



**Australian Government**

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**Department of Communications,  
Information Technology and the Arts**

# **BACKING INDIGENOUS ABILITY**

## **DELIVERING A COMPREHENSIVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS PACKAGE IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

**DISCUSSION PAPER**

March 2006

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) is calling for submissions from Indigenous communities, the telecommunications industry, interested stakeholders and members of the public on the design of Backing Indigenous Ability, one of the four programs announced in August 2005 under the new \$1.1 billion *Connect Australia* package.

Through Backing Indigenous Ability the Australian Government is seeking to address deficiencies in telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Indigenous communities<sup>1</sup> and build on the success of previous programs, in particular the Telecommunications Action Plan for Remote Indigenous Communities (TAPRIC).

While the \$89.9 million program covers both broadcasting and telecommunications, this discussion paper deals with issues relating to the \$36.6 million telecommunications component.

The program will help to improve telecommunications services in Indigenous communities by addressing the need for telephones, Internet and videoconferencing, encouragement and aggregation of demand, online content and training. Backing Indigenous Ability will commence on 1 July 2006 and run for a period of four years.

This paper outlines the fundamental design principles the Government intends to apply to the telecommunications area of the Backing Indigenous Ability program and seeks comment from stakeholders on key elements and design of the program. This will assist DCITA with program development and promoting an environment that will continue to improve telecommunications services to Indigenous communities.

This paper aims to facilitate discussion; it does not represent Australian Government policy.

Section 8 of this paper contains information on how to make a submission in response to this discussion paper, and details of proposed stakeholder consultation sessions DCITA will be holding during March and April 2006.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper regional, rural and remote Indigenous communities will be referred to as Indigenous communities.

## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 *Connect Australia*: A coordinated package

Backing Indigenous Ability is part of a \$1.1 billion *Connect Australia* package announced by the Australian Government on 17 August 2005.

The *Connect Australia* package comprises four programs:

- **Broadband Connect** aims to provide all Australians with affordable broadband services (\$878 million over 3.5 years);
- **Clever Networks** aims to roll out new broadband networks for innovative applications to improve the delivery of health, education and other essential services (\$113 million over four years);
- **Mobile Connect** aims to extend terrestrial mobile coverage to areas where they can be commercially maintained and continue satellite handset subsidies for other areas (\$30 million over four years); and
- **Backing Indigenous Ability** aims to deliver a comprehensive package for telephones, Internet and videoconferencing in Indigenous communities and improved Indigenous radio and television (\$90 million over four years).

This paper focuses on the telecommunications and information technology, rather than the broadcasting, aspects of Backing Indigenous Ability.

This paper does not directly seek comments on the Broadband Connect, Clever Networks or Mobile Connect elements of *Connect Australia*. These programs have been the focus of separate discussion papers and stakeholder consultation. However, in making submissions in respect of Backing Indigenous Ability, stakeholders should consider the linkages between this program and other *Connect Australia* programs. For example, broadband infrastructure funded through Broadband Connect or Clever Networks could form the basis for the delivery of services to Indigenous communities that are the focus of Backing Indigenous Ability.

### 2.2 Origins of Backing Indigenous Ability

#### 2.2.1 TAPRIC

Complex geographic, demographic and social factors affecting the demand for services and their commercial sustainability have resulted in a relatively poor level of telecommunications infrastructure in Indigenous communities. This has detrimentally affected the availability, accessibility and take-up of telecommunications services.

The Telecommunications Action Plan for Remote Indigenous Communities (TAPRIC) was released in May 2002. TAPRIC was in response to the recommendations of the Telecommunications Service Inquiry, published in September 2000, and a further scoping study of the needs of Indigenous communities undertaken by the Government in May 2001.

The scoping study concluded that the geographic isolation and economic disadvantages faced by remote communities meant that a commercial roll-out of telecommunications services could not be relied upon and that some form of intervention by Government was needed.

TAPRIC was designed by the Australian Government in conjunction with state and territory governments, industry and communities in order to commence the improvement of telecommunications services in remote Indigenous communities. The strategy to implement TAPRIC was based on direct consultation with Indigenous communities, industry and all spheres of Government.

TAPRIC concentrated on five programs:

- Community Phones Program to improve access to payphones;
- Internet Access Program to improve access to Internet-based services for remote Indigenous communities;
- Online Access Centre Business Study to examine models for online access centres in remote Indigenous communities and to identify funding and revenue opportunities for capital and ongoing costs;
- Content Development Program to increase the take-up and use of online services in remote Indigenous communities; and
- Information and Awareness Raising Program to increase awareness of telecommunications and Internet services and opportunities to improve them within Indigenous communities.

### **2.2.2 The success of TAPRIC**

The Regional Telecommunications Inquiry report, published in November 2002, identified that:

The Government has put in place a strategic and accepted framework to resolve the difficulties faced by remote Indigenous communities in accessing appropriate and affordable telecommunications services. The direction of the Telecommunications Action Plan for Remote Indigenous Communities is supported as providing a holistic and well-targeted way forward. Significant funds are currently being applied to meet the needs of remote Indigenous communities, but fully meeting the needs of these communities presents a long-term challenge, and further funding will be required in the future.

In January 2005, DCITA reviewed TAPRIC to consider and report on the program's appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency and the future strategy in relation to telecommunications services in Indigenous communities.

The review found that TAPRIC had met its objectives for those communities able to be covered by the program and established the policy grounds on which an extension of TAPRIC would be sought.

The review made some key findings:

- The highest priority of remote Indigenous communities is still a need for basic telephone services. The role of more advanced telecommunications services to support Internet access and videoconferencing are also crucial in enabling these communities to enhance economic development and develop self-sufficiency.
- The essential gains made under TAPRIC should be sustained and they should be achieved more widely so that Indigenous Australians living in remote areas can benefit from access to essential services.
- The greater availability and use of community facilities and services has improved the quality and quantity of interactions and developed personal and learning capabilities. The identification of community champions through TAPRIC has allowed them to exert a positive social and educational impact in their communities.
- Email and videoconferencing facilities have enabled families to stay in touch with family members living elsewhere, and to provide a platform for community issues (including politics, health issues and education) that would not otherwise be catered for in and between remote communities.
- The availability of targeted funding in remote Indigenous communities had expanded the market for communications services in regional areas and provided communities with a stepping stone for building capability on terms that respected the priorities and preferences of communities themselves.

In summary, the review determined that TAPRIC had been appropriate, effective and efficient in addressing the telecommunications needs of remote Indigenous communities but that further money would be required to complete plans and ensure telecommunications for remote Indigenous communities are adequate.

Since the review in January 2005, TAPRIC has continued to address the telecommunications needs of remote Indigenous communities. Backing Indigenous Ability builds on the key elements of TAPRIC, representing a more wide ranging and comprehensive approach to delivering telecommunications into Indigenous communities.

### **3. BACKING INDIGENOUS ABILITY**

#### **3.1 Identified needs**

Adequate communications services are essential in the contemporary world and a vital building block to implement basic and lasting improvements for Australia's Indigenous people. Communities need access to telecommunications services to participate in Australia's economic, social and cultural activity.

A number of reports in recent years have identified significant levels of telecommunications disadvantage for the 25 per cent of Australia's Indigenous people that live in remote areas.

In meeting this disadvantage, the delivery of telecommunications to Indigenous communities must focus on the areas of access, affordability, awareness and appropriateness in providing the following range of services:

- telephones – needed for lifeline services, business/government contact and personal contact;
- Internet/broadband – needed for business/government contact, learning resources and economic and social participation;
- videoconferencing – needed to improve access to health services, education initiatives, justice hearings, prison contacts and personal contact;
- training, content and support – needed to assist communities use and maintain the services; and
- infrastructure – needed to provide access to the range of services required by Indigenous communities.

Backing Indigenous Ability takes up the challenges presented in meeting these needs. The program will build on and enhance previous initiatives (including most recently TAPRIC) to address the current situation.

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| <p>Q1 What did TAPRIC and previous initiatives do well? Where did TAPRIC and previous initiatives fall short?</p> <p>Q2 How can the design and delivery of Backing Indigenous Ability be optimised to achieve long term sustainable quality telecommunications solutions for Indigenous communities?</p> |
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## **3.2 Key principles and objectives**

### **3.2.1 Key principles underpinning the program**

Fundamental principles underpin the Backing Indigenous Ability program. It aims to:

1. Follow a culturally appropriate approach that integrates effective responses to supply and demand constraints.
2. Involve and support communities to assist community members to take advantage of the opportunities provided by improved communications to achieve their community goals.
3. Build on previously tried successful models and activities while accommodating flexibility and innovation.
4. Encourage communications initiatives to underpin and support communities to better access existing Government and other services.
5. Enable telecommunications initiatives to be used to build capacity within communities.
6. Plan for the medium and longer term future of telecommunications within Indigenous communities by implementing the appropriate foundations now.

It is in the context of these underlying principles that Backing Indigenous Ability policy will be designed.

### **3.2.2 Policy objectives and proposed actions**

Building on the achievements of TAPRIC, Backing Indigenous Ability will provide an opportunity to target the following telecommunications areas.

#### *Telephones*

- Roll-out shared community phones to identified communities without current access (extending the community phones program).
- Provide additional community phones in identified communities.
- Provide mobile telephony coverage for identified communities.

#### *Internet and broadband*

- Establish and support public Internet access for identified communities.
- Implement new equipment or refresh equipment in current Internet access points.

#### *Videoconferencing*

- Encourage public Internet access providers and government and non-government organisation agencies to establish and share existing videoconferencing facilities with communities.
- Establish and support new PC-based and stand alone videoconferencing facilities in identified communities.

### *Training, content and support*

- Improve awareness of rights and entitlements to telecommunications initiatives.
- Community champions to support the sustainability and use of telecommunications in Indigenous communities.
- Affordable maintenance and support to be available.
- Encourage and support the development and supply of Indigenous prepared and relevant content that contributes to community goals.

### **3.3 Key elements of Backing Indigenous Ability**

In achieving these objectives, the program will be formulated to address five broad areas, being:

- services;
- engagement;
- content development;
- training and support; and
- sustainability.

These areas will be driven by the individual program elements, described in detail at 3.3.1 to 3.3.8. This is represented diagrammatically below.



### 3.3.1 Shared community phones

TAPRIC's major funding priority was the Community Phones Program—the objectives of the program were to improve phone accessibility for Indigenous communities by working with telecommunications carriers and communities.

Under Backing Indigenous Ability, it would be possible to continue the work commenced under the Community Phones Program and implement telephones as a priority to those identified communities that do not currently have access. In addition, extra community telephones could be introduced to communities where there is a demand and need.

There may be opportunities to extend the reach of Australian Government or state/territory government infrastructure projects to deliver telephones into smaller communities that previously did not fit the criteria to receive a community phone. There may also be opportunities over the life of Backing Indigenous Ability to trial innovative delivery alternatives or technologies. These may include implementing mobile telecommunications as part of *Connect Australia's* Mobile Connect program.

There are likely to be benefits in using state and territory governments, regional agents (currently used as facilitators between Government agencies, service providers and communities) and the Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs), which are the multi-agency units that act as the main engine for coordination of Indigenous specific programs for the Australian Government) working at the local level with communities to assist with identifying sites, the application process, training community members in using and maintaining the phone and in liaising with service providers.

Once consultation has identified priority communities, implementation of this element of the package could be put to tender or through some other approach.

- Q3 Should the installation of community phones into Indigenous communities be regarded as a priority under Backing Indigenous Ability?
- Q4 Is it appropriate to use regional agents and ICCs to identify communities in need of community phones and to assist them in an application process? How else could priority communities in need of community phones be identified?
- Q5 Is it appropriate to use an application process to identify a need for a community phone? If so, what should be the key elements of the application process? What are the alternatives to using an application process?
- Q6 Once priority communities requiring a community phone are identified, what is the best way to facilitate provision of the phone? For example, should there be a tender process or some other approach?

### 3.3.2 Public Internet access

Many existing public Internet access points in Indigenous communities require equipment upgrades, and many have difficulties achieving sustainability. Backing Indigenous Ability offers an opportunity to upgrade equipment, maintain centres and explore pathways and models for sustainability.

Implementation of new Internet facilities could focus on hub communities, complemented by the Backing Indigenous Ability training and skills development and community champions program elements to improve availability of local technical expertise.

Hub communities in this context are communities providing services such as schools and medical centres which people from surrounding smaller communities regularly visit to access these services. Generally these communities would have a population in excess of 50 people. Hub communities could be identified in consultation with the ICCs or through the work of regional agents.

Sustainability of new telecommunications technology may be compromised by a lack of local trained maintenance or technical personnel. Community champions (discussed below) could play a vital role in engaging the community and could provide guidance to manage sustainable Internet access facilities.

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| Q7  | Are hub communities the appropriate location for implementing public access Internet facilities? If so, how best can hub communities be prioritised as appropriate locations for new Internet access?  |
| Q8  | Should ICCs, regional agents or other assistance be used to identify communities with a need for Internet facilities and assist them in an application process? How else could priority sites for Internet facilities be identified?   |
| Q9  | Is it appropriate to use an application process for communities to identify a need for Internet facilities? If so, what should be the key elements of the application process? What alternative process could be used?   |
| Q10 | Once implemented in a community, how best can the use of the facilities be encouraged? What arrangements such as Shared Responsibility Agreements or other local or regional agreements should be used for communities to support the installation and maintenance of Internet services? |
| Q11 | Are there more innovative models of delivering Internet access to Indigenous communities?  |

### 3.3.3 Videoconferencing

Backing Indigenous Ability offers an opportunity to fund the provision of hardware such as PC-based videoconferencing on existing PCs in public Internet access locations, as well as some larger dedicated videoconferencing units where needs are identified. For example, to access justice services, specifically those to do with juvenile court hearings, and access to health services.

An audit is being conducted to identify where facilities are currently available. This will guide an examination of issues on the use of videoconferencing by communities, Government agencies, and other organisations to identify ways of improving the use and viability of videoconferencing facilities.

The ICCs or regional agents could be further used to identify communities where existing facilities are not present and could be of benefit to Indigenous communities.

Other elements of Backing Indigenous Ability that can support an improvement in the use of videoconferencing include training within communities, community champions to encourage usage by community members and organisations and demand aggregators to work with Government agencies (including justice, education and health providers) to combine their demand and improve the level of usage.

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| <p>Q12 Are PC-based webcam videoconferencing facilities appropriate for Indigenous community needs? What parameters should be set for deciding when dedicated videoconferencing facilities need to be implemented into sites? What size of community is appropriate to receive videoconferencing facilities in the context of sustainability?</p> <p>Q13 What factors are contributing to the low use of videoconferencing facilities in many communities?</p> <p>Q14 Should ICCs, regional agents or other assistance be used to identify communities with a need for videoconferencing facilities? How else could priority locations for videoconferencing facilities be identified?</p> <p>Q15 What can be done to ensure that videoconferencing facilities introduced into a community are widely used? For example, how should the appropriate location of videoconferencing sites be decided?</p> <p>Q16 Is it appropriate to use an application process for communities to identify a need for videoconferencing facilities? If so, what should be the key elements of the application process? Should communities need to establish a certain level of demand for the facilities as part of the application process?</p> <p>Q17 What arrangements such as Shared Responsibility Agreements or other local or regional agreements should be used for communities to support the installation and maintenance of videoconferencing facilities? What form should these take?</p> |
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### 3.3.4 Training and skills development

Training and skills development are vital for telecommunications improvements to translate into real outcomes for communities. For this to occur, training and skills development in telecommunications should focus on identified skill gaps and priority needs within communities, and should build incrementally on the existing skill base. Skill gaps could be identified through consultation with communities using regional agents and ICCs.

Flexibility in delivery can result in locally tailored approaches that best suit community needs. This will have the most chance of acceptance by communities and aid in sustainability. Approaches may include tailored, sequential training modules developed and delivered in consultation with state education departments and communities. Training could also be provided in the local language to facilitate the learning process. Training would also need to be inclusive to address age and gender issues.

Skills development can also complement other Australian Government 'economic independence' initiatives that are building small business management skills within communities. Skills development and training initiatives can be reinforced by complementary Backing Indigenous Ability elements such as community champions and Indigenous content development. For example, new business management skills and online cultural content could combine to build stronger arts and craft businesses in communities.

Implementation through a grants process could be combined with a more targeted approach using the ICCs, community champions and regional agents to identify areas of training and skills development need.

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| Q18 | How best can skill gaps be identified? Is it appropriate to use the ICCs, community champions and regional agents to identify priority areas for training and skills development in the area of telecommunications? How else could training and skills development needs of communities be identified?              |
| Q19 | What types of training and skills development sessions on telecommunications are appropriate and how should these be implemented? Are different approaches required for different age groups? What flexible or innovative approaches could be undertaken to identify and deliver training and development sessions? |
| Q20 | Is a grants program an appropriate way to fund communities to deliver training and skills development sessions within accountability guidelines?  |
| Q21 | How could communities support appropriate training and skills development programs?   |
| Q22 | What obstacles exist for the successful delivery of training and skills development?  |

### 3.3.5 Community champions

Community champions could be another cornerstone to improve sustainable telecommunications within Indigenous communities. Community champions in this context will be local or regional opinion leaders and/or trainers who assist Indigenous communities to engage with new communications technologies and new ways of performing communications related tasks. Champions are a 'bottom up' approach to guiding the introduction and upgrade of culturally inclusive communications infrastructure and services. There already exist in many Indigenous communities unpaid or underpaid champions who perform a wide variety of administrative tasks. Funding dedicated Community champions with a focus on communications could ensure smoother introduction of technology that could then be used more efficiently to address other administrative tasks in the community.

Community champions could build longer term community engagement with modern telecommunications. Champions could act as a bridge between communities and new telecommunications capabilities and build basic skills, acceptance and use within local cultural parameters. They could encourage and support the effective use of telecommunications equipment and services accommodating and linking across demographic and cultural differences and local capacity constraints.

Champions could be used to encourage communities in their longer-term involvement with all other elements of Backing Indigenous Ability, including Internet and videoconferencing use, using government and other services online, accessing Indigenous content, recording and archiving activities, and reinforcing training and skills development.

Community champions could provide an opportunity to engage communities in the use of telecommunications technology and thereby assist in providing the tools required to manage sustainable telecommunications within a community.

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| <p>Q23 Are community champions an appropriate way to engage the community and assist them in using telecommunications technology? For what size of community would a community champion be appropriate? Would every Indigenous community with a phone, Internet or videoconferencing facility need access to a local champion?</p> <p>Q24 What roles could community champions play within communities?</p> <p>Q25 How could community champions be identified within regions and communities?</p> <p>Q26 What would be the best way to engage and compensate community champions for their role and how could their performance be monitored and assessed?</p> |
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### **3.3.6 Culturally appropriate content and recording and archiving of culturally significant material**

The availability of culturally appropriate content on the Internet is a key component of engaging communities.

Ways to encourage and implement culturally appropriate content could include a competitive grants process, a select grants process to meet specific needs, addressing ICC identified priorities or as a complementary element packaged, for example, with skills development or recording and archiving funding.

Implementation could include identifying appropriate business or reporting applications tailored to meet Indigenous community needs specified in the grant programs. The benefits and risks of different models of delivery will be examined during the consultation phase, with a view to sustainability of outcomes.

The recording and archiving of culturally significant material element of Backing Indigenous Ability could provide an opportunity to increase the relevance of Internet access to Indigenous communities in a similar way to the provision of culturally appropriate content. Funding could be available to support projects that protect and enhance appropriate electronic access to culturally significant material.

Establishing and accessing material of local significance to communities can be a powerful motivator to further explore Internet use. The digital preservation of material may also contribute to community well-being and cultural identity.

- Q27 What models of delivering increased culturally appropriate content to the Internet could be introduced under Backing Indigenous Ability?
- Q28 How could a grant or funding model to encourage development of culturally appropriate content be structured? What are the benefits and risks of the models?
- Q29 Will the ability to digitally record and archive culturally significant material encourage usage of Internet services?
- Q30 What funding approaches could be adopted to encourage the recording and archiving of culturally significant material under Backing Indigenous Ability?

### **3.3.7 Demand aggregation**

A challenge for obtaining affordable Internet access can be the cost involved in obtaining ongoing ISP services. In many hub communities, government agencies and other organisations are separately obtaining ISP services, sometimes with surplus capacity.

One role for demand aggregation could be to combine the demand from these organisations into a package that would also provide for spare capacity to be made available, preferably for community use. In addition, it could assist communities

obtain better quality and value for money when purchasing communications equipment and services.

Demand aggregation could also have a role in packaging telephone, Internet and videoconferencing services to enable delivery of a suite of telecommunications technology into Indigenous communities.

It may be appropriate to approach demand aggregation of telecommunications services within a particular region through the use of a demand aggregation broker. The broker could also act as a negotiator between infrastructure providers and communities to secure an appropriate package.

Alternatively, a regional agent, ICC or community champion could facilitate demand aggregation.

- Q31 Who should facilitate demand aggregation within communities and regions? Is it appropriate that ICCs, regional agents and community champions assist with demand aggregation or should alternative models be implemented (for example using a demand aggregation broker)?
- Q32 What other initiatives could assist in demand aggregation?

### **3.4 Interaction of the individual program elements**

It is anticipated that a combination of the individual program elements outlined at 3.3.1 to 3.3.8 will address the five broad policy areas of services, engagement, content development, training and support and sustainability as identified below:

- services – shared community phones, public Internet access, videoconferencing and demand aggregation;
- engagement – training and skills development, community champions, culturally appropriate content and recording and archiving culturally significant material;
- content development – community champions, culturally appropriate content and recording and archiving culturally significant material;
- training and support – training and skills development and community champions; and
- sustainability – training and skills development, community champions, culturally appropriate content, demand aggregation and processes to support the installation and maintenance of equipment.

### **3.5 Innovation and flexibility**

In considering initiatives to improve telecommunications in Indigenous communities under Backing Indigenous Ability, innovative and flexible approaches are being sought. Approaches that allow tailoring to meet individual community needs and priorities are of particular interest.

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| Q33 | What innovative and/or flexible approaches are being used elsewhere that could be used to deliver elements of Backing Indigenous Ability? |
| Q34 | What technologies offer greater flexibility and why?  |
| Q35 | What are some innovative means of service delivery to provide telecommunications improvements to Indigenous communities?                  |
| Q36 | What are some innovative approaches that could be used to fund communities in need under the Backing Indigenous Ability program?          |

### 3.6 Funding

A combination of approaches could be used to fund elements under Backing Indigenous Ability, including but not limited to:

- Direct funding for service providers where there is a known need (for example communities identified under the Community Phone Program of TAPRIC as requiring a payphone).
- Program funding through a competitive grant program (whereby communities could apply for funding to improve telecommunications services within their community) or select grants funding (where particular needs in selected communities could be identified and grants could be negotiated directly with the community). The funding cycle under Backing Indigenous Ability could be aligned with other Indigenous funding programs operated by DCITA or other departments to provide a coordinated approach.
- Strategic funding of specific areas of telecommunications which may be a single funding initiative or as a response to a larger strategic goal. This may include, for example, strategic funding through state/territory or local government partnerships, a Shared Responsibility Agreement, a Regional Partnership Agreement or funding as a priority region. Strategic funding could be allocated, for example, to build infrastructure on a project that links in with Broadband Connect, Clever Networks or Mobile Connect.

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| Q37 | How should funding be provided under Backing Indigenous Ability?   |
| Q38 | What type(s) of funding provision best suit each program element?  |
| Q39 | Should a mix of funding approaches be used?  |
| Q40 | How can communities be assisted to develop grants applications so as to compete on a more equal basis for funding? |

## 4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

### 4.1 Culturally appropriate delivery of services

A successful Backing Indigenous Ability will largely be dependent on engaging communities to identify telecommunications needs and to use technology introduced under the package. In some cases, this may be through formalised arrangements in Shared Responsibility Agreements or other local or regional agreements.

Delivering services in a culturally appropriate manner will aid in the acceptance and ownership of telecommunications technology and provide a better opportunity for sustainability within Indigenous communities.

Experience from TAPRIC and other initiatives indicates that specific approaches are required to engage communities and deliver services. For example, initial consultation with communities regarding programs and services and discussions within those communities regarding telecommunications initiatives may assist in the take up and use of telecommunications technology.

Messages regarding the program or services can be communicated using Indigenous and mainstream media as well as using local networks such as the ICCs, regional agents and other regional organisations. In addition, DCITA can use its databases of Indigenous communities to identify priority locations for delivery of specific information or services.

Q41 In delivering Backing Indigenous Ability in a culturally appropriate manner, what should be done to enable acceptance and ownership of telecommunications technology to aid sustainability within Indigenous communities?

Q42 What are some best practices in engaging communities in the planning, development and implementation stages of introducing or improving telecommunications technology?

### 4.2 Sustainability

Telecommunications services delivered to Indigenous communities need to be operationally and financially sustainable. Consequently the Department intends to include sustainability as an important criterion in any program design. Factors that have previously been identified in this paper that assist in developing sustainable services include, but are not limited to:

- aggregating demand;
- using regional agents and ICCs to identify needs of communities and assist them in applying for funding under the package;
- developing community champions to provide skilled, easily accessible local support within Indigenous communities to assist users following the introduction of telecommunications technology;
- the consolidation, maintenance and installation of physical infrastructure;

- training and skills development of community members;
- developing culturally appropriate content on the Internet; and
- delivering telecommunications services in a culturally appropriate manner.

### 4.3 Industry

Communities should also be encouraged to consider innovative and flexible approaches to achieving commercial sustainability in the absence of ongoing funding. For example, communities could establish and maintain partnerships or other relationships to support their telecommunications technology. Partnerships could be formed with telecommunications industry participants or other corporate entities and may assist communities with technical support, business assistance, financial management support or funding assistance.

Telecommunications enhancements in Indigenous communities provide real potential for communities to use technology to open new business avenues and generate increased economic activity for local business. This potential has already been realised by a number of communities where Internet services assist in generating tourism activities, the sale of arts and crafts and in enabling export initiatives, as well as accessing services from all levels of government.

In addition, the introduction of telecommunications services into Indigenous communities may provide an opportunity for Indigenous Australians to play a role in service delivery. For example, skilled local Indigenous contractors could assist in building sites for community phones. Participation and contribution by communities (rather than communities being a recipient only) to a particular initiative may assist in engaging the community and achieving a sustainable service.

- Q43 How can telecommunications services delivered to Indigenous communities become operationally and financially sustainable and remain sustainable beyond the life of the package?
- Q44 What innovative and flexible approaches could be used by communities to aid in the sustainability of telecommunications technology?
- Q45 How could telecommunications industry participants be encouraged to form partnerships with Indigenous communities? What form might these arrangements take?
- Q46 In what ways can local Indigenous Australians assist in service delivery of telecommunications in Indigenous communities?

## 5. WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT APPROACH

### 5.1 An integrated approach

The approach for Backing Indigenous Ability is in keeping with the whole of government approach to Indigenous affairs.

The five principles underpinning the Australian Government's new approach are collaboration, regional need, encouraging flexibility in funding programs, accountability and leadership. The Government has identified priorities in early childhood health and education, safety, law and order, economic development and employment.

Backing Indigenous Ability will aim to use an integrated whole of government approach, drawing on the experience and resources of Australian Government ICCs, state/territory government agencies and local government, key stakeholder groups, Indigenous resource agencies and representative bodies.

Consideration is required on how and to what extent Backing Indigenous Ability elements should be incorporated into Shared Responsibility Agreements (note that further information in respect of Shared Responsibility Agreements may be obtained from the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination website ([www.oipc.gov.au](http://www.oipc.gov.au))).

An Action Plan under the Online and Communications Council National Approach is currently being developed with other jurisdictions. It will identify specific activities and initiatives to be undertaken by Australian, state, territory and local Governments. This process provides an opportunity to identify and develop some collaborative activities involving elements of Backing Indigenous Ability.

Another approach that is being considered in the Backing Indigenous Ability context is the use of Regional Partnership Agreements. It is envisaged that where it is appropriate and administratively practicable these geographically based agreements will take the form of multi-community, multi-purpose agreements that can include a range of *Connect Australia* elements.

- Q47 How should Backing Indigenous Ability use arrangements such as Shared Responsibility Agreements to facilitate arrangements with communities?
- Q48 What elements of Backing Indigenous Ability should or should not be formalised through agreements with communities to share responsibilities and ensure appropriate service delivery?
- Q49 Would the use of Regional Partnership Agreements work within the Backing Indigenous Ability program and the wider *Connect Australia* package? If so, what form should these agreements take?

## 5.2 Using existing infrastructure

There may be existing telecommunications infrastructure and services currently used by government agencies that could be used to extend telecommunications services more widely within a community.

There may also be scope to use existing telecommunications services and infrastructure implemented through state or territory government initiatives. This technology may be currently used within hub communities, for example for education or health programs but might not generally be available for use for other purposes.

Through the cooperation of state or territory governments, it may be possible to reach arrangements to introduce sharing of telecommunications access or for the introduction of new technology at a significantly reduced cost. For example, a broadband Internet line may already be located at a school within a hub community. Agreement could be reached to allow multiple connections to be extended from the school or for members of the wider community to use the broadband line outside school hours. This would enable a greater and more diverse range of users from the community to access the Internet.

There is scope under this aspect of the package for innovative and flexible solutions to be suggested by communities and other stakeholders to enable enhanced telecommunications within Indigenous communities.

State and territory governments are supportive of a cooperative approach and appeared keen to work with the Australian Government in supplementing the *Connect Australia* package by encouraging innovative use of existing infrastructure, becoming project partners or making in-kind contributions to programs.

Q50 How can existing infrastructure and services in communities be used to provide access to a wider range of uses and users from the community?
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## 5.3 Consultation

Consultation processes with state and territory governments will be important to Backing Indigenous Ability. In addition to stakeholder feedback sought in this discussion paper and from the scheduled stakeholder meetings, further consultation to guide design and implementation of the program will occur by:

- working with other elements within DCITA, including *Connect Australia* programs, arts and culture programs, sport and broadcasting policy areas and the DCITA Network Regional Offices. A number of meetings have already been held with internal stakeholders to identify common goals, priority communities and opportunities to maximise positive outcomes;
- seeking input from the ICCs, particularly to identify priority communities and needs and assist in community liaison during implementation. Information has been developed for ICCs and a meeting for ICC members is currently being planned;

- involving Australian Government agencies, including the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination, to advise on the development and implementation of Backing Indigenous Ability. An Australian Government Cross-Agency Reference Group is being established for this purpose;
- consulting with state, territory and local governments; and
- consulting with key stakeholder groups, Indigenous resource agencies and representative bodies (such as the National Indigenous Council), service providers, and individual communities and their members. Discussions have commenced and visits are proposed to a number of communities and with key representative groups during early 2006.

Q51 Are there any other key stakeholders that should be consulted (other than through this discussion paper and the consultation sessions planned for March and April identified at Section 8 below) in the design and implementation of Backing Indigenous Ability?

## 6. INTEGRATION WITH *CONNECT AUSTRALIA*

### **Relationship between Backing Indigenous Ability and the other elements of *Connect Australia***

Common infrastructure may support voice, Internet and advanced services. For this reason, implementation of Backing Indigenous Ability will link closely with the other programs within *Connect Australia* (Broadband Connect, Clever Networks and Mobile Connect) to ensure that optimal local level use is made of available resources.

Linkages could include, for example, broadband infrastructure introduced to a location and funded through Broadband Connect or Clever Networks which could then form the basis for the delivery of services to Indigenous communities.

<p>Q52 How best can Backing Indigenous Ability link in with the other elements of <i>Connect Australia</i> to ensure an efficient and effective delivery of telecommunications into Indigenous communities?</p>
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## 7. PACKAGE EVALUATION

Like all of the programs under *Connect Australia*, Backing Indigenous Ability will be subject to regular evaluations and be part of a formal mid-term review.

Appropriate compliance, monitoring and evaluation methodologies will also need to be embedded in Backing Indigenous Ability to:

- monitor progress in achieving outcomes;
- monitor the ongoing appropriateness of initiatives;
- ensure effective delivery of outcomes;
- ensure efficient use of resources; and
- provide input for future program design.

Q53 How best can the progress of Backing Indigenous Ability be monitored and assessed? How often should a formal assessment of Backing Indigenous Ability be undertaken?

## 8. HOW TO RESPOND TO THIS DISCUSSION PAPER

### 8.1 Stakeholder meetings

To provide stakeholders with opportunities to discuss the issues raised in this paper and to raise other matters they may consider relevant, DCITA will convene a number of discussion sessions. These meetings will be held at various venues across Australia during March and April 2006.

DCITA is currently approaching the ICCs to seek their assistance in organisation of venues. Pending finalisation of that process, the tentative schedule for the meetings is as follows:

State	Dates	Location
Western Australia	Fri 31 March	South Hedland
Queensland	Tues 4 April Wed 5 April	Brisbane Mount Isa
New South Wales	Mon 10 April Tues 11 April	Sydney Dubbo
South Australia	Thurs 20 April Fri 21 April	Ceduna Port Augusta
Northern Territory	Wed 26 April Thurs 27 April	Alice Springs Darwin
Western Australia	Fri 28 April	Kununurra

To register to attend any of these meetings, please contact:

Beth Howard  
Indigenous Telecommunications Section  
Department of Communications,  
Information Technology and the Arts  
Email: elizabeth.howard@dcita.gov.au  
Phone: (02) 6271 1184

## **8.2 Written submissions**

While the March/April stakeholder sessions will provide an opportunity for group discussion and debate, stakeholders wishing to have their individual views taken into account in the development of Backing Indigenous Ability are encouraged to lodge written submissions to the Department.

Submissions must identify the names of the parties making the submissions or comments and organisations they represent (if relevant) as well as contact details (including email addresses if applicable).

Electronic submissions (preferably in Word or RTF format) should be lodged at:

BIA@dcita.gov.au

Hardcopy submissions should be posted to:

Indigenous Telecommunications Section  
Regional Communications Policy Branch  
Department of Communications, Information Technology  
and the Arts  
GPO Box 2154  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

All submissions and comments, or parts thereof, will be treated as non-confidential information unless specifically requested and acceptable reasons accompany requests. Note that submissions or comments will generally be subject to Freedom of Information provisions. Email disclaimers will not be considered sufficient confidentiality requests.

Persons making submissions should be aware that submissions may be made publicly available on the DCITA website.

Where industry providers wish to assist the development of programs and in doing so provide commercially sensitive information, this information should be provided separately or relevant sections marked as “commercial in confidence” in their submission.

The Department reserves the right not to publish any submission, or part of a submission, which in the view of the Department contains potentially defamatory material.

The closing date for comments and submissions is:

**5:00pm (Australian Eastern Standard Time),  
Friday, 19 May 2006.**

For any questions regarding this submission process, contact Beth Howard at the addresses noted above.

### **8.3 Contacts for further information**

To discuss any elements of the discussion paper relating to Backing Indigenous Ability, please contact Beth Howard at the addresses noted above.