / explanation in First Language(s) provides the best format for people of all levels of literacy, numeracy and English language ability. Some regional employers are already making this investment and using this approach. They are often viewed as the most successful in developing and maintaining strong Anangu employment experiences and outcomes.

An ISEP that provides the flexibility and fit to support materials in audio language and visual instruction will provide a significant uplift in the experience of work for Anangu, as well as supporting stronger outcomes for overall workplace recruitment, employment on-boarding, training and retention processes.

Benefits of resources in Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara languages include:

- Clearer understanding of employment roles, obligations and expectations
- Increased comprehension of any training delivered. Experience on the APY Lands has shown that Anangu workers are best supported with resources in language provided in ‘on the job’ training rather than as ‘pre-employment’ training
- Improved understanding in the worker’s family around employment. Positive family engagement and support is often key in creating the best environment and experience for individuals who are entering the workforce. Developing resources in language (posters, videos, social media stories, role plays etc.) about work exposure and employment supports a broader experience that is much more interesting and accessible to Anangu workers and their families
- Demonstrating a genuine focus on and investment in cultural competency and acknowledging the value of supporting Anangu staff members creates a positive environment and experience for new workers.

“Anangu families need to be supportive of their family members in work from the beginning. Families need to keep pushing workers to be strong. And, non-Anangu need to help families achieve. Outside people and families need to work together to support workers”

— Margaret Smith, NPYWC Director

Without this focus and investment on supporting workforce participation, we will continue to see Anangu face challenges in their engagement with the workforce and with the workplace.

Recognising the value of this approach, the ISEP would ideally provide the means and the mechanisms to support the co-design, development and distribution of these types of resources as a key element for creating and maintaining an employment environment that is safer and more accessible to Anangu..

Without this investment we will continue to see:

- New workers discouraged from participating in work. For those who do participate without accessible tools for induction, facing ongoing challenges in feeling confident and successful
- Other staff and managers having to invest greater time and energy to support new workers, often without appropriate training or specialist skills themselves to support Anangu staff learning in English as a second language.

2.3 Thin labour market

Remote communities in general are often characterised by a thin labour market, especially in comparison to urban and regional environments. For the very remote communities of the NPY region, labour markets are particularly challenging because they exist in the context of a limited regional economy.

Industries such as mining, tourism, agriculture and other natural resource exploration – which are often engines for regional economic development – have been available to and experienced by many Aboriginal communities in other remote areas of Australia. However, these opportunities have not been available or experienced to the same extent in the NPY region. While some mining opportunities are in an exploration stage in parts of the region, no significant or sustained investment is in place to underpin significant economic and employment benefits to the region.

The main financial input to the region's support for individuals, families and communities remains Government welfare and benefit streams. These include disability, family and unemployment benefits. A small proportion of Anangu in the NPY region are beneficiaries of royalties and other resource/usage generated income payments.

Local work opportunities that exist within communities are limited in number and vary significantly in the skillsets required.

The key local employers in NPY communities are:

- 1) Government organisations providing local services, for example, education, health and mental health, some community stores, drug and alcohol support services, municipal and local government services
- 2) Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations including art centres, primary health care, municipal and local services, community patrols, employment support, and community stores. Other community services provide individual, family and community support such as youth services, disability support, family and domestic violence services, child and family support, education and school attendance support
- 3) Other not-for-profit non-Aboriginal organisations providing services including youth services and financial counselling
- 4) For profit organisations and private small businesses delivering services such as construction, maintenance etc.

- 5) For profit companies delivering human services such as aged care and disability services. The ILSC-owned Voyages Ayers Rock Resort is an outlier in being the only large corporation located in the region that is active in the employment of Aboriginal people

There are currently only a small number of local Anangu owned businesses operating in the NPY region. From an empowerment and economic development perspective, there would be significant benefit for individuals, families and the region in strengthening opportunities for Anangu to create and develop Anangu owned businesses and community organisations over the medium to long term.

Looking to the future with a goal of economic substitution is key. This requires the need to balance current challenges and opportunities with a longer term strategic perspective to extend the regional economy via Anangu run businesses. Regional economic development will provide the most effective long term driver for local employment.

Today, any exploration of the regional Labour market needs to have a focus on both **demand** (jobs, opportunities etc.) and **supply** (availability of actually or potentially qualified and work ready individuals and/or the necessary investment in expanding the pool of potential employees). It also requires an acknowledgement that available jobs/roles fall across the full range of unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled and professional skill levels/types.

Employment / opportunity skill level types :

- i. Unskilled
- ii. Semi-skilled
- iii. Skilled
- iv. Professional

Support for employment preparation, training and readiness must match and support the skills and aspirations of Anangu with the skill sets and requirements of the roles that are available.

While there are opportunities for greater flexibility and adaptability around (i) unskilled and (ii) semi-skilled roles, there are more challenges and greater expectations around (iii) skilled and (iv) professional level roles for both Anangu and employers.

Many influential and well rewarded roles require “skilled” or “professional” level skills. They are, therefore, less accessible to Anangu in the current environment (see Section 3).

Local experience shows that many Anangu do not engage with a work or career life in the same manner mainstream environments. Anangu often work for periods of time (weeks, months or possibly years) and then step out of the workforce for a period of time. This might relate to changing family or personal situations/commitments/obligations, poor experiences in the workplace or with their role, burnout or other factors. Many people will then spend a period of time unemployed before they decide that they feel ready to re-enter the workforce and begin looking for new opportunities.

Acknowledgement of the potential for the cyclic nature of work to be a characteristic of the regional labour market and work models is important in establishing realistic and appropriate baseline, expectations and measures of change/success in the region.

It also is important to recognise that some employers can and do operate as “gateway” employers providing early or initial employment opportunities for Anangu in more of the unskilled or semiskilled work roles. These employers, such as RASAC on the APY lands, are able to offer flexible, well supported and accessible roles to Anangu in communities. Through this engagement Anangu are able to develop their knowledge and confidence in the workplace with an employer that has a highly Anangu focussed training and skills development model as well as intentional flexibility in how they have designed the resourcing models. Many Anangu are then recruited by other local and regional employers, having developed a desirable level of work readiness and experience that is attractive to other employers. This provides for strong, positive impacts for the individuals entering the workforce.

Employers must be supported, too. The value and cost of this investment by the “gateway” employers needs to be recognised and incorporated into the ISEP framework to ensure it supports all the key components of strengthening existing and future regional labour markets.

2.4 [Intergenerational welfare implications](#)

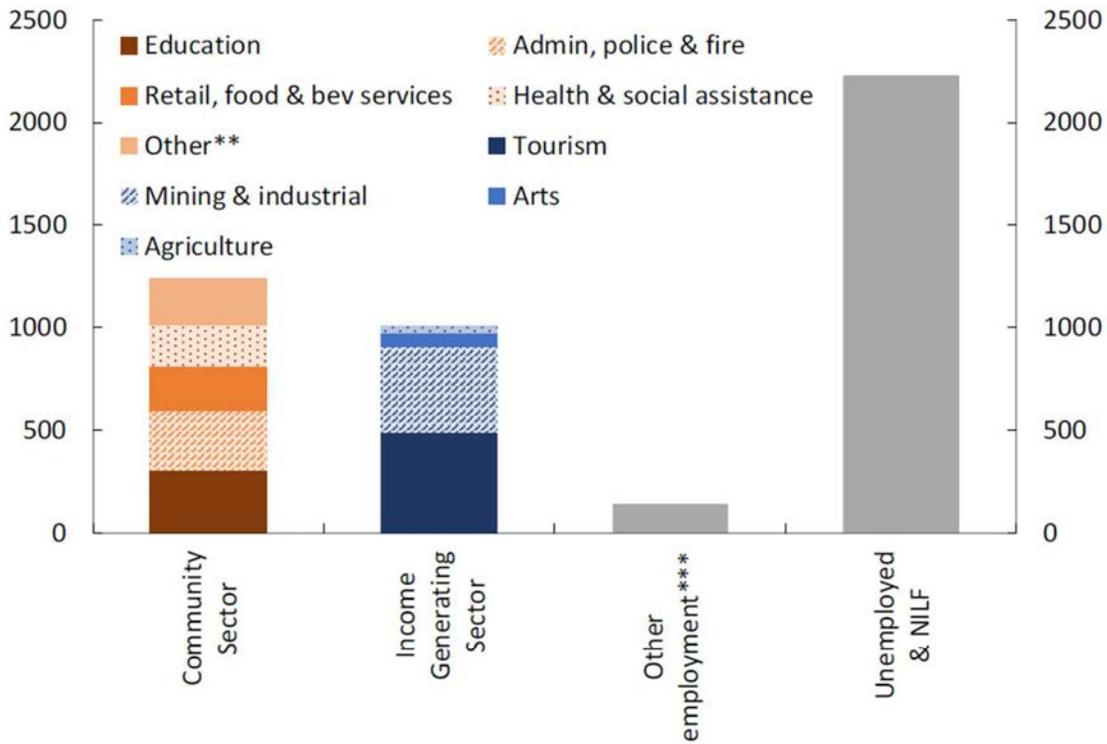
There is acknowledgement that welfare payments remain the most prevalent day to day income source for the majority of Anangu across the NPY region. This includes age and disability pensions, carer and parenting payments and unemployment benefits. The 2016 Census revealed that the median individual income for Anangu was between \$150 - \$300 per week. This places Anangu in the lowest decile (10%) of all Australians from an income perspective.

“In the 70s and 80s, Anangu were running communities, managing the store, the mechanics and other services. We were independent and we had trust. Something cut us off – now there is no trust and white people are running things and making all the money”

— Margaret Smith, NPYWC Director

The table below includes Anangu and non-Anangu employment, with the majority of Community Sector and Income Generating Sector jobs being held by non-Anangu. The following figures provide some excerpts of Commonwealth data extracted for an NPY Regional Economy exploration in 2018

Figure 2
NPY Lands residents aged 15+: counts of employment by industry (2016)*



* Bars do not add to the total regional 15+ population due to non-respondents

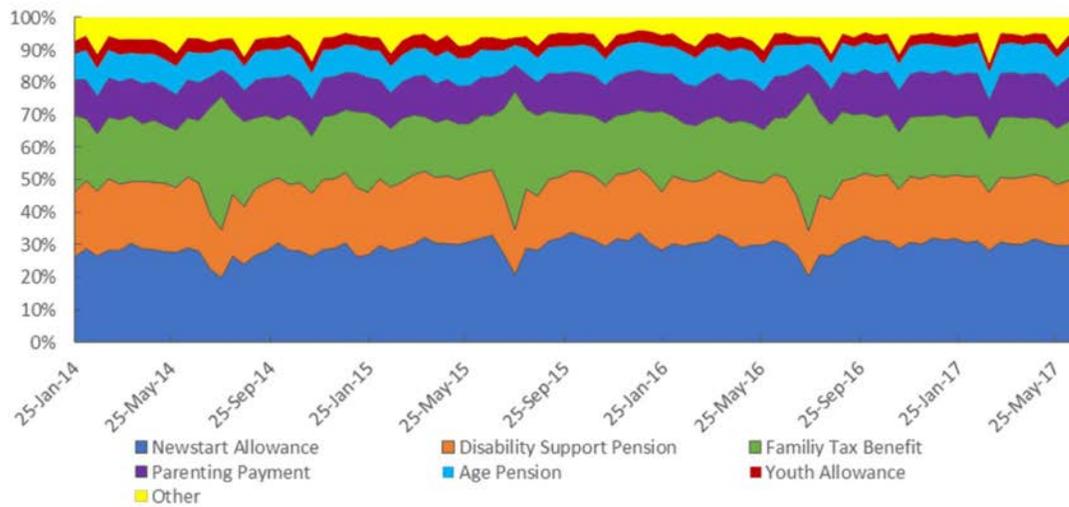
** Includes construction, maintenance and transport-related services

*** Includes those employed in banking, consulting and labour hire, and those who described their industry inadequately

Source: ABS Census 2016

The following tables provide further details of the types of “welfare” payments most prevalent in the NPY lands communities

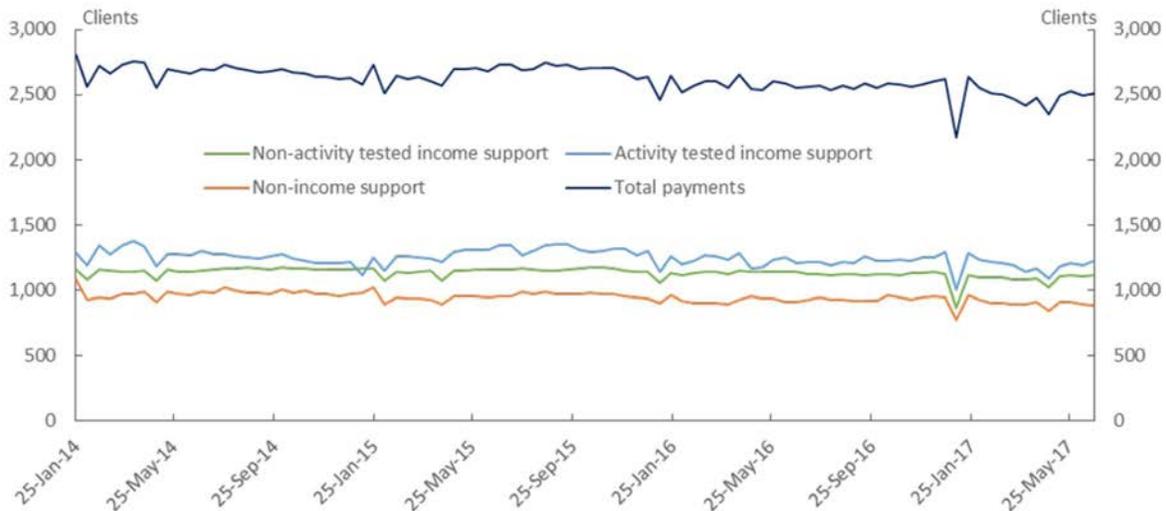
Figure 3: Main Payments - Proportion of total payment amount, NPY Lands



Source: Department of Social Services and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Note: Centrelink payment files extracted by the Department of Social Services from the current Teradata landing databases with an "as at" date of 21 July 2017.

Figure 4: Clients on Centrelink payment caseload by payment type, NPY Lands



Source: Department of Social Services and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Note: Centrelink payment files extracted by the Department of Social Services from the current Teradata landing databases with an "as at" date of 21 July 2017.

While more up to date data will be reflected in the 2021 Census outcomes, the available evidence reflects the long-term and ongoing financial challenges for Anangu. Beyond the direct impacts and challenges of low income levels, there is also the flow on impact for many Anangu, especially young people, who have limited or no exposure to the structures, expectations and experiences of employment. This demonstrates the limited direct or relational exposure (through the lived experience of family members) many Anangu have to ongoing, consistent structured employment.

Any approach to increasing employment participation and long term employment outcomes must be grounded in the evidenced “starting point” for our region. To successfully design, support and deliver on a transformational change in our region, the ISEP must be able to factor in the very remote context of intergenerational welfare dependence in the NPY region, thereby enabling flexibility and adaptability to build a workable model for delivering real change over time.

The model needs to acknowledge the need for and necessary investment to:

- Work with the people who have limited or no ongoing history or experience of employment and will therefore require significant initial and ongoing support (including language, literacy and numeracy) to facilitate their entry into the job market and successfully navigate workplaces
- Work with people who live in poverty and do not have the resources to be work-ready. This includes the capacity to have a good night’s sleep, have food in the house for breakfast before starting work, clean work clothes, and reliable transport to work
- Build the capacity of the whole community to have a more positive engagement with work. This reflects our assessment that building a threshold level of people with a positive relationship to work is the necessary starting point. This approach moves us away from a “one person / one fulltime job” perspective which sees short episodes of work as a failure, to a model recognising the need for people to have the time and support to see themselves as workers.
- Create pathways of support for young people leaving school and entering the workforce. The years of transitioning from school to work are particularly difficult to navigate in remote Australia and yet it is during these years that life-long attitudes to work are established. This is also a time when young people are learning to balance their cultural, social and work life. It is critical that young people have consistent mentoring and support from the early years of high school right through to employment and maintaining a work/career pathway
- Provide child care for young families and young women to support working life.

2.5 [Person-centred approach](#)

Our assessment is that one of the critical elements for successful change and transformation will be to allow for support and solutions to be tailored to meet the needs of individuals. A “one size fits all” approach, even within a single region, will not work. The experience, needs and aspirations of Anangu are diverse. Support frameworks and structures, therefore, need to be able to adapt to meet the needs of:

- All Anangu: Younger Anangu *and* older Anangu
- Job Seekers: People with little or no work exposure, experience or current aspirations *and* people who are ready to take the next step in terms of skills, responsibilities *and/or* higher roles
- Career Aspirants: People who see work as an opportunity for participation and income to support their current lifestyles *and* people who have broader or higher aspirations for working towards career and senior leadership opportunities.

“Malparara way means non-Anangu showing and leading first, and then Anangu taking over. But they must feel comfortable and know the person. Anangu get nervous when they start work. They find it very hard.” — Margaret Smith, NPYWC Director

The system needs to provide more options and flexibility, and employer organisations need to be properly funded to provide the wrap around support required for workers. This includes additional support for those who do not come to work straight from school, nor have a family history of work. Critical factors are:

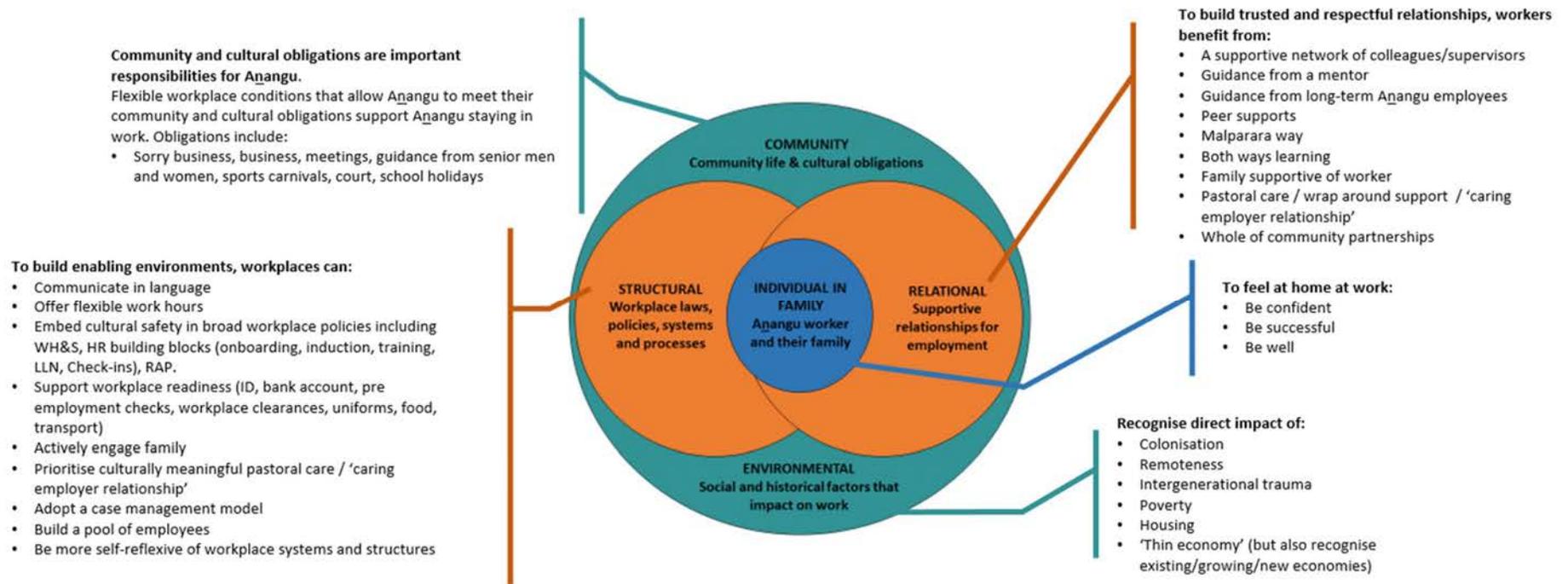
- culturally safe support in language for workers to maintain their engagement and confidence
- engagement with families and communities to understand the need and invest in support of individuals
- recognising and accommodating non-linear work place engagement
- Building trauma-informed workplaces.

Ideally, ISEP would provide mechanisms to acknowledge and support individuals in their own journeys and allow providers and employers to work with individuals to map out and develop their work lives over time. This shift in perspective and focus would ensure a more personalised and relevant experience and a support model that we believe is necessary to maximise positive outcomes in our region.

The generic, inflexible models that have mostly characterised Government designed and funded support for Anangu to date have clearly shown they are not able to activate or sustain the necessary change for better and more positive experiences and outcomes for Anangu as workers.

The diagram on the following page represents relationships between Anangu and their families with workplace structural and relational factors, as well as broader community, cultural and environmental contexts. Within each part, this diagram also identifies the factors that make work easier and must be supported by funding structures such as ISEP.

Enabling factors for Anangu workers in the NPY region: Modelling what makes work easier



3. Empowered Communities – context and approach

NPY Empowered Communities (NPY EC) has worked with Anangu communities and organisations in developing a Regional Development Agenda, and is partnering with the NIAA to develop a Regional Investment Strategy to support the development agenda (roadmap). Our roadmap outlines the work EC is facilitating in supporting Anangu families and communities on the journey towards development³, empowerment,⁴ and productivity.⁵

Priority areas identified by Anangu include:

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

Of these priority areas, **education** and **work** were amongst the most pressing concerns identified in our discussions. With a focus on education and work, we moved to a co-design approach to develop two locally driven EC initiatives: *Transition from School to Work* and *Intensive Support for New Workers*.

Transition from School to Work focuses on young people who are in their senior school years or finishing high school, and *Intensive Support for New Workers* is for all Anangu workers as they participate in the regional labour market.

Transition from School to Work

In the NPY Region, where young people already face significant structural disadvantage, 45% of children on average do not attend school every day.⁶ 2016 data also shows that half of the Anangu population are under 25 years of age, and of this cohort:

- only 18% have completed Year 12
- 3% have Cert III or above, and
- only 13% are in work or study.

We know that ‘young people who do not successfully make the transition from education to work are at risk of long-term disadvantage’⁷, so a focus on building networks and structures to better support students, their families, schools and employers to all work together has direct and obvious value.

Intensive Support for New Workers

In terms of regional employment, 2016 ABS data also shows that for the eligible adult population:

- 18% of Anangu are in the workforce
- There are twice as many non-Anangu employed on the Lands compared to Anangu

Anecdotally, many Anangu leave roles within the first 12 months of employment as they find challenges in:

- Navigating the structures and complexities of the workplace

³ Expanding the range of social, economic and cultural choices enjoyed by individuals and building self-reliance, capability and opportunity

⁴ Anangu-led decision making, rights, recognition, opportunity and agency

⁵ Delivering sustainable development through effective investment in NPY communities

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2016

⁷ Australian Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017. Closing the Gap Prime Minister’s Report 2017

- Managing pressures from family such as meeting family obligations including financial support (humberging)
- Managing workloads with cultural obligations

For many Anangu in these complex circumstances, the fastest way to resolve the challenges is to stop working.

We also know that some employers are more successful in supporting Anangu staff in a more holistic way. This includes helping them navigate any personal and work challenges and so workers feel confident, successful and stay in work.

As part of our design of the *Intensive Support for New Workers* initiative we've learned that specific support models are required by Anangu workers across a broader range of career circumstances. This has led us to think about changing how we describe this initiative to *Supports for Anangu Workers* to reflect that different cohorts have support needs at all stages of career development.

In support of the full range of proficiencies that skilled and professional roles require, we recognise there is a need for an effective support model to enable employers to engage Anangu workers at their existing skill levels, allowing for the provision of pathways for workers toward higher skill level roles. In this way, established Anangu employees will be supported in building their skillset, confidence and experience to undertake more senior roles in their communities in the future.

Reflecting on the focus of ISEP around entry level engagement with work, we believe it would be short-sighted not to acknowledge and account for the support necessary for people who are already actively employed and who may be ready for more skilled or professional roles. We would like to explore this separately with NIAA.

EC's identified initiatives (*School to Work Transition* and *Intensive Support for New Workers*) are very closely aligned to the scope and outcomes of ISEP. In our assessment, these show strong local/regional examples of how Anangu, employers, service providers and Governments can come together to deliver new ways of working. This will mean stronger and better outcomes for Anangu.

ISEP is a game-changing opportunity to provide funding in new and innovative ways in this very remote context. ISEP can address the challenges and issues that are limiting employment opportunities, impacting Anangu aspirations and how they want to engage with work.

4. Developing the ISEP approach

4.1 People and jobs

How should the Indigenous skills, engagement and employment Program (ISEP) work alongside the new employment services model and the new remote engagement program to build work-ready skills and connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to rewarding, sustainable jobs? NIAA is interested in stakeholders' views on whether Indigenous-specific employment investment should target specific cohorts, transition points, regions, industries, barriers, etc.

Our view is that ISEP can play a critical role in regional coordination and understanding the gaps in the current systems and processes. ISEP could have the coordinating function to support and hold everyone to account in setting the standard for real engagement. This would ensure that the value of innovation and additional investment is achieved, by driving new and better outcomes.

The first section of this submission provides insight into some of the specific challenges of our region. An understanding of this context must provide the foundations for developing a model that works for the NPY region. The model must include funding to employers to create stronger work environments, investing in and addressing the aspects in our case for change. These include acknowledgement of the significant additional challenges and costs related to supporting local workforce development outcomes in very remote Australia.

The standard mainstream ideas of 'work readiness and work ready skills' are neither appropriate nor sufficient in the NPY region. The structures, supporting materials and investment required to support Anangu to reach a "work ready" stage need to be continue to be refined. Continuing collaboration is required to deliver action research, co-design and drive the necessary approach, investment and outcomes.

A concrete example of an evolving employment program delivered by the NPY Women's Council Youth program captures some of the benefits of working in this way:

"Iwara Ara Ninitiringini is a supported employment program. During the program participants are mentored and formally trained in order to gain the required work readiness skills to be successful in the open workforce. Participants are put through a range of training blocks that teach them new skills such as facilitation, work readiness, leadership and administration skills. The participants work in a range of settings and with a range of different employers throughout the program to gain a wide variety of skills and experience. In the programs first pilot none of the participants were employed at the beginning of the program – six of the seven participants had never held employment. At the end of the program, five of the seven participants graduated into ongoing employment"

— Brett Toll, Assistant Youth Services Manager, NPYWC

Given the positive outcomes of *Iwara Ara Ninitiringini*, it is imperative that ISEP provides funding for this type of supported employment program.

What is relevant and appropriate for urban and regional locations is not so easily transferable to remote and very remote Australia. Focusing directly on the needs and challenges of remote and very remote regions must be at the core of the ISEP approach if it is to achieve better outcomes than previous approaches and investment.

The considerations around: (i) market size and scope; (ii) workforce participation and barriers to participation; and (iii) the proper alignment and integration of other Government programs (including the revitalised CDP) are interrelated components in achieving real change in how Anangu experience and engage with work, and how more effective long term change is achieved.

Regional Cohorts

As we've noted in section 3 our regional EC work has identified two key cohorts:

- Young people transitioning from school to work (or study)
- New and existing workers who require a more holistic support model to grow in confidence and experience success in the workforce.

Based on the co-design work already undertaken, ie developing the School to Work Transition and Intensive Support for New Workers initiatives, transition points such as the school to work period and the early stages of working in a new job are often points of vulnerability for Anangu. During these periods Anangu may also be experiencing or navigating other life challenges as well as structural barriers.

Other important cohorts to target could include:

1. Young people aged 15 – 24 years, especially young people who have disengaged from the school system
2. Young mothers (often with need for childcare)
3. Workers already in the workforce but requiring support to sustain jobs
4. Young people who have gone to boarding school (i.e. off the Lands)
5. People 'orbiting' outside and then re-entering communities

While these cohorts are a necessary focal point of ISEP, the perspectives of Employers and their representative bodies are also relevant. Employers are a key component of any outcome, as well as providing insight in understanding potential solutions. With the interconnectedness of our very remote labour markets, and employment landscape, support for both **supply** and **demand** is imperative.

Regional Barriers

In identifying the regional EC priorities, part of the process was to address some known barriers and challenges:

- Anangu concerns over the lack of available pathways for young people leaving school in order to give them the best opportunities to lead active, fulfilling lives in their communities.
- Thin labour market with limited employment opportunities, a lack of jobs especially on country and/or in community roles, as well as roles suitable for school leavers with limited work and life experience and skills
- Many employers did not understand or appreciate the range of pressures experienced by Anangu upon entering and staying in the workforce – which often impacted Anangu experiences of feeling understood, supported, confident and successful in the jobs

- The fact that a large proportion of community based jobs (especially skilled and professional level roles) are undertaken by non-resident and predominantly non-Anangu workers often on a drive-in-drive-out basis can be discouraging for Anangu, who rarely see a pathway to taking up these roles. There is a dichotomy of jobs, there are entry level jobs and skilled/ professional jobs and how do we fill that gap (big gap between non-skilled and professional, there are few opportunities for Anangu to gain the intermediate skills and experience that are “expected / assumed” for professional roles).

Regional Economy

As noted previously, any exploration of existing and future employment models needs to address questions around regional economic development and expansion of the regional economy. These are key mechanisms to strengthen and expand the regional labour market and job options. New industries and services and expanded specific job opportunities would provide a foundation to support greater employment in the future.

- **Capture growth areas:** Human service delivery such as NDIS, aged care, youth work and children’s services are growing nationally. These are fields that potentially align with Anangu cultural family values, and provide jobs in communities. Training or certificates that broadly encapsulate the general skills common to all human services fields may provide flexibility in the qualifications required to do a job, and thus enable a pool of Anangu workers to undertake a range of different jobs.
- **Focus on jobs associated with community governance, the environment, cultural tourism, arts:** Jobs in community management, land management, conservation and climate change adaptation align strongly with Anangu cultural knowledge. These roles support people in real jobs on Country. In addition, there are remote community specific roles, associated with community governance and leadership, that require support and resourcing.
- **Tip the balance towards ‘import replacement’ and engage in future visioning with each community:** The FIFO/DIDO workforce from outside the region means that Anangu do not have access to jobs that could and should be done locally. We need to ask: what professional or highly skilled jobs in communities are held by non-community members but could, in the medium- or long-term, be filled by locals or people from within the region. These include professions such as teaching, nursing, trades, and management. We also need to ask: what local businesses could pick up the roles external businesses currently fill in support communities? This is not only about jobs, but about entrepreneurship as part of the import substitution picture.
- **Explore ‘orbiting’ and the opportunities it may bring:** Although there is strong demand for local jobs, there are still opportunities and possibilities for work off-community. Some people might want to relocate permanently or semi-permanently to regional centres (especially if they or members of their family require services such as access to health services). Other people may spend months or years away but return at a later stage of their life.
- **Other resource based opportunities:** Mining, agriculture etc have the potential to bring significant economic and financial benefit. They require engagement with and investment from large external corporate entities and can be challenging with tensions around land management and preservation and cultural priorities and values. There are often challenges in establishing legitimate and equitable partnerships between corporates and communities, that need to be navigated.

4.2 A flexible and responsive IAS

How could IAS investment be designed to be more flexible and responsive at the regional level, and better meet the needs of the community for Indigenous job seekers and employers? NIAA is interested in stakeholders' views on more flexible investment that builds on success factors and leverages partnerships and other investment at the local level, including partnerships and opportunities for co-investment with industry.

In the NPY region, the EC partners in conjunction with communities have developed a regional development roadmap (http://www.npyec.org.au/uploads/1/0/5/7/105789899/npy_regional_develop_roadmap_july_2020_web.pdf)

This Roadmap describes the key areas of focus for the NPY EC region and includes details of our key priorities such as *School to Work Transition Support* and *Intensive Support for New Workers* which have been described in Section 3. This roadmap is the first step towards the development and negotiation of an NPY EC Regional Investment Strategy, which will provide, in partnership with Government, the detailed mechanisms for funding and support of the Regional Roadmap outcomes.

Part of that model will include a future structure for pooling of funds to allow local/regional Anangu decision makers to allocate and/or re-allocate available regional funding to specific priorities in the Roadmap.

Under the Joint Decision Making model (agreed between EC National Leaders and NIAA), the NPY region has established a local representative structure (*Kulintja Kutju* or One Vision). This group is participating in the review of existing NIAA IAS funding as a precursor to the establishment and administration of the Regional Investment Strategy.

This encompasses a shift from activity-based program design and evaluation to an integrated, strategic outcomes based investment. This represents a real change in investment management for all parties including Government. It provides, in our assessment, a strong active example of how funding around initiatives such as ISEP must be built. They must be centred around the perspective and voice of local Aboriginal people and organisations.

Aligned with this approach, co-design principles are at the core of our work. Co-design provides a mechanism for activating the principle of subsidiarity – that the authority to decide and act should rest at the closest level possible to the people or organisation that the decision or action is designed to serve. In our region this means Anangu represented directly, or by their regional community controlled organisations (in particular, the NPY EC regional opt in organisations).

Empowerment is a central element of Empowered Communities. Our view is that the most effective way to deliver outcomes that are more flexible and responsive at the regional level, and better meet the needs of the community for Indigenous job seekers and employers, is one that maximises regional Anangu leadership, co-design and decision making. Leveraging a model based on our *Kulintja Kutju* group would provide an effective structure to maximise engagement, understanding and decision-making by Anangu, who can use it as a mechanism for creating stronger futures as individuals, as families, as communities and as a region. The ISEP procurement or allocation of grants in the NPY region would achieve better outcomes through the use of the *Kulintja Kutju* model of joint decision-making across the NPY region.

This approach also embeds the reality that Anangu maintain deep cultural beliefs and practices that mean their values and aspirations around work are different to mainstream non Aboriginal Australian society.

It is vital that Anangu involvement in regional planning and investment around employment and jobs is grounded in their own world view, reflecting what works for them.

One example of this difference is that for Anangu, patterns of work are often more cyclical: a person may have many different jobs throughout their life, with short or longer breaks in between. These breaks in individual employment, may be due to family and cultural obligations and/or other demands. At other times, an individual may fulfil the role of main breadwinner for their family.

It is important to acknowledging that often in the current environment there is a preference for casual or part-time work and/or flexible work structures. This means that the exploration of roles and job structures with employers and potential partners, reflects this situation. From there it could be expected that there will be opportunities for shared discussion, agreement and design of future and potentially more aspirational work and investment models. These should always be developed under the direction of Anangu, reflecting their views on potential pathways in order to maximise Anangu ownership and therefore the most positive outcomes.

Opportunities for co-investment with industry, while highly desirable, will be potentially challenging at the current time due to the nature of the regional economy and labour market. However, it would be highly desirable to consider how these might be explored and activated in the future. One successful example is the work being done at Voyages Ayers Rock Resort.

We must move away from a formulaic model in the way outcomes are currently measured (that is: one job for one person for 38 hours per week) to introducing other measures of success. These might concentrate on indicators such as overall workforce participation, overall hours worked by Anangu workers, participation in and completion of on the job training.

ISEP would be better placed to allocate resources in the NPY region to factor a model of joint decision-making such as *Kulintja Kutju* in both:

- the co-design of program priorities and job opportunities and support; and
- the procurement and allocation of ISEP funds across the NPY region

4.3 Measuring, monitoring and evaluating

How should results of the new ISEP program be measured, monitored and evaluated to ensure investment contributes to closing the gap in employment outcomes? NIAA is interested in stakeholders' views on how Indigenous-specific employment investment should be monitored and meaningful data collected and made accessible to demonstrate clear outcomes.

In the national and regional work of Empowered Communities we have – and continue to – look deeply into the best ways to approach and incorporate measurement, monitoring and evaluation in our work.

Using a developmental evaluation approach with participation from people working in the initiatives, we are building cooperative learning and buy-in of evaluation processes. To do effective regional evaluation, we need to establish a meaningful regional baseline. This sits between the very detailed ground level indicators and national Closing the Gap (CtG) population level indicators. To define an effective and meaningful regional level measurement, monitoring and evaluation model it must be co-designed with community.

Key learnings we have developed and which we believe are critical for the ISEP program are:

- Providing education and capacity building around measurement, monitoring and evaluation. This includes a strong focus on how to define short and long term outcomes and identifying the appropriate mechanisms for measuring and evaluating the level of change achieved
- Defining, measuring and evaluating short and long terms outcomes. Equally important from a monitoring perspective, is the identification of key indicators of progress and, the processes for capturing and evaluating progress and adapting initiatives based on indicator results.
- Understanding that at its heart, embedding measurement, monitoring and evaluation is an organisation and people change management exercise. There must be a strong focus on understanding where people are starting from and supporting both individual and organisational learning and ownership of measurement, monitoring and evaluation processes, data and value.

For the NPY region, a genuine consideration to understand our progress, is the extent to which we have access to up to date, comprehensive regional data to provide an effective baseline to measure against. From our regional work done to date, there is no consistent regional dataset. In lieu of this we need to work together to develop a defacto or proxy dataset for a regional baseline. This would then inform the approach to establishing a regional measurement, monitoring and evaluation approach.

As per our previous responses, in our assessment, ISEP offers both a genuine opportunity and a core requirement to establish an Anangu-centred model and approach to measurement, monitoring and evaluation. Not only will this ensure strong end to end engagement and understanding for and by Anangu, but it will also support the necessary shift in thinking and approach from stakeholders – shift to an Anangu-centred perspective and approach to employment, jobs and successful changes and outcomes.

A further recommendation, in addition to the measurement, monitoring and evaluation of programs and initiatives, is an equivalent focus on measurement, monitoring and evaluation of the ISEP model framework itself to ensure effectiveness in supporting necessary change at all levels.

4.4 Shared decision-making

How can we embed shared-decision making in community-based workforce planning? NIAA is interested in identifying the opportunities for partnerships with appropriate stakeholders in the employment space, and how shared decision-making can be best facilitated, for example through community-based workforce planning.

As described in Section 4.2, the NPY EC Joint Decision Making model (agreed between EC National Leaders and NIAA), has established a local representative structure (*Kulintja Kutju* or One Vision group) who are participating in the review of existing NIAA IAS funding as a precursor to the establishment and administration of the NPY Regional Investment Strategy.

In our assessment, this model provides a demonstrably effective mechanism for embedding shared decision making in community based workforce planning. This is a model that engages, informs and supports local Anangu representatives (people who are experienced and/or interested) in the development of an approach and a mechanism for ongoing review, assessment and refinement of programs. The group has leveraged the experience of providers and other experts to assist them in exploration, analysis and assessment of ideas, strategies and approaches to their own work and the work of the programs and providers that they review.

Facilitated through partnership with regional Anangu organisations and a small dedicated team to work day to day with the representative group, *Kulintja Kutju* has demonstrated how Anangu can be supported to develop their knowledge, skills and experience around areas in which they have not previously had an opportunity to actively participate.

Coupled with a focus on co-design and development of areas such as the previously mentioned measurement, monitoring and evaluation approach, the ISEP model provides a real opportunity to support and embed another mechanism for Anangu led decision making and community empowerment.

Strong collaboration with employers will also be required. A mechanism needs to be embedded for employers to contribute to the continuous improvement cycle allowing employers to easily participate in a multitude of ways, from work experience opportunities to supporting peoples career paths.

The ISEP procurement or allocation of grants in the NPY region would be better targeted and more efficient when provided through use of a joint decision-making model such as *Kulintja Kutju*.

4.5 Safe and culturally appropriate work environments

How can the ISEP encourage potential employers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to provide safe and culturally appropriate work environments? How can employers better value the skills and perspectives of Indigenous employees? NIAA is interested in understanding how all employers, including Indigenous employers and SMEs, can be supported to further employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“Anangu are living in two worlds. Culture is the most important thing for us. So, orientation is very important so that non-Anangu understand and respect cultural obligations.”

— Margaret Smith, NPYWC Director

As noted in previous sections, safe and culturally safe work environments are at the heart of our regional priorities around education and work, i.e. the *School to Work Transition* and *Intensive Support for New Workers* initiatives.

At their heart, both of these initiatives are focussed on learning how remote employers have been and can provide safe and culturally appropriate work environments, as well as better valuing the skills and perspectives of Anangu employees.

To that extent, work is already underway to explore and address this requirement in part (that is, these initiatives have a specific scope of work).⁸ NPY EC has facilitated the engagement of a broad range of stakeholders including Anangu, Aboriginal Service Providers and Organisations, other Employers and

⁸ Further details of the NPY Empowered Communities priority areas of *School to Work Transition* and *Intensive Support for New Workers* can be provided if necessary

Governments to map out the needs and the potential ways to address cultural safety in the workplace and achieve better outcomes.

The work to date:

- Recognises and articulates the large gap that exists between Anangu values and engagement with education and work, and the values and demands of employers, workplaces, job design and labour markets.
- Explores a model that provides consistent support, e.g. brokering and mentoring, both for those entering the workforce and for employers to negotiate this gap
- Recognise the non-Anangu workers require specific cultural orientation to the region and to working with Anangu
- Recognises that solid two-way trust relationships are critical in supporting Anangu to feel confident to engage with and explore new opportunities at work. A critical element of an effective support model offers of support and navigation of sensitive issues in peoples work and family/personal lives
- Highlights that employers need to incorporate a different way of working into their everyday workplace practices. This includes creating trauma-informed workplaces, intensive worker support, engagement with families, flexible employment arrangements, stronger cross-cultural training of staff and redesign of jobs
- Acknowledges that a “person centred support model” is critical. A model where an individual’s journey and experience is at the heart of exploring employment or work. In our assessment this is a necessary component properly managing expectations and achieving more effective long term outcomes
- There are a range of structural and logistical issues that impact people’s ability to work including, for example, housing, access to vehicles, and vehicle maintenance etc.

4.6 A local focus

How should the ISEP consider a local focus? NIAA is interested in stakeholders’ views on whether defined boundaries required for the ISEP, or whether applicants for funding under the ISEP are best placed to determine the local region within the context of a specific funding proposal?

We would argue that a custom-designed approach is needed for the cross-border NPY region (WA, NT and SA), and this submission has been written specifically with regard to this region.

As discussed above, this region faces a particularly complex set of environmental, logistical, economic and cultural issues. Crossing three state borders adds complexity, due to varying governance rules and disparity in investment across the states/territory.

Empowered Communities has built an extensive set of connections and networks across this region. There are mechanisms, structures, joint decision-making and co-design processes in place that could readily support a new approach to employment programs. We would seek to join up with ISEP to design and deliver a more integrated model of providing job opportunities and support across the NPY tristate region that draws on the work that has already been initiated through Empowered Communities

Conclusion

Aṅangu want jobs. This submission, from the context of the tri-state NPY region, has presented the case for a regional co-design approach to the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program (ISEP).

The context of the NPY region has been articulated in five complex but critical areas of need. Currently, these deeply rooted contexts and the interplay between them are not acknowledged with real flexibility and investment by Government. ISEP must be anchored in understanding the ways these very fundamental issues result in and barriers to work.

The five areas are:

- **Understanding the remoteness of the NPY region.** Being very remote, communities in the NPY region have limited access to mainstream services, challenges and higher costs in delivering services in communities, small and mobile populations meaning the workforce itself is often on the move, limited local economic development opportunities, increased logistical and operational costs for employers in sustaining local and non-resident workforces. The interconnectedness of these factors need to inform ISEP guidelines in order to find locally relevant ways to close the gap in very remote Australia.
- **Recognising Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara languages.** 80% of Aṅangu speak Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara or Yankunytjatjara at home meaning English is a second, third or fourth language for many people. LLN support in English as well as visually and orally based workplace resources and materials in Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara are essential in workplaces to support Aṅangu in the workplace and better engage Aṅangu in workplace recruitment, on-boarding and retention processes. ISEP must recognise languages barriers and provide flexibility and investment for supporting on the job training in LLN and creating resources in languages other than English.
- **Understanding the impacts of a thin labour market.** For the very remote communities of the NPY region, labour markets are particularly challenging because they exist in the context of a limited regional economy. Local work opportunities that exist in government, Aboriginal controlled and non-Aboriginal not for profit and for profit businesses. There are, however, only a small number of Aṅangu owned businesses. Looking to the future, economic substitution should play a key role in regional economic development. Further to this issues is the need to understand both supply and demand. Currently, there is an unmet gap between participation in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, and the training, skills and readiness required to move up into skilled and professional roles. The reality of Aṅangu cyclic workplace engagement is also an important pattern to acknowledge at all levels of work. ISEP must support employers in finding flexible solutions to these barriers.
- **Recognising the implications of intergenerational welfare.** Welfare payments remain the most prevalent day to day income source for the majority of Aṅangu. Any approach to increasing employment participation and long term employment outcomes must be grounded in this starting point. ISEP must allow for employers to work flexibly and over time with employees to build the capacity of the whole community in adopting positive relationships to work.
- **Adopting a person-centred approach.** We must move away from a “one size fits all” approach to engaging workers. Taking on and understanding the complexities of life challenges for Aṅangu workers and their families must be at the core of ISEP. It must provide options and flexibility so employers can be properly funded to support the workplace coordination and systems required to provide wrap around support for workers.

To best support Anangu engagement and maximise employment outcomes in the context of this complex reality, ISEP must:

1. See the NPY as a distinct region with distinct needs and barriers.
2. Build off work the already done by EC in centering Anangu empowerment through co-design models such as those undertaken in EC initiatives including *School to Work Transition*, *Intensive Support for New Workers*, and joint decision-making such as *Kulintja Kutju*, to undertake ISEP design, procurement and funding processes for our region
3. Support the need to build a “critical mass” of Anangu workers with positive experiences and relationships to work. This investment is a critical building block for employment and must recognise a different way of thinking and working – a way that redefines what successful workplace engagement is, and how it is measured, given that many Anangu are entering the workforce from a place of intergenerational welfare reliance. ISEP should provide resources to the widest range of organisations and employers who can support the needed change on the ground.
4. Take into account the need for regional economic development and expansion of the regional economy as key mechanisms in strengthening and expanding the regional labour market and job options for unskilled and semi-skilled roles. ISEP must support the work of the NPY region to consider other avenues and options for regional economic development.
5. Ensure that ISEP’s vision does not lose sight of the need to further explore how pathways to skilled and professional roles also need to be supported.

NPY as a region, and Empowered Communities as a regional partnership, is keen to have the opportunity to continue to work with NIAA and ISEP to make sure the proposed investment achieves genuine and positive change for Anangu communities, families and individuals.