

Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands

An approach based on regional success factors for co-design of the
new Regional Engagement Program design

New Regional Engagement 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 discussion paper for the new Regional Engagement Program (REP).

Strong economic development and reducing the cycle of poverty for Anangu and Yarnangu¹ of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands – a tri-state region across remote Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia – requires a distinct, targeted approach. While Aboriginal people across Australia share many of the barriers to work outlined here, there can be no doubt that specific challenges in the NPY region warrant a unique response.

A successful Regional Engagement Program (REP) must connect with people’s needs, starting where they are at, to secure the outcomes sought by Anangu and the Australian Government. In the NPY region the new REP must be grounded in:

1. **Place-based engagement** as the foundation for Anangu participation and long term economic development. This approach addresses the specific circumstances that characterise the NPY region: tri-state complexities, remoteness, small and mobile populations, thin labour market and economy, low formal education attainment, English as a second language, intergenerational unemployment and welfare dependence as well as the historic and ongoing impacts of trauma. A REP model informed by place-based engagement will work towards breaking the cycles of poverty, intergenerational unemployment, welfare dependency and trauma through meaningful and relevant work and community engagement.
2. **Face-to-face relationships** between Anangu participants, providers and employers are central to developing trust and coordinated systems that will aid the success of the new REP design and delivery.
3. **Person-centred and whole-of-life approaches** recognise that pathways to employment for many Anangu are constrained by a range of structural, educational and historical factors, as well as the need to navigate personal, family and community challenges. The new REP must prioritise family and community engagement to bolster whole communities, and give individuals the best chance of success.
4. **Support people to become job-ready** by investing in reaching a ‘threshold’ level of people who are genuinely ready to work. Achieving a threshold will mean there is cohort of people with the robust foundations for engaging with work and jobs across the region. In the NPY region, many people are ‘pre job-ready’, that is, not yet equipped to achieve job readiness, let alone participate in full-time roles. Achieving a threshold level of job-ready people is necessary before many broader workforce development benefits can be achieved. *We must invest in creating a workforce, before we can develop a workforce.* The new REP must not only invest in job-ready participants, but in supporting people to become job-ready (people who may not be engaged at all in work or the workforce, or are in the early stages of workforce participation). Experience shows that there are a significant percentage of the population who fall into this category.
5. **Invest in Aboriginal led and Community Controlled Organisations** as providers of REP services as well as key employers and supporters of Anangu and Anangu employment.

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

6. **Provide incentives for increased participation** in work activities / placements. Given the barriers to employment people in remote regions face, the new REP must offer people the right incentives to participate, in progressive steps, towards workforce engagement through community projects, training and work placements and ultimately into paid employment. Voluntary activities will be most successful when people have agency, opportunity and responsibility to earn additional income by participating in these focused and flexible activities.

Through our consultation, conversations and co-design work with Anangu, we know that people want to enjoy the financial benefits of working, as well as 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.

Despite people's expressed needs and wants, Closing the Gap targets and measures show that there has been limited improvement in employment outcomes for very remote populations. Real flexibility and commitment in a Regional Engagement Program to address our region's specific and local workforce needs presents a significant opportunity to deliver outcomes that both Anangu and the government want to see – namely, long-term positive outcomes for Anangu in successful, meaningful engagement and employment.

2. Six reasons for doing things differently

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 is about supporting Indigenous agency and responsibility on the ground while influencing structural changes within government. In designing and developing a new model for regional engagement around work and work readiness, our case for doing things differently in the NPY region centres on Anangu defined work priorities, and our understanding of the regional environment, identified through NPY EC's co-design approach.

Co-design has told us that Anangu employment means employers and workers must navigate structural, social and historical barriers, as well as find ways to enable and encourage Anangu to meet the challenges of living and working well in two worlds. This reflects a need for a significant shift in what initial job success looks like, and an acceptance that there are fundamental building blocks for Anangu engagement and employment that need to be established and supported.

To set the scene in a meaningful way in Section 2, we explore the six key considerations (outlined in Section 1, above) that underpin the unique challenges of our region before specifically addressing each of the discussion topics from the New Remote Engagement Program Discussion Paper in Section 3.

The six key considerations underpin our approach to the discussion topics into the new Regional Engagement Program structure, to provide a roadmap to support governments in working together with Aboriginal people in very remote Australia toward stronger regional economies and better long term employment outcomes.

2.1 Place-based engagement

Embed place-based engagement as the basis for genuine Anangu participation and long term economic development goals. Place-based engagement means targeting the specific circumstances that characterise the NPY region and breaking the cycles of poverty, intergenerational unemployment, welfare dependency and trauma through meaningful and relevant work and community engagement.

The best place-based engagement results in genuine engagement with local people in shared decision-making and co-design, where local communities and their long-term needs are explored, understood and valued. Economic development is a critical component of long term, sustainable growth for the region. The full exploration, development and advantages of regional economic development opportunities, however, are dependent upon people who are ready and able to take up those opportunities by entering and succeeding in the workforce.

As we build a local workforce participation and capability threshold of people ready to take up work in the region, we must plan programs in the context of the specific circumstances that characterise the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands. Defining characteristics of the NPY Lands of Central Australia include:

- **Remoteness:** Encompassing 350,000 klms² across a tri-state region (NT, SA & WA).
- **Population:** A population of approx. 5,000 Anangu across 26 communities making the NPY Lands one of the lowest population densities in the world.
- **Mobility:** Relatively small and mobile populations in each remote community. The mobility of people and families throughout the region (including across borders) means that community populations and demographics can change materially and quickly depending on circumstances such as cultural business, community unrest and regional events.
- **Thin economy:** Operating with a thin economy where labour markets are particularly challenged because they exist in the context of a limited regional economy. Markets in both supply and demand can be characterised as ‘thin’. Further, the main industry in the NPY region is government-funded service delivery, meaning that many jobs that exist have medium-high entry-level requirements, are not accessible for many Anangu, and get taken by non-Anangu workers.
- **Language:** 80% of Anangu speak Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and/or Yankunytjatjara languages at home. Many people have medium to low levels of English language comprehension as well as very low levels of literacy (in both First Language and English). This has a considerable impact on peoples’ confidence and competence with navigating workplace processes in written English, including navigating technical government language and technology based solutions.
- **Poverty:** Low individual or family incomes and minimal or no access to job opportunities puts the NPY region in the bottom socio-economic decile in the country. Poverty levels are underpinned by government policies that are inflexible, punishing and promote welfare dependency. The majority of Anangu families and communities are impacted by intergenerational unemployment, welfare dependence and trauma.

For an engagement model to be relevant, effective and ultimately successful in the region, these regional realities need a genuine place-based solution that considers and specifically addresses each area, in partnership with local people.

2.2 Face-to-face relationships

Recognise that trusted, face-to-face relationships are central to the success of all aspects of program design and delivery.

For Anangu, family and community relationships are central in life. The fundamental importance of familiarity and trust with other people in their lives, including service providers and external support relationships, cannot be overstated. Relationships developed over time, with regular interaction and respect, build trust and provide people with the sense of safety and confidence to engage and work with others. The development and maintenance of relationships is critical for engagement with Anangu in the new REP.

Managing and supporting the development of relationships is not only about the participant and the provider. Relationships are central across the entire system of remote engagement.

Healthy and functional relationships must be sustained between the participant and provider, but also between providers and employers, between employers and their employees and/or work-placement participants, and critically in the relationships that both providers and employers have with the remote communities they operate in:



Community based staff, physically located in community based offices, have been shown to be central to achieving the most beneficial outcomes for Anangu. This is where the best and strongest relationships are formed and nurtured and has been acknowledged as a foundation of successful engagement by many regional providers including regional CDP providers. Anangu value and respond best to face-to-face interactions and support. Established relationships and routines for engagement with support staff results in stronger participation and better outcomes in both formal and informal interactions for Anangu.

Staffed offices in communities mean Anangu can drop in regularly as they build trust and relationships by seeking practical, informal supports such as accessing the internet, help with queries, having a cup of tea and a chat. The trust and relationships formed provide the cornerstone for working with people around training, work experience and employment. The new REP model needs to recognise the relational aspect of the work of providers, and why a people focused approach is so important for good outcomes. The importance and value of this often invisible work of job support providers must be recognised.

Any strategy to move to a partly or fully online model for support of engagement and employment activities or outcomes would be, in our assessment, disastrous for our region. Online-only delivery has major limitations in remote communities because of the technical, logistical and access issues for Anangu, but also because the loss of the face-to-face relational ways of working would negatively impact Anangu engagement.

2.3 Person-centred approaches

Person-centred and whole-of-life approaches recognise that pathways to employment for many Anangu are constrained by a range of structural, educational and historical factors, as well as the need to navigate personal, family and community challenges. The new REP will work best through prioritising family and community engagement to bolster whole communities, and give individuals the best chance of success.

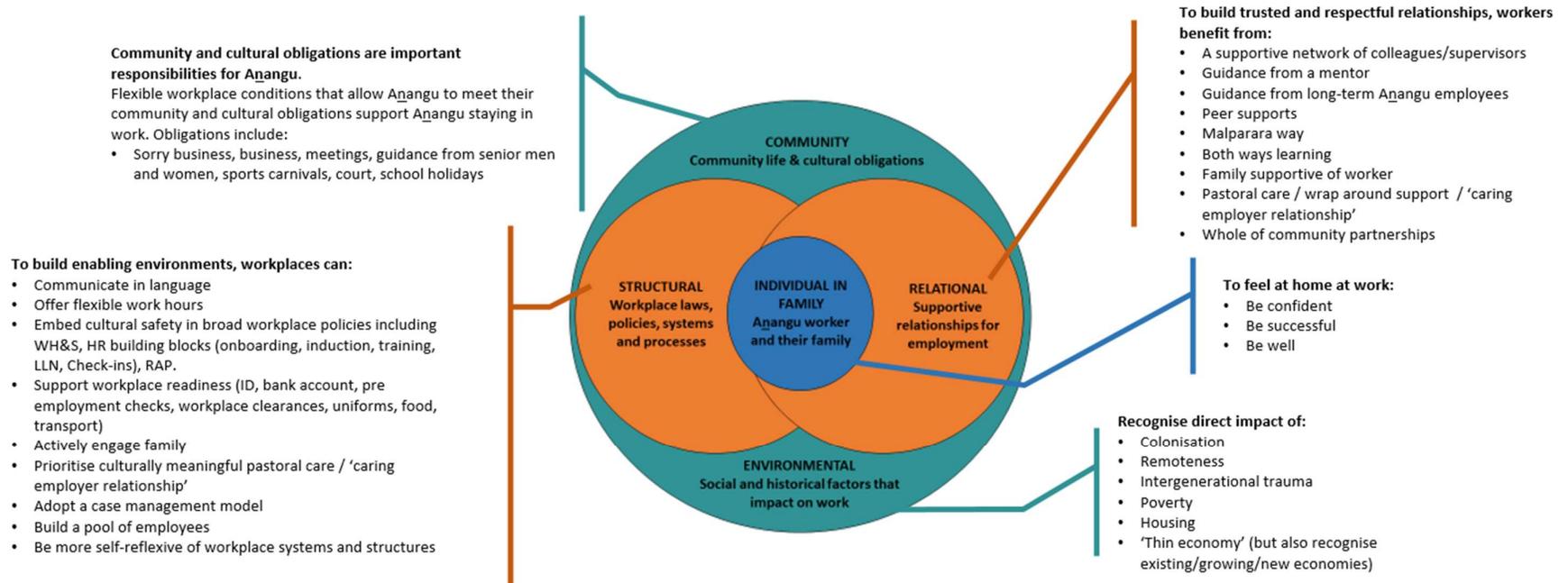
Regional knowledge and experience shows that engaging Anangu with person-centred and whole-of-life approaches supports the best work outcomes. This approach puts the person and their family’s needs at the centre of support structures, making minimal assumptions about where a person might or should be at with regard to their personal situation and work capacity. Person-centred approaches engage with people in a respectful and open manner to explore their experiences, aspirations and concerns, and work in partnership with the person and their family to navigate their individual journey.

Supported, holistic and appropriately paced engagement means participants develop their individual knowledge, skills and confidence to become ‘job ready’ in a steady, empowered way. It also enables providers to look at the best form of post-placement support to assist workers in resolving any issues (personal as well as professional) that may impact their journey as they become confident and successful workers.

Individualised models of support require more time and effort, but have been shown to deliver better outcomes in remote contexts with strong relational engagement over time. In our assessment, to be truly person-centred, a regional co-design approach to the new REP would need to consider what is meant by “work” and coming together for a shared meaning among all regional stakeholders. This must include an exploration of what is considered a standard or acceptable work journey, as well as the ways we understand and measure success in the workplace from the Anangu and employer perspectives.

The following diagram shows a model of person-centred support, with enabling factors for Anangu workers in the NPY region.

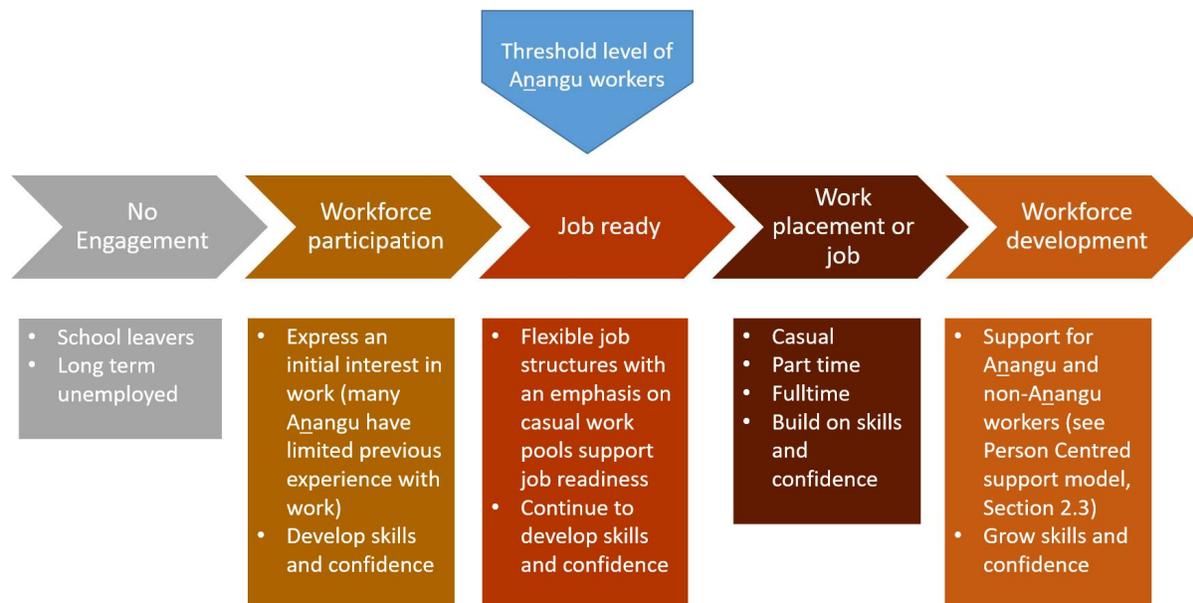
Person-centred support for Anangu workers in the NPY region: Modelling what makes work easier



2.4 Support people to become job ready

Support people to become job-ready by investing in reaching a ‘threshold’ level of people who are genuinely ready to work. In the NPY region, many people are ‘pre job-ready’, that is, not yet equipped to achieve job readiness, let alone participate in full-time roles. Achieving a threshold level of job-ready people is necessary before many broader workforce development benefits can be achieved. The new REP must not only invest in job-ready participants, but in supporting people to become job-ready.

A significant number of people across the NPY Lands could not be considered job-ready against the mainstream definition of job readiness. Many people are not able to enter the workforce in the way the REP discussion paper assumes they can. Significant effort and investment is required to work closely with individuals and communities to understand and address some of the underpinning assumptions about what job readiness looks like and what that means for people in remote central Australia. We must acknowledge that access to adequate housing, transport, food/nutrition, and a sufficient level of social and emotional wellbeing are often unacknowledged as factors that form the foundation of job readiness. Substantial investment in supporting foundational factors is required in lifting the general level of readiness of the potential working population in our region from cohorts of people with no engagement in the workforce through workforce participant and job readiness, as highlighted in the diagram below.



At a regional level, our goal is to achieve a threshold level of people who are genuinely ready to work. A threshold level refers to the point where there are sufficient numbers of people within a community who have an appreciation and understanding of work, and what it requires to be work or job ready. At the threshold level, with enough people far enough progressed on their journey to work or job readiness, there

will be a pool of people to work with around the next stages work placement, jobs and workforce development.

Without a threshold level or pipeline of people enabled and confident to take the next steps, it remains extremely challenging for job service providers and employers to establish the necessary systems and structures to deliver employment outcomes.

An effective REP model will value and support this as a foundation for transformation of the historical ways of working with remote communities and meeting the Closing the Gap employment targets, namely, CtG Target 7 (increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15-24 years in employment, education or training to 67% by 2031) and CtG Target 8 (increase proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-64 who are employed to 62% by 2031). These are ambitious targets nationally, but will be particularly aspirational for remote Australia where a transformational way of thinking and working together to come even close to these targets is required.

As described in the APO NT 2017 proposal “Fair work and Strong Communities”² an investment in the creation of real jobs (at the right level, including entry level) for Anangu will benefit both the individuals and their communities. However, we argue that the NPY region also requires entry level opportunities with greater flexibility than a model that relies on the formula of one person for one FTE job – an approach that has not worked in the NPY region. In our region, more flexible models may mean that success is not a question of, for example, 10 Anangu in jobs, but rather 10 FTE jobs for (many) Anangu.

Not 10 Anangu in jobs, but 10 jobs for Anangu

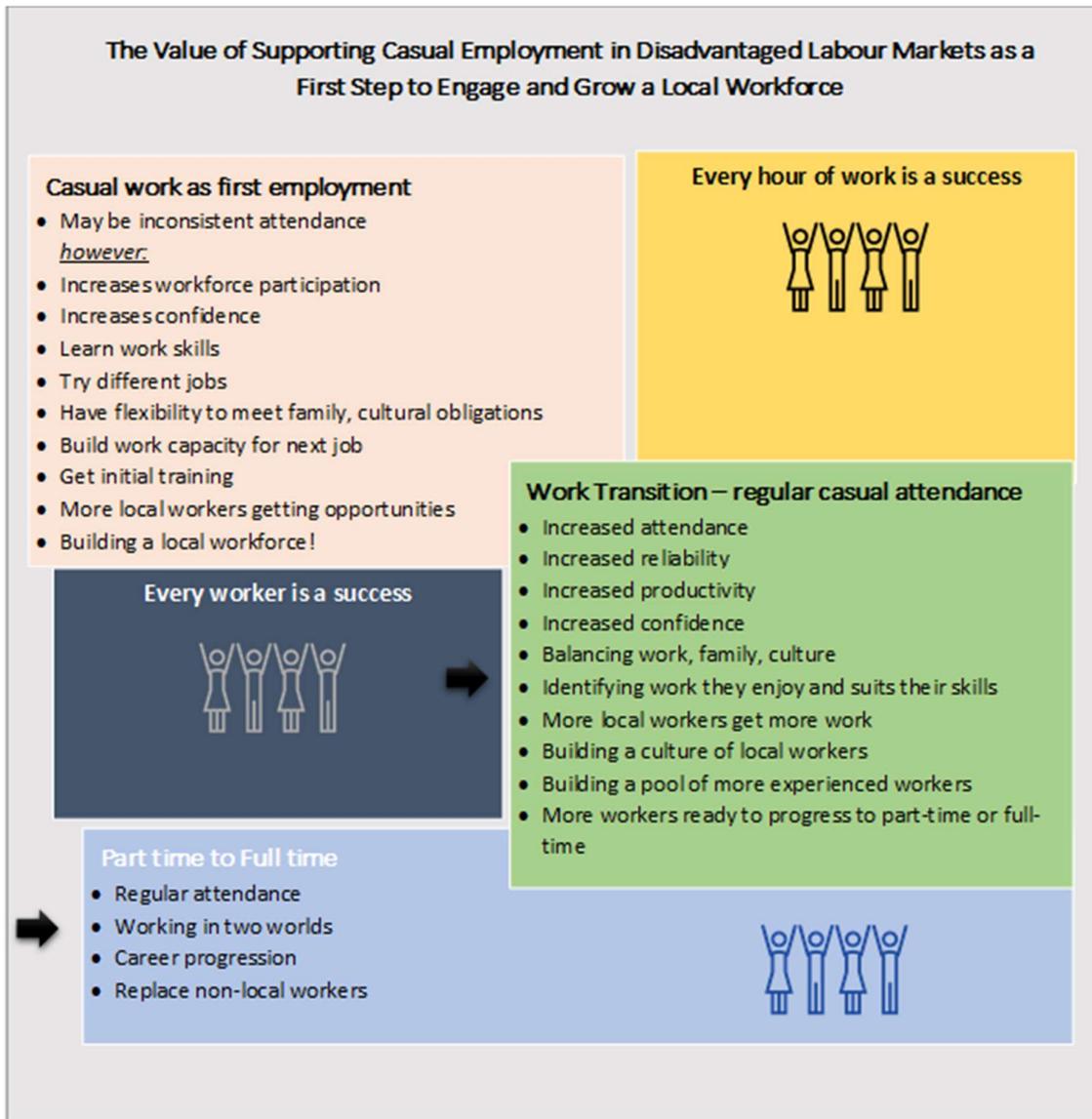
The value of entry level roles, largely in the unskilled and semi-skilled domain, requires the creation of jobs that support approaches such as pools of workers, and casual, flexible labour markets where all Anangu (and especially young people) get to have their initial experiences of work. Young people in urban and regional centres enjoy the opportunity to have casual and part-time work experiences as teenagers and/or whilst still at school. Our assessment is that this casual, flexible first taste of work is often critical for people before they are ready to enter into longer term or full time employment and career pathways. Casual work is a good way for people to learn job skills and gain confidence in work. In the NPY region, we need to generate the environment for early work experience afforded to young people in urban and regional centres.

The new REP needs to include capacity to provide similar opportunities and experiences so that people can enter the workforce at an appropriate level of engagement. We need a mix of opportunities that allow different employment models to be explored and adapted to the needs of individuals and employers in lieu of more mainstream environments and stronger labour markets (that have a variety of options for entry level / casual employment). Flexibility in opportunity is key. Success will come through recognising that one size does not fit all.

One size does not fit all

The value of supporting casual employment in disadvantaged labour markets as a first step to engaging and growing a local workforce is outlined in the image below:

² “Fair Work and Strong Communities: Proposal for Remote Development and Employment Scheme” (APONT May 2017) http://www.amsant.org.au/apont/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/RDES-Report_Online.pdf



Getting things right for entry level workers who are often in semi-skilled and skilled roles, is a critical foundation for the long term employment transformation that we aspire to. Work flexibility and in a supported way to make the transition from workforce participation, to job readiness and employment, is the starting point.

Over time, working together, we will be able to increase the opportunities and pathways for Anangu to take up more of the skilled and professional roles that constitute the majority of Government funded skilled service provision roles in communities. These are roles that Anangu often aspire to. Comprehensive pathways and the right support will see Anangu increasingly achieve that aspiration.

2.5 Invest in Aboriginal led and Community Controlled Organisations

Invest in Aboriginal led and Community Controlled Organisations as providers of REP support and as key employers and supporters of Anangu

One of the four Closing the Gap priority reforms focuses on building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors to deliver services with appropriate support and Aboriginal governance. In the context of our remoteness and thin economy, we believe there is both a need and an opportunity to invest in Aboriginal led and Community Controlled Organisations as key employers and supporters of Anangu.

Regional Anangu organisations are significant employers of Anangu, and often the most innovative and flexible in providing employment opportunities for local people. They, however, are often challenged in their need to deliver reliable services on tight budgets, which can preclude them from being able to invest in the necessary structures and systems to maximise employment opportunities for Anangu. In particular, budget constraints often limit their ability to support inexperienced or unskilled candidates who need entry level roles with a strong support structure to scaffold their successful transition and participation into the workforce.

By understanding the constraints of the thin labour market in remote regions, there is a clear argument to support additional short term investment by government to support role creation with embedded supports. The new REP will be most useful and successful if it is able to acknowledge the need for role creation with embedded supports and that in almost all cases, it is Aboriginal led Community Controlled Organisations that have and continue to be the most experienced, effective and competent employers of Anangu, and strongly committed to real outcomes.

2.6 Provide incentives for increased participation

Incentives for increased participation in work activities / placements must be provided. Given the barriers to employment people in remote regions face, the new REP must offer people the right incentives to participate, in progressive steps, towards workforce engagement through community projects, training and work placements. Voluntary activities will be most successful when people have agency, opportunity and responsibility to earn additional income by participating in them.

Given the historical, social, structural, economic, family and personal barriers Anangu face in engaging with work in the NPY region, we believe that incentives to increase entry to work and voluntary participation in activities are integral to RES in the NPY region.

The discussion paper outlines the new compulsory REP requirements. While most of these requirements are reasonable, the requirements of 'accepting suitable paid work when it is offered' and 'not to voluntarily leave suitable employment' are potentially problematic for participants in the NPY region. We would not like to see participants unfairly penalised when i) the availability of suitable paid work in the context of a thin regional economy is contentious and ii) there are many cultural and social reasons why participants may have to leave work.

In our region, there are many valid reasons why people leave jobs. Any new program should not penalise people for managing the realities of remote life, but rather seek to maximize work opportunities and work engagement in the context of the thin labour market, cultural obligations, and the stressors of remoteness and poverty. The new Remote Engagement Program model will achieve the best outcomes if it can encourage positive, relevant work-related engagement measures rather than penalties (see also Section 3.5, below).

While some activities are now voluntary (Work for the Dole, Skills for Education and Employment (SEE), Green Army, Aboriginal Program and Placement, Post-school state and territory funded initiatives), it is our assessment that in this region, these activities should come with incentives. We believe that incentives are relevant and necessary as a mechanism to promote participation. Incentives can support people in overcoming their complex barriers to participate by offering a suitable reward, in this case an opportunity for additional income or benefit.

Incentives may be in the form of monetary incentives, but may also include encouragement through removal of barriers such as: graduated pathways into work with flexible hours of work, casual, part-time and job sharing structures all linked to wrap-around or case management support from a person-centred approach i.e. family support services, child care, etc.

Encouraging people with incentives to participate supports providers in engaging participants face-to-face, and building the relationships that are so central in supporting Anangu into work. Having an incentive to support Anangu engagement and participation through “work for the dole” or voluntary activities uses the external motivator of additional remuneration to support Anangu in breaking through the barriers that may be holding them back. Over the longer term, through a pathway into real jobs, the goal would be for people to more completely internalise a new way of thinking about work and the value of having a job to them and their families.

3. Empowered Communities response to discussion paper topics

3.1 Placements for job-ready participants

- ***What kinds of placements or activities are most likely to be useful—to participants, and to the broader community—on the pathway to employment or where jobs are not available?***
- ***How could placements and activities be structured to benefit individuals and the community including possible incentives? And what could we expect of participants in return for any incentives they receive?***
- ***What are the new or emerging opportunities in remote communities, where participants could gain skills and competencies to prepare them to compete for future employment opportunities while contributing to current community needs?***

The question of placements for job ready participants must be understood in the context of a number of limiting factors. The thin economy (described above) directly impacts placements for job-ready participants in so far as:

1. There are a limited number of employers who can facilitate placements.
2. There are not enough jobs in remote communities (entry level jobs that do exist are too often taken by non-Anangu workers because they require less support; skilled level jobs are also taken by non-Anangu workers with requisite qualifications) which undermines the purpose of work placements as pathways into real jobs.
3. A lack of access to real jobs over generations in remote contexts has meant that many families have little or no family history of work. This has left a large cohort of participants not familiar with the concepts and structures of mainstream work, and thus, not yet job-ready.
4. The recognised gap in the local labour market around the “first job” casual work opportunities that young people are able to explore in more mainstream environments. These small steps are often a key component of longer term success. This opportunity hardly exists in our region, and so job or work placements are important to provide a useful alternative for local people

The issue of placements for job-ready participants in the NPY Region is not only a question of ‘what kinds of placements are likely to be useful?’ but also a question of ‘how can a new Remote Employment Program create meaningful placements when there are so few jobs/employers/job-ready participants?’. The pursuit of useful placements for those who are job-ready should not occur in isolation – there must be a concurrent strategy for the creation of more jobs, more employers ready to fully support Anangu, and more job-ready participants in the region. Critically, pathways to prepare Anangu to take over existing community jobs including the more skilled and professionally based roles (in a suitably managed way) should be prioritised.

The discussion paper identifies a number of industries in communities that present opportunities for work placements in education, aged-care, community liaison and the arts.

Historically, however, there has been a thin line between the provision of CDP placements and what constitutes real jobs in these industries that workers could and should be doing. The risk is that paid jobs are effectively replaced by ongoing work placements. To generate useful placements, we believe the new REP must develop structures to ensure that work placements are not used by employers as a substitute for a worker in real jobs. Work placements must be:

- Structured
- Time-limited
- Upskilling including training (on or off the job)
- Linked to employment outcomes.

We also recognise that voluntary participation in activities under the REP can provide important skills development and support for Anangu by contributing to the wellbeing of individuals and communities in supporting community-identified projects/infrastructure. CDEP allowed providers the flexibility to support community development activities by paying people (top up) for undertaking extra hours, and gave participants the chance to be part of a team focused on work that mattered in their community and be rewarded for that effort. CDP also often focused on community prioritized activities and outcomes but without any additional incentives.

Any new model operating in the NPY Region should encourage/incentivise participants to engage in community development activities. Through their engagement, participants have the opportunity to be introduced to job readiness skills and work routines, as well as the chance to begin developing the supportive relationships already described (2.2, above).

There is a focus of government on providing accredited training in activities, but experience in our region shows that familiarisation with work routines, workplace language and behavior, learning day to day skills and tasks of workplaces (for example, completing time sheets, access to MyGov, ID and pre-employment checks) are more relevant and helpful for entry-level employment (i.e. when people have jobs) as we build the threshold of workers in the NPY region.

Incentives would encourage participants to ‘step up’ to another level of engaging with work. Participants could be remunerated under REP to reward engagement in a time-limited placement, and incentives for attending work-related voluntary activities. The three-tiered model for NPY Women’s Council Anangu Support Workers provides a workable model for incentivising workers with increased pay for increased responsibility as they move through the three tiers. Moving from tier to tier is self-paced and supported by supervisors.

Micro-businesses present new and emerging opportunities that may support jobs growth. In the NPY Region, however, this should start with working with existing local organisations to develop a model and investment structure with the vision to support Anangu in growing their own businesses. Even with this support, there are significant barriers and challenges to how micro-businesses might be sustained including challenges for micro-businesses that potentially compete against a community owned organisations, and challenge of finding the right customer base in small, mobile communities.

3.2 Support for job-ready participants to get a job

- ***What sorts of support or training have been helpful in matching people who are job-ready to job vacancies? (For example, interview and CV preparation, job searches)***
- ***What more could be done to help people who do find a job to succeed in the workplace over the longer term? (For example, induction, mentoring, training in workplace health and safety, information about how the tax system works)***

- ***Are there new ways to create employment opportunities for job-ready candidates?
(For example, linkages to business incubator programs, ways to support new enterprises, ways to engage the private sector in job creation)***

The discussion paper suggests that in remote areas, many participants are ‘job ready’ – they have the skills and experience needed to obtain long-term employment, but are underemployed or unemployed. This assumption, however, does not represent all or most participants in very remote communities across the NPY region of NT, SA and WA (see 2.4, above).

In the NPY region, many local people are at a pre job-ready status because of a number of complex and interrelated factors including:

- Remoteness and lack of mainstream services mean Anangu do not have the same level of access to services and structures that support becoming ‘job ready’ as other Australians. As previously mentioned, the region covers 350,000 square kilometers across the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia with approximately 26 communities and an Anangu population of some 5000 people.
- Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara are first languages for 80% of Anangu. Many people have medium-low levels of English language ability as well as very low levels of literacy (in both First Language and English). Being ‘job ready’ almost invariably requires the navigation of systems in English, which presents additional challenges for Anangu.
- A thin labour market in their own communities, which is where most people want to stay and work, is particularly challenging in the context of a limited regional economy where demand and supply do not match. No significant or sustained investment is currently in place to underpin real economic and employment benefits to the region, meaning job opportunities are limited across the spectrum of unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled and professional levels.
- Poverty and inter-generational trauma in the region limits opportunity, thus requiring additional effort, incentives and wrap around support
- Welfare payments remain the most prevalent day to day income source for the majority of Anangu across the NPY region. The impacts of intergenerational unemployment, welfare and dependency means that many families have no family history of work and need significant initial and ongoing wrap around support to engage with work.

Thus, the question of the sorts of support or training that have been helpful in matching people who are job ready to job vacancies in the NPY region does not sufficiently account for the region’s thin economy, and the reality that a large cohort of Anangu need significant support to become ‘job ready’. The focus of support for entry-level workers in this region must be on firstly becoming ‘job ready’ including, for example, supporting people to obtain 100 points of ID.

Further, the types and modes of training that are available in remote contexts are limited. RTO accredited training makes sense for people who are job-ready, however, informal and on-the-job training focused on work language, work systems, processes and procedures is more relevant and beneficial than accredited training for entry-level roles.

For those who are job-ready, existing structures still need to be grounded in building trusted relationships and onboarding to support people to stay in work. Personal and professional support is warranted for people in unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled and professional levels of engagement with work.

Currently, incentives provided to employers are administratively cumbersome and rigid in design meaning the complexity can be a deterrent in supporting Anangu in meaningful ways into work. Once in work, more could be done to support people in the workplace over the long term, both relationally (in supportive relationships for employment) and structurally (in workplace laws, policies, systems and processes) (see also Person-centred diagram of support, page 7).

Specifically, these should emphasise:

- CDP providers' role in sustaining relationships in post-placement support for the employer and the participant over the initial 26 weeks
- Embedded person-centred support (individualised to the needs of each participant and their family)
- Understand the importance of family and community, and find ways to engage family in support of the worker
- Establish support systems for the employee from mentors and other long-term Anangu employees within an organisation
- Provide spoken and visual communication in Language to assist with understanding
- Offer flexibility in work hours
- Embed cultural safety in broad workplace policies including WH&S and HR building blocks.

In thinking about jobs and work opportunities, our experience is that flexibility is key. Flexibility in what constitutes work for Anangu and what constitutes a successful outcome. For many people entering the workforce we know that casual employment is a valid and often desirable (to Anangu) model, so success is not just a person in part time and or full time role. So role creation that focuses on casual roles and employment opportunities is necessary and appropriate.

Is considering nor to measure change and success it is, in our assessment, equally relevant to measure and acknowledge (including rewarding) changes (increases) in total hours worked within a community (ie against a plan or expectation). This approach recognizes the value of more hours of work being completed in a community not just measuring the number of people in jobs for nn days/weeks/months

Regional history and engagement with communities has confirmed that small steps of success (ie dipping in and out of work over time) are often usual experiences of many Anangu on their employment journeys.

3.3 Vocational training for participants

- ***What kinds of training opportunities have led to members of your community succeeding in getting a job? (For example, apprenticeships, short-courses, certificates and higher education qualifications offered by a Registered Training Organisation, work experience with host employers)***
- ***How can service providers increase their knowledge and awareness of culturally-specific issues to better assist Indigenous participants?***
- ***Are there new types of training that would be useful to grow participants' skills to contribute in new enterprises and opportunities emerging in the post-COVID economy?***

Short vocational industry courses do lead to jobs in the NPY region. Given the absence of generational engagement with workplaces, however, our experience suggests that a far more effective approach is

training focused on activities using informal peer support and mentoring that builds relationships and on-the-job confidence by familiarising workers with basic skill sets.

The discussion paper asks how service providers can increase their knowledge and awareness of culturally-specific issues to better assist Indigenous participants? Our position is that when Aboriginal led and Community Controlled Organisations are the main service providers, knowledge of culturally specific issues and culturally safe work practices are inherently supported by the organisations' values, as well as their community and cultural connections under the guidance of their Aboriginal boards and members.

The new Remote Engagement Program will achieve the strongest outcomes by supporting Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to create meaningful work in communities (See, for example, APO NT's *Fair Work and Strong Communities: Proposal for a Remote Development and Employment Scheme* which details a clear strategy for creating 12,000 new jobs that would expand community control and engagement in remote employment programs). In our assessment, a focused, time bound investment will help shift the current employment landscape for remote regions. Supporting the creation of new, often entry level, roles will bring significant benefits and allow a shift to begin. This is a critical first step to investing in the unskilled and semi-skilled workforce, and building the pathways that can be activated as we achieve our regional threshold of job ready employees.

Further, we believe that any non-Aboriginal organisations partnering with Aboriginal organisations would ideally be short-term and transitional partnerships, established to provide leverage to Aboriginal organisations. The emphasis of the region should be on growing local Aboriginal led and Community Controlled Organisations, rather than embedding long-term partnerships potentially dominated by non-Aboriginal organisations (unless and only where this may be the preference of the local people for a specific endeavor).

All non- Anangu staff working in the region need ongoing information and training on local contexts and issues that extends beyond orientation. This might be delivered in vocational, tertiary or specific workplace professional development training, but should also exist in the form of external professional supervision with a person who can assist staff in critically self-reflecting over time on their own cultural frames of reference. Service providers must also look at their own systems, policies and procedures to enable workplaces to be structurally and functionally more welcoming and adaptable for Anangu.

In addressing the post-COVID economy, where some economic opportunities may arise in industries like tourism, hospitality and mining, relevant vocational training must be targeted to communities, supporting and enabling Anangu engagement in industries where there will be jobs.

Most critically, in an increasingly digital post-COVID world, we must maintain face-to-face delivery of vocational training opportunities to best support Anangu learning needs. Indeed, access to all forms of support (CDP, human services and workplace training and development) are best delivered face-to-face and not online to help manage language, cultural and digital barriers. Any transition to a digital interface can only happen at a pace that works for local people and must be co-designed and implemented with local people at the center.

New enterprises or opportunities might include areas such as NDIS services and support, however as in other areas NDIS is a thin market in the NPY region. The development of viable enterprises or support models will require additional analysis and collective review and co-design to work through the current and potential risks and issues that limit access to the market for new entrants (including local people).

3.4 Non-vocational services to overcome serious barriers to employment

- ***What types of services are most important to local Indigenous communities in helping people to get past entry barriers and begin the journey to job-readiness? (For example, health services, housing services, literacy and numeracy education assistance)***
- ***What approaches have been most effective in connecting participants with relevant government and non-government support services?***
- ***What needs to change for service providers to be better able to connect participants to the right services?***

The discussion paper acknowledges the difficulty in identifying and understanding complex barriers for participants in engaging with CDP and work, and that the service experience for participants could be improved with greater focus on their lived experience.

People in remote Australian communities' experience extreme poverty and some of the country's poorest health outcomes. To make real inroads on 'Closing the Gap', every Government system and service must be willing to take on and play a part in addressing the fundamental barriers that poverty and poor health present. The new Remote Engagement Program is no exception. Supporting Anangu in addressing the social and emotional wellbeing of individual workers, families and communities is an essential component of encouraging Anangu workers to comfortable and successful at work. To be work ready (let alone feeling confident, successful and well at work), people's home lives need to be relatively stable. Good health and home life are the prerequisite conditions that enable people to get to and stay in work.

People are often navigating structural barriers such as overcrowded housing and no access to childcare, exposure to family and domestic violence, mental health issues, or drug and alcohol addictions. Many people also need access to practical supports for being able to participate in work effectively, things such as an alarm clock and a work uniform. Therefore, to navigate structural barriers, social and emotional wellbeing services and supports are critical. These services and supports are necessary in the NPY region to help people overcome entry barriers and begin the journey to job-readiness. Again, this support is most meaningful as person-centred care, ie to meet the person where they are at.

Services and systems that assist workplaces in providing workplace instruction in Aboriginal languages are also critical for helping people who have English as a second or third language.

COVID will be an important issue to navigate for Anangu workers particularly given the fact that, at the time of writing, vaccination rates remain low in many communities. With workplace legislation mandating vaccination, more needs to be done to ensure Anangu workers have access to health services and are receiving accurate public health information concerning their rights and responsibilities. COVID will be an ongoing challenge and the new REP will need to continue to navigate the issues of the day (vaccinations, boosters, proof of vaccination).

The most effective approach for connecting participants with relevant government and non-government support services is, in our experience, face-to-face, on the ground support or relational engagement. We know that it is personal relationships, for example, that are supporting many Anangu in getting vaccinated against COVID; and personal supportive relationships – *malparara way* – help Anangu stay engaged in work.

Such relationships mean people have trusted, practical support to help navigate cultural and language barriers, online systems and other workplace expectations.

For relational, face-to-face delivery to be a reality however, the right services need to be supported on the ground. Communities need:

1. **Service Centres functioning and accessible to Anangu:** Remote communities need well-functioning service centres providing access to basic services such as obtaining IDs, banking, Centrelink, MyGov, fines, funerals, and housing services. We have seen how difficult this is to achieve on the APY Lands with the barriers PYKU have faced in providing basic services.
2. **Health services and workers on the ground:** The recent example in the APY Lands of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) changing its model from in-community mental health support to a FIFO and telehealth model (which has also meant that local Anangu support workers lost their jobs) materially undermines the pursuit of healthy, supported communities – and therefore a healthy, supported, and ‘job-ready’ workforce.

3.5 Mutual obligation requirements

- ***What approaches are effective in helping participants to meet their Mutual Obligation Requirements?***
- ***What are the barriers that are preventing some participants meet their Mutual Obligation Requirements? How can these be addressed?***
- ***What specific assistance or flexibilities do community organisations and service providers require to better support participants meet their Mutual Obligation Requirements?***

In the NPY region, it is impossible to talk about approaches that help participants meet mutual obligation requirements without first identifying the significant structural barriers that can and often do prevent people from meeting their mutual obligation requirements.

These barriers include:

- **Social determinants of health** – the social factors that determine people’s health outcomes in economic stability, access to quality education, access to quality health care, housing and community infrastructure, social and community contexts. For Anangu, specific barriers include poverty, mental health issues, substance use, domestic violence, chronic health conditions, acute trauma, a lack of child care and adequate food/nutrition.
- **Language** – Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara are first languages for 80% of Anangu. While language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) in English is a challenge, many younger and middle aged people also do not read or write in Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara or Yankunytjatjara. Thus, a lack of spoken and/or visual communication in language from government and employers presents significant barriers for Anangu in engaging with work and meeting CDP obligations.
- **Managing online processes** – navigating online systems and access to reliable technology and infrastructure in remote communities present a significant barrier to workplace systems.
- **Administration** – The government’s capacity to manage their workload in administering service deliver has impacts on participants in, for example, having to wait for lengthy periods on the phone with Centrelink call centres.

Addressing these barriers should form a central component of supportive approaches and work in with incentives that ensure participants are empowered, have their own agency and responsibilities and are able to meet mutual obligation requirements.

Incentives, however, should be tied to a very structured model. It must be clear what activities constitute or are eligible for incentive payments to ensure they are legitimate and activated appropriately.

Again, service provision that is face-to-face is central in providing the right model and infrastructure to address these barriers. Face to face support allows genuine person-centred engagement and the provision of practical life assistance – clothes washing, food, a safe place at CDP office – that can make the difference between someone getting to placement and/or work, or not.

In our region, there are many valid reasons why people leave jobs. Any new program must not penalise people for the strategies they need in managing the realities of remote life, but rather seek to maximize work opportunities and work engagement in the context of a thin labour market, cultural obligations, and the stressors of remoteness and poverty. The new Remote Engagement Program model must encourage positive, relevant work-related engagement measures rather than penalties.

As previously outlined, we believe there is value in a program that makes the distinction between a participant's requirement or obligation to attend their monthly or fortnightly appointment and the opportunity provided incentives for increased engagement by finding real pathways into meaningful work and work for income or incentives rather than "work for the dole" activities.

These opportunities for incentivised engagement could be built around a range of hours where an increased payment is attached to increased hours engaged in work like activities under the voluntary component of REP. Obligations and opportunities for participants who remain on unemployment payments, however, should be no greater than those of participants in non-remote employment programs.

Further, community organisations and service providers work best when they are able to have discretion around supporting participants and their reasons for leaving a job, or not meeting mandatory obligations where they have a good reason to believe that the person requires a flexible solution. Without this flexibility, the system drives provider and participant relationships, and can unfairly penalise people for matters outside their personal control. There are valid cultural reasons (for example, being on men's business) and external social pressures (social determinants of health detailed above) that impact people's ability to meet their obligations.