

Submission to
Department of Communication, Information
Technology and the Arts (DCITA)
‘Backing Indigenous Ability’ Discussion Paper

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Introduction

1. The Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra Media are pleased to present this joint submission to the 'Backing Indigenous Ability' (BIA) discussion paper, released on 27 March 2006. This submission provides an overview of the Ngaanyatjarra communities, general responses to common questions in the discussion paper, and specific comment on the identified areas for discussion.

Background

2. The Ngaanyatjarra Lands comprise 250,000 square kilometers of land in Western Australia, adjoining the Northern Territory and South Australian borders. The area comprises three local government areas, being the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku, Shire of East Pilbara and Shire of Laverton. The nearest major regional centres are Alice Springs (1,000 north east of the largest community on the Lands, Warburton) and Kalgoorlie (900 kilometres south west of Warburton).
3. The Ngaanyatjarra people (Yarnangu) have maintained a continuous association with their country, evidenced by the recent successful handing down of native title in the Lands. The approximately 2200 Yarnangu living on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands are part of the 'Western Desert Cultural Bloc', a culturally homogenous group that extends across State and Territory borders. The major dialects spoken with the Lands are Ngaanyatjarra, Ngaatjatjarra, Manjintjatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Pintupi.
4. Yarnangu are supported by a strong regional governance organisation, the Ngaanyatjarra Council. The Ngaanyatjarra Council was established in 1981, representing five independently incorporated communities, originally for the purpose of achieving land rights and mediating with mining and other interested groups. Over the past 25 years, a further seven communities have joined and the work of the Council has expanded to include the development of business enterprises, air services, and coordinated service delivery and support in areas of health, education, housing, law and justice, employment and municipal and essential services. The Ngaanyatjarra communities operate as a cohesive and cooperative network under the umbrella of the Ngaanyatjarra Council.

Rationale for this submission

5. Ngaanyatjarra communities are uniquely placed to make this submission. As can be seen from above, the Ngaanyatjarra communities are some of the remotest Aboriginal communities in Australia. This alone poses a considerable challenge for effective telecommunications infrastructure and services. In common with other remote

Aboriginal communities, Yarnangu have poor health and educational outcomes. Many speak English as a third or even fourth language. Physical disabilities, including significant hearing loss and sight impairment, are prevalent. Learning approaches are not suited to traditional classroom approaches, with Yarnangu learning through peers rather than instruction. Gender issues are influential on training and use of facilities. Community members are very mobile, and can be absent from a particular community for long periods for a range of reasons. As well, the Ngaanyatjarra Lands have virtually no active industry in the region or employment opportunities outside of CDEP and government-funded service providers in the region, making the Ngaanyatjarra Lands one of the lowest socio-economic regions in Australia. Taken together, these factors mean that Yarnangu both have a high need to, and have difficulty in being able to access and use telecommunications effectively.

6. Notwithstanding these challenges, the Ngaanyatjarra communities have made some important steps towards improving their telecommunications access and services. Ngaanyatjarra Media, the regional media organisation, was established as Irrunytju Media in 1992, and was incorporated in 2002. Ngaanyatjarra Media has a reputation for providing quality media and telecommunications services with a high degree of Yarnangu involvement and ownership. A new media communications centre will soon be built at Irrunytju, proving a base for further expansion, including a planned network of telecentres across the Lands. The Ngaanyatjarra communities were also successful in securing the rollout of broadband services under the Coordinated Communications Infrastructure Fund (CCIF). As a result, within a year, six of the twelve Ngaanyatjarra communities will have broadband infrastructure comparable to metropolitan areas.
7. On behalf of the twelve communities represented in the Ngaanyatjarra Council, the Council also signed a Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA) with three levels of government on 15 August 2005. This is the first RPA signed in Australia, and demonstrates the responsive and progressive approach of the Council to working in partnership with government. The RPA represents a more direct engagement between Ngaanyatjarra communities and government. Under the RPA, Ngaanyatjarra communities expect that governments will honour their commitments for greater flexibility in government programs and services, and recognition of Yarnangu solutions to community issues.
8. A copy of the RPA can be found on the Ngaanyatjarra Council's website, www.ngaanyatjarra.org.au, or by contacting the Ngaanyatjarra Council contact identified above.

General Responses

9. The issues below have been identified from those questions in the discussion paper that were regularly repeated within different sections. Where the general response may need to be elaborated or qualified, this is done so in the relevant section.

Sustainability is the key priority

10. The discussion paper identifies that the key elements of BIA are to address services, engagement, content development, training and support, and sustainability. Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra Media note that, while focus on all of these areas remains important, the most important factor to consider is sustainability.
11. As a result of initiatives, principally stemming from Networking the Nation (NTN) and Telecommunications Action Plan for Remote Indigenous Communities (TAPRIC), there is a range of different telecommunications infrastructure that has been rolled out across the Lands. While much of this infrastructure has considerable potential, and some successes, without appropriate recurrent funding to support repairs and maintenance, training and technical support, the equipment will rapidly fall into disrepair or disuse. This is particularly important for Aboriginal communities in remote areas for whom it takes time to establish new technologies and to build a skill base and interest.
12. It is an unfortunate reality that the shorter funding cycles focused on new initiatives and infrastructure only add complexity to telecommunications use and effectiveness in remote Aboriginal communities. It is critical that BIA prioritise support for sustainable infrastructure development and use, as it relates to both existing and any new telecommunications initiatives.

Regional priority setting

13. The discussion paper identifies a common question across a range of areas relating to how best to determine regional and community priorities. Reference is made to regional agents and the Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) as a possible source of identifying priority needs. As it is unclear from the discussion paper to whom 'regional agents' refers, in this submission, it is assumed that the reference is to Remote Indigenous Media Organisations (RIMOs).
14. It is the experience of RIMOs, such as Ngaanyatjarra Media, that over the past decade, media and telecommunications work undertaken by such organisations has increased considerably. At the same time, however, there has been no commensurate increase in resources and support. As a result, the capacity of these organisations to deliver an effective ongoing service to remote Aboriginal communities has been detrimentally affected. With the recent proposal to phase out television funding for RIMOs from DCITA's Indigenous Broadcasting Program funding, and focus on radio broadcasting only, there is even less of a future for sustainable and viable media and telecommunications support in remote Aboriginal communities.
15. Notwithstanding the difficulties for RIMOs in securing their ongoing sustainable operations, liaising directly with them remains the best and most effective means of determining regional priorities. Staff in the Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) do not have sufficient expertise or understanding of remote telecommunications

priority setting. This reflects both the limited skill base and regional knowledge of staff in the ICCs post-ATSIC, and also the relatively junior level of staff from the relevant portfolio (ie, DCITA). For example, the most senior DCITA representative in the Kalgoorlie ICC is an APS Level 4. This contrasts with the APS Level 6 and APS Level 5 positions that were mapped from the ATSSIS regional office on 1 July 2004, neither of which have been filled. The limited travel budget also means that staff are not able to regularly visit remote communities such as the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. The absence of a skilled senior DCITA solutions broker, with an understanding of the regional communities, regional priorities and national mainstream program initiatives, mean that the support provided by the ICC is limited at best.

16. In addition to this, Ngaanyatjarra Council notes that the framework of the RPA provides for discussions on regional priority setting. Consistent with the philosophy of the new arrangements in Aboriginal affairs, priority setting should be done directly with communities and not negotiated through third parties (including coalitions of government agencies, such as the ICC).
17. As a result, Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra Media call for increased support for RIMOs to take account of their critical role in assisting government to determine regional priorities. Explicit recognition and support for the expanded role of RIMOs needs to be addressed by the Australian Government, including in the context of the BIA initiative.
18. Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra Media recognise their regional role to advocate for appropriate communications infrastructure and mode of delivery for communities, however do not want to take on the role of a telecommunications service provider. Without the expertise and organisational infrastructure, it would not be sensible to take on the numerous roles of rollout, billing, repair and maintenance, helpdesk support and so on, that should be provided by a commercial telecommunications provider. Therefore the scope of projects undertaken by a regional organisation should be in line with the ability to support that project on an ongoing basis, or be carried out in partnership with larger government or commercial service providers.

Applications and/or agreements

19. The BIA discussion paper also seeks comment on whether application processes are appropriate for various initiatives, and seeks feedback on the key elements of any such applications. Alternatively, the discussion paper raises the possibilities of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) or other local or regional agreements as a mechanism to support installation and maintenance of new infrastructure. These two funding approaches, which are fundamentally different in approach, are addressed in turn below.
20. In the experience of Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra Media, applications for grants have a defined or limited scope, short timeframes and repetitive requests for

similar information. As a result, it is often very time consuming to prepare an application. Applications often have to be inappropriately rushed through community consultations in order to meet the timeframe. The narrowly defined scope for the particular initiative also usually means that essential or related initiatives relevant to the community's circumstances fall through the gaps.

21. While there is a public policy benefit in having a transparent and equitable process for accessing funding through applications, there needs to be some significant changes to how BIA applications for funding are sought. These changes would go some way towards meeting the objectives to streamline funding processes that form part of the Australian Government's new arrangements in Indigenous affairs. While these streamlined and more flexible funding arrangements are being pursued principally through the SRA approach, Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra Media encourage the Australian Government to extend this more flexible approach to other application processes that may occur outside the scope of an SRA.
22. More flexible and streamlined funding applications would have the following key features:
 - Longer timeframes for completing applications, in particular for larger telecommunications initiatives, in order to ensure appropriate community consultation
 - More flexible approaches for larger telecommunications initiatives, such as 'phased funding' initiatives that cover the following:
 - a. funding for informed consultations (for costs associated with discussions and negotiations, preparing a business plan, building community awareness, and identifying and planning linkages with existing initiatives)
 - b. funding for trial projects of the new initiative, in order to build community understanding and awareness for the larger initiative, and test linkages with related projects
 - c. securing 'in-principle' support for future funding pending the outcome of consultations and/or trials
 - d. ensuring funding parameters include start-up costs (such as staff housing) and provision for accessing future operational and recurrent costs
 - Greater use of existing information on the proposed funded body already provided to the Australian Government. For example, each year Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra Media electronically submit annual grants applications for consideration by the ICC. The information held within the Grants Management System (GMS) could and should be drawn upon by DCITA, rather than sought through a separate application process.
 - Streamlined applications, such as short 'expressions of interest' aligned with oral presentations (provided through a range of means, including videoconference and video presentations). This is more appropriate for increased involvement of Yarnangu in the applications process.

23. With respect to SRAs, Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra Media support the simplicity of the SRA process, in particular that the initiatives are focused on community priorities, are not bound by program guidelines, and avoid the need for applications to be completed by predetermined timeframes. In stating this, Ngaanyatjarra Council notes that in its experience, some government agencies have nevertheless sought to impose agency requirements on Council or community staff after the SRA has been signed. This is clearly outside the intention of the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs, and the Council cautions that appropriate planning needs to be undertaken by agencies to ensure that this does not occur.
24. The 'mutual obligation' element of SRAs can be an effective way for communities to be engaged in supporting and utilizing new telecommunications infrastructure. Ngaanyatjarra Media notes, however, that some infrastructure can be an 'essential service' and therefore is not appropriate for mutual obligation responsibilities that are not required of citizens in regional or urban settings. In addition, larger scale telecommunications initiatives can be very costly. Any mutual obligation therefore needs to be carefully considered to ensure that it does not place undue burden on communities to 'match' the investment, where such investment is necessarily of a high scale due to the technology and remote installation costs. It may therefore only be appropriate to consider the use of SRAs for smaller scale telecommunications initiatives.
25. The fundamental philosophy behind SRAs is that it is a mechanism to address community priorities (rather than government priorities). In this area, however, it is possible that a community may not have a priority need for a service that is not able to be identified by the community (other than through establishing and using a service). For this reason, for certain technologies, it may not be appropriate to consider SRAs as the key funding tool, where communities may not be able to make an informed decision about their telecommunications priorities. An example of this is the use of videoconferencing. Ngaanyatjarra Media has established a videoconference facility in its telecentre at Irrunytju. This service has been embraced by Yarnangu, as it is a visual medium that allows people to communicate in language and in groups. The service is increasingly being used for talking with relatives in prison, meetings, training and, most recently, for giving evidence at court. Yet, prior to establishing and using this facility, it is unlikely that Yarnangu would have put forward videoconferencing as a priority need (notwithstanding the benefits that are now increasingly clear to community members).
26. Another concern with SRAs is the potential negative impact that can occur, without careful planning on the part of DCITA, on the broader program funding available to support recurrent costs. While it is difficult for agencies such as DCITA to plan for SRA 'buy-in', this can not be at the expense of recurrent funding. This is particularly important in light of the fact that SRAs are 'demand-driven', and therefore can inconsistently (and potentially inequitably) influence investment decisions across a region. Over-reliance on SRAs as a funding mechanism should be avoided, but the SRA approach may be beneficial in some circumstances.

27. The key issue with agreement making, either through SRAs or another agreement form, is to ensure that there is clarity in the roles and responsibilities of all parties. Therefore, it may be more appropriate to focus effort on ensuring there are clear principles and guidelines for relevant parties involved in installing, maintaining and supporting new telecommunications initiatives (such as through memoranda of understanding). This would be more appropriate for larger scale initiatives where there are often a number of parties (including RIMOs, telecommunications industry, government and corporate partners). In smaller initiatives, which may be better suited to the SRA approach, clarity in roles and responsibilities could be achieved through SRA development process.
28. Regardless of whether the process to access funding is through an application or an SRA, it is essential that there is sufficient time in the process for community members to discuss the initiatives and build their expertise and understanding. Depending upon a number of variables, this consultation and community awareness process will take time. It cannot be circumscribed by government requirements to ensure funding is committed or spent within a particular financial year, or that an initiative is rolled out according to a nationally determined timeframe. For larger initiatives, consultation time may take up to or longer than six months. This needs to be factored into the process so that communities are ready, willing and able to take up new technologies.

Specific responses

29. The following section identifies specific responses to the areas identified in the discussion paper.

TAPRIC and previous initiatives (Q1)

30. Two TAPRIC programs have been delivered in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. These were:
- 2003 – TAPRIC Community Access Computers into most communities
 - 2005 – Ngaanyatjarra Lands Web Portal Project (funded through Indigenous Community On-line Program, and produced by Ngaanyatjarra Media)
31. Both TAPRIC programs addressed needs in the remote communities of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. However, the implementation of the rollout of the Community Access computers was not as effective as it could have been, with not enough time for community consultation to ensure the computers had a dedicated community access area for their location. As a result, many computers ended up being locked away in the community office without much access. No software or appropriate resources were provided, nor training or allocations for satellite costs (\$60 per month). This resulted in some plans being cancelled after the two year contract. In addition, the Telstra 2-way internet access did not enable networking, limiting any growth for further computers to be added. Ngaanyatjarra Media is seeking further funding to set up community access facilities with networked computers.

32. The main problem with the TAPRIC programs is that they were one-off, without any recurrent funding for on-line access, technical support, training or management. In remote Indigenous communities, the ability to generate income from users is limited (and would reduce community access). Basic recurrent funding for the RIMO is therefore essential for the ongoing sustainability of the project. The organisation in charge of delivery and maintenance of the project also needs to be clearly identified. Consistent with the comments in the 'general section' above, the TAPRIC programs did not build in sufficient time for community consultation. Other relevant factors that affected TAPRIC were the time taken to build local ownership and uptake, cost and timeframes associated with distances for travel and delivery, and recruiting staff to remote areas. Timeframes make take up to 50% longer than for regional areas due to all these factors.

Optimising sustainable telecommunications solutions (Q2)

33. The key factors to be taken into account in designing and delivering BIA are ensuring:
- Low-cost internet access
 - Recurrent funding for technical support, training, repairs and maintenance, and software upgrades
 - Telecommunications projects are linked with existing initiatives and planning, in particular focusing on the timing of any rollout to maximise linkages.
34. The primary obstacles to effective design and delivery are:
- Insufficient funding for employment of Aboriginal community members and staff. In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Yarnangu *malpa* or *yamatji* (helpers/ co-workers) are used to ensure appropriate planning and community engagement with new initiatives.
 - Unrealistic timeframes for consultation and involvement of Aboriginal community members
 - Insufficient recurrent funding provision (see above, and general response)
 - Limited alternate funding to maintain facilities and programs (eg- communities in other regions may be in a position to draw upon royalty or entry fees)
 - Inappropriate planning for cultural controls on use of images, names and stories (eg, for sorry business, *tjukurrpa* (law), men's and women's business)
 - Poor or non-existent coordination with other services and infrastructure being rolled out to meet community needs.

Community phones (Q3-6)

35. Community phones remain a top priority for remote Aboriginal communities, such as those on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. As few people have access to or can afford reliable phones in the home, community phones are an essential service that remain underfunded and insufficiently available or operational. As a result, ongoing support for community phones must remain a high priority for BIA.

36. Ngaanyatjarra communities participated in the iConnect Community Phones Project, which was managed by PY Media and funded under Networking the Nation since 2003. This is a successful model using a Phone Away card to avoid high phone bills and disconnections. Unfortunately, the project relied on the commercial service provider and project partner, Telstra, providing adequate exchange infrastructure, which did not occur. Of the 199 services requested in Ngaanyatjarra communities, only 34 services were installed at the end of the iConnect project in 2005. Lack of network infrastructure, and no requirement under the Universal Service Obligation (USO) for pre-paid services, were given as the reason for not providing the other 165 services. Some regulatory controls need to be included to help ensure all project partners comply with their responsibilities to complete projects.
37. Ngaanyatjarra Media supports the current rollout of the robust public telephone (the 'Ned Kelly' phone) that has been developed by Telstra and the Centre for Appropriate Technology in partnership. Support for the installation of these phones is recommended.
38. Further to this, however, Ngaanyatjarra Media strongly supports the promotion and use of Voice-over Internet Protocol (VOIP) telephony. This method of delivering community phone access is cheaper and more sustainable in the longer term, where broadband services are available throughout the region. For those communities that are not able to access VOIP, Telstra must continue to ensure an improved standard of service.
39. Regardless of whether the phones are standard telephone lines or VOIP, both must be able to support an appropriate pre-paid charging mechanism. Inclusion of phone card services must form part of the USO for remote communities. The Country Calling Card is an improved solution on the PhoneAway Card, with values available in small amounts (eg \$5), slightly less numbers required to be keyed in, slightly larger fonts and Pitjantjatjara language offered for phone support. However this could go further with even less numbers and simpler instructions in large font (appropriate for people with limited literacy and sometimes poor eyesight).
40. Community phones are best facilitated through a tender approach, provided that the relevant RIMOs (such as Ngaanyatjarra Media) have had the opportunity to inform the development of the tender specifications. Different assessment criteria, determined in consultation with the relevant RIMOs, should be established for remote and very remote regions (taking into account the vastly different issues that may face a contractor in a remote desert region compared to a remote tropical region, for example).
41. Notwithstanding the above, it also remains a priority to ensure that exchanges are upgraded in remote areas such as the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, so that community members are able to access home phones.

Public Internet access (Q7-11)

42. Hub communities are an appropriate way to implement public access Internet facilities. They can be an effective way to start a rollout, provided that smaller communities are also able to access similar facilities, albeit on a smaller scale.
43. Ngaanyatjarra Media has secured funding and operated a telecentre in Irrunytju since 2004, comprising 7 community access computers, videoconferencing, a stand-alone computer with archival material, meeting room, and TV/video. The facility gives networked access to the internet, music, local photos and videos and games. It provides a space for training, IT support, digital photography, printing/binding, desktop publishing, online services (banking etc), and website development. Much of the local content is in language. The telecentre is very well utilised. Another telecentre was recently established at the Ngaanyatjarra College at Warburton, with another planned for Warakurna. The WA model for telecentres works well, but effectively requires a dedicated staff member due to the size of the facility. With the difficulties of recruitment and lack of staff housing in remote communities, and only \$20,000 pa covered towards the position by Telecentres WA, this model is unrealistic for smaller communities.
44. On the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, it is planned to establish 'mini-telecentres' in each of the remaining 9 communities. The mini-telecentres would be co-located with other community facilities, and ideally include a combination fax, laser printer and scanner, two VOIP phones, one community phone that supports phonecard, three personal computers, router, 16 port switch, and the required cabling, furniture and lockable storage. The key feature of the mini-telecentre concept is that they must be easy to manage with minimum technical supervision. The mini-telecentre will be managed by the community, and include a trained media worker, CDEP participant or senior community representative. Ngaanyatjarra Media is currently seeking funding for this proposal.
45. Training of operators and visitors could be provided by a funded IT trainer operating on a regional basis, with off-site helpdesk support, regular service rounds and site support for major faults. This IT Training & Technical Support program was funded under TAPRIC and rolled out through Telecentres WA Support Branch. It is an excellent initiative, but is only funded for less than 18 months, with no recurrent funding. In order to be effective for Indigenous communities, this type of training needs to be flexible and ongoing.
46. Support for projects such as the telecentres and mini-telecentres is critical. Telecentres can develop IT skills through engaging people in activities and projects that are relevant, fun and meaningful. They also allow for small groups to work together in familiar and friendly environments, where there is a strong focus on observation, demonstration and hands-on activities. These are the most effective ways for Aboriginal people in remote communities to learn and to develop IT skills that

will better equip them for employment opportunities and community administration responsibilities.

47. Prioritising hub communities is best done through consultation with RIMOs. As noted in the general comments, it is essential that any funding process allows considerable time for community consultation and for the model of the telecentre to be trialed and expanded over a reasonable time period (ie a number of years).

Videoconferencing (Q12-17)

48. A combination of PC-based webcam and standard videoconferencing facilities are required. As PC-based webcam are only suitable for one-on-one discussions, they will have more limited usage. As they are relatively inexpensive, however, they are a useful addition for the telecentre model described above.
49. Standard videoconferencing facilities are well suited for Aboriginal communities, provided that the screen is reasonably big. Videoconferencing facilities have been established at Irrunytju since 2002, and have been increasingly utilised since that time for link ups with family members in correctional facilities and hospitals. The facility removes the need for long travel times for meetings, training, court hearings and specialist doctor visits. It also allows for documents and videos to be shown. The most important elements of the medium, however, is that it allows for groups to be present and interacting at the same time, in language, and making visible the non-verbal communication (such as body language and hand signs) that is common among Yarnangu. As videoconferencing is relatively simple and cheap, particularly using IP networks, it is a very important communication tool to support and promote in remote Aboriginal communities.
50. In order to establish the need for videoconferencing, the following process is recommended:
- Undertake a needs survey, including existing services and gaps
 - Establish PC-based webcams initially
 - For communities above 50 residents, establish a standard videoconference facility situated in a private but community accessible location.
- The facility should also be co-located with other community services, and located within a telecentre, mini-telecentre where available, otherwise in a community meeting room.

Training and skills development (Q18-22)

51. The most important training and skills development requirements for telecommunications in remote Aboriginal communities training area is in technical support. This includes troubleshooting, networking, installation, operation and maintenance (last mile equipment), and customer service. Ideally each community would have 2-3 people trained in basic technical support and diagnostics. Some

training in rigging and dogman skills (eg, working at heights and associated first aid) is also important for some tower and broadcast equipment maintenance activities.

52. These courses are best delivered as VET training, traineeships and through on-the-job training. With the low levels of literacy and numeracy, and English as a third or fourth language, training programs must be hands-on and allow people to learn through observation of a locally employed qualified person. Peer training (ie train-the-trainer) is also very effective, as it is a culturally appropriate learning style and can be done in language.
53. Training resources must be visual and/or verbal, avoiding large blocks of text and using graphics wherever possible. Large text must be kept simple. Local images and language should be used where possible, and relevant local content included. Self-paced modules, from a workbook or on-line guide with easy to follow visual instructions, are effective.

Community champions (Q23-26)

54. While the idea of community champions has some merit, in many respects, regional champions may be more useful. This is because most programs will be delivered on a regional basis in remote communities.
55. Undoubtedly, staff and community members involved in RIMOs play a role as champions (noting that champions need not be Aboriginal community members). Where non-Indigenous staff are working in a media or communications role within a community (as for many service industries), it is important to have a *malpa/ yamatji* community mentor to ensure the programs and services are culturally appropriate. Any such community members are self-identified, with support from existing staff and community members to indicate those likely to have an interest in the work.
56. Where community champions (including *malpas/ yamatjis*) are used, they should be engaged and remunerated as staff members of the RIMO. This will facilitate standard performance monitoring, coaching, guidance and support. It also supports culturally sustainable services, reducing impact of non-Indigenous staff turnover, and promotes labour market opportunities in remote communities.

Culturally appropriate content, including recording and archiving (Q27-30)

57. The most appropriate means of ensuring culturally appropriate content is through supporting audio and visual material (not English-based text) some of which may be online, but some of which must be standalone or restricted access to protect and control sensitive material. Yarnangu, in common with many other traditional remote communities, have considerable concern about online (ie, universal) access to cultural content. While Yarnangu are keen to use computers to store and view archival and locally relevant cultural content, control over access is critical to the success of such projects. For example, within Ngaanyatjarra Media, video and audio recordings that

are culturally sensitive (eg women and men's business) are separately stored and locked away. This provides secure, standalone material that can be carefully managed by Yarnangu.

58. A good example of successful archival of cultural material can be found in the Ara Irititja project, which is based in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in South Australia. It provides digital photos of archival material that is not networked and can be controlled to manage cultural protocols. It allows for content relating to deceased people (sorry business) to be rendered unavailable (ie, moved to the 'sorry bin'). It relies upon effective naming of individuals in the material, and the ability to separate out such footage, which requires a specially designed program.
59. Ngaanyatjarra Media, Ngaanyatjarra Council and communities are very keen to develop a Ngaanyatjarra version of the Ara Irititja Archival Project and undergo a process of:
- accessing and cataloguing collections of photos, video, audio recordings, images of artworks etc;
 - scanning and loading into the project;
 - entry of all information relating to each item; and
 - providing a computer containing the project to each community.
- This is a large project that will take at least 2 years to set up, with ongoing management for loading new material and updating computers. It would cost approximately \$200,000. It will yield a significant active repository of the living social and cultural heritage of the region. Most funding programs for archival projects offer small sums that are not appropriate to larger scale archival projects such as these.
60. Ngaanyatjarra Media has also been seeking funding for several years to convert its archive of cultural video recordings (hundreds of hours of traditional dance, singing and *tjukurrpa* dreaming stories) from Super-VHS to digital format, and properly catalogue and archive the collection. The recordings date from the late 1980s. Already some videotapes have degraded with age so badly as to be rendered unviewable. This Video Preservation Project is a high priority project but does not appear to fit into any existing funding program. Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra Media would encourage BIA to consider this as a valid archival project. Flexibility in program guidelines to facilitate funding such projects is critical.
61. The most important means to ensure culturally appropriate content is developed and available for archiving is for funding to be available to go out bush. Funding needs to support trip planning that can take many months, as preparations are made to organise and document events. Being able to go out bush is critically important – quite literally, being in the physical space will draw out the songs (*inma*) that relate to the area. It is not possible to record this material in another location. The place and stories are intertwined and inter-dependent. Recording must occur in context, and funding is needed to support this happening.

Demand aggregation (Q31-32)

62. Demand aggregation is best done with State government support, working closely with regional agencies. This will ensure that the full range of possibilities and linkages are taken into account, including links with other providers and communities.
63. In some cases, communities may be better placed for demand aggregation to include more than one region. As demand numbers are relatively small and scattered across a large region, no commercial provider (such as Telstra) is going to offer metropolitan quality services and prices on a purely commercial basis. Within the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, the demand aggregation broker model has worked reasonably well. The broadband brokers, working on the Ngaanyatjarra broadband project, have found that there is 'more bang for your buck' if the entire region and all sectors (including regional and government service providers) are included as a whole when dealing with telecommunications.

Innovation and flexibility (Q33-35)

64. While Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra Media appreciate the government's desire to promote further innovation and flexibility in telecommunications, there is a strong risk that this will take the focus away from supporting effective communication tools that need ongoing support.
65. As an example of the need to support successful past initiatives, it is worth looking to the experience of rolling out the UHF network across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. This occurred in 2003 as part of Networking the Nation. The UHF radio network reached most locations in the Lands. It is affordable technology, free for Yarnangu to use once established. It is mobile, easy to use and allows people to communicate in language, with a repeater network that enables a 'party line'. It provides emergency communications that are rare but critical in remote communities. The UHF radio was very popular and became familiarly known as 'Yarnangu radio'. And yet it is currently not operational in the Lands due to shortfalls in funding for repairs and maintenance costs. While this network was one of the most successful communication tools on the Lands, it is currently not operational.
66. Ongoing support for the UHF radio network, and other successful projects such as iConnect, is far more important than continuing to pursue innovation at the cost of sustainability and usability. Similarly ongoing funding for staffing, upgrading of computers, community training and running costs for existing telecentres is another key priority for sustainability of existing infrastructure.

Funding (Q37-40)

67. Consistent with the comments in the opening section, and above, Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra Media support funding for recurrent costs, and struggling

programs that have already been established (such as the UHF radio network). It is concerning that funding is put into new programs that is then not sustained just as the programs start to become well established and integrated. Recurrent funding includes support for ongoing repairs and maintenance, training, program development, technical support and management.

68. It is also critically important to maintain and support video communications as part of any recurrent funding program. Video is the main tool for recording language programs, events and stories.
69. With respect to assisting communities to develop grants applications, a regional grants coordinator working with Yarnangu would be effective for developing multiple grants for multiple programs. An indigenous communications 'grants broker' would be another effective approach (similar to the Indigenous Land Management Facilitators network supported under the Natural Heritage Trust).

Culturally appropriate delivery of services (Q41-42)

70. Ngaanyatjarra Council recommends drawing upon existing community planning and strategic planning that has already been done. Where required, BIA should provide funding for updated Regional Telecommunications User Needs Survey to identify gaps. This will facilitate the development of plans, with an emphasis on consultation and building community awareness of benefits and implications (costs, training & management requirements) in introducing new technologies so that informed decisions are made. Plans should include provision for ongoing repairs and maintenance, training, management requirements, funding needs, staffing etc. Plans also need to identify how new infrastructure and programs fits with existing ones in the region. It is also important to clearly state who will be responsible for management (ie, the community, a regional organisation, State Government etc).
71. There are a range of projects already in progress for the Ngaanyatjarra Lands which have developed a significant body of information about the needs in the region, as well as proposed developments to ensure they are as effective and accessible to Yarnangu as possible. It is anticipated that this would be the basis of any further funding programs in the region to ensure maximum benefits and extension of existing programs.

Industry (Q43-46)

72. The key to sustainability is aggregation of services across all users in the region. Due to the distances involved and small population sizes, government subsidisation of telecommunications is an essential service, under the USO, HIBIS and other similar programs.

73. As remote Indigenous community members have very low incomes and high costs of living, and community budgets are already stretched. It is therefore important that telecommunications services are affordable and scaleable.
74. Regional organisations such as RIMOs already deliver services in regions and are an appropriate organisation to work in with commercial service providers to co-deliver services that would otherwise not be feasible to deliver- local technical support and installations, supply of handsets, training and so on.

Integrated approach (Q47-49)

75. General comments on the use of SRAs are noted above. With respect to the use of Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs), these may be appropriate for large regions with a number of communities, to cover a high-cost investment and planning strategy.
76. The Ngaanyatjarra Council notes that it has taken a ‘whole of region, whole of government’ approach to its negotiated RPA (ie, the RPA scope explicitly covers all government programs and services in the region, including but not limited SRAs or any thematic issue). As such, the Ngaanyatjarra RPA already has scope to cover regional issues, and currently includes a regional investment plan (to be developed in partnership with the governments). This regional investment plan will be the logical place to identify communications-related investment in the region for the next 1-5 years. This is seen by the Council as being a far more effective and coordinated way of managing its relationship with government than to enter into ‘thematic’ RPAs or regional SRAs on all portfolio-specific areas. It is also more conducive to meeting whole of government and whole of community outcomes, and integrates the RPA with SRAs and other identified investment priorities on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

Using existing infrastructure (Q50)

77. Earlier comments regarding aggregation, building on and supporting existing programs and infrastructure are reiterated. Ngaanyatjarra Media’s experience is that commercial telecommunications providers charge very high rates for co-locating equipment (eg-microwave broadband equipment) on their towers, even where they are no longer in commission. This should be addressed.

Consultation (Q51)

78. The key issues with consultation have been identified above. In addition, it is important to note that RIMOs play a specific role as both a representative group for regions and a stakeholder for media and communications services. As a remote based organisation, it is difficult for Ngaanyatjarra Media staff to participate in face to face meetings.

Relationship with Connect Australia (Q52)

79. Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra Media caution that the approach to funding must be holistic enough so that submissions from Indigenous organisations can be funded through a combination of the two programs if required.

Package evaluation (Q53)

80. The evaluation process used for Networking the Nation was appropriate, and should specifically incorporate feedback from recipient communities. The most effective evaluation remains whether programs are still active in 5-10 years time after rollout.