

Our Ref: CT 51

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

Dear Sir/Madam

## **BACKING INDIGENOUS ABILITY DISCUSSION PAPER**

The Gascoyne Development Commission (GDC) is pleased to offer a response on the Backing Indigenous Ability discussion paper. Indigenous people have a rich history and proud cultural association with the Gascoyne Region of Western Australia. This region includes the boundaries of five language groups with Indigenous people comprising approximately 15 per cent of the Gascoyne population. The GDC provides direct support to the Indigenous population of the region through the employment of an Aboriginal Economic Development Officer and the adoption of projects aimed at improving opportunities for Indigenous people in the Gascoyne.

The GDC also maintains a proactive role in Information Technology and Telecommunications development in the region, sourcing advice and information from the Gascoyne Telecommunications Working Group (GTWG). The GTWG was established specifically as an advisory community based committee to the GDC. The Group's main objective is addressing all aspects of telecommunications and information technology affecting the Gascoyne to assist the region in meeting its full potential and staying abreast with the global community.

Given our strong interest in telecommunications and Indigenous development opportunities, I would like to provide the following comments in regards to the questions outlined in the discussion paper:

1. TAPRIC identified the critical needs for communities to progress however this regional telecommunications inquiry could have focussed on a sound definition of what constitutes an eligible remote community as opposed to a family unit that choose to live in a remote location and claim community status.
2. The design and delivery of the Backing Indigenous Ability could be optimised by involving the community in the consultation process. It is also important to incorporate this program with other elements of the Connect Australia package to ensure efficiencies of scale and sustainable infrastructure. Service providers such as Telstra and Optus should also be involved from the outset to determine the most appropriate model for different areas.

Integral to the long term sustainability of any communications development is adequate training and awareness raising. Training and awareness raising could be carried out by local providers to ensure continuity of service and understanding of cultural differences and specific local needs.

3. The installation of community phones should be a priority under this program for unconnected communities. It is also imperative that the security of established

phones is maintained or improved. Existing community phones could be further protected from vandalism and inappropriate use through innovative ideas such as 'robust phone' technology or credit card pin numbers. It is vital that Indigenous people remain connected through community phones and means of protecting this service must be implemented.

4. Several agencies in the Gascoyne can provide advice to ensure the correct communities are serviced (i.e. Department of Indigenous Affairs, Indigenous Coordination Centres, Development Commissions, and TAFE).
5. An application process is appropriate to determine the need for a community phone. The key elements of the application should be based on the size of the community and the general needs or make up of the community.
6. A tender process is most appropriate to facilitate provision of community phones.
7. Hub communities are appropriate as a location for public access internet facilities. To prioritise hub communities Government must look at suitable geographical coverage to ensure maximum availability for all communities. The remoteness of communities should also be given higher priority.
8. Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICC) can help identify the business/training levels of communities to identify those who will most benefit from internet facilities. Communities who demonstrate a long term approach to development should be given first priority. ICCs should also assist communities with the application process.
9. It is appropriate to use an application process to identify communities requiring internet access. The key elements of the process should include awareness raising of the opportunity and assistance in lodging an application. This process would identify existing facilities and already planned facilities.
10. The use of such facilities can be best encouraged by establishing a group of trainers/facilitators who would visit communities and demonstrate the value of using this technology as well as conducting some level of introductory training and identifying an on site representative. A Shared Responsibility Agreement would be appropriate to support installation and maintenance of Internet services.
11. We are not aware of more innovative models of delivering internet access to Indigenous communities.
12. PC based webcam video conferencing facilities may be appropriate in communities that are isolated. Demand for the webcam video conferencing facilities should be based on applications from communities who can demonstrate a need and use for this technology. Awareness raising, training and development must be implemented to ensure the communities understand the opportunity presented.
13. Low use of videoconferencing facilities could be attributed to the high cost of accessing videoconference. Furthermore it could be attributed to lack of knowledge and fear of use, especially in terms of Indigenous communities. Training and awareness raising is important in generating further use.
14. ICCs and others should be used to identify communities requiring videoconferencing facilities and to encourage these communities to apply for this technology. ICCs should also be aware of actions and development in this area of technology that different communities have undertaken to date and be able to advise accordingly.
15. Wide usage of videoconferencing facilities would only be possible if substantial awareness raising surrounding the site is undertaken, targeting Indigenous and non Indigenous. Training would ensure usage however a high level would not be expected due to low population numbers in remote areas. The location of sites should be determined by need and in consultation with communities.
16. As above an application process should be utilised to determine existing and future videoconferencing facility needs.
17. The community should be prepared to have local members trained and future allocation for their retention or continued tenure established. A Shared

Responsibility Agreement may be appropriate to support installation and maintenance of videoconferencing facilities.

18. Skill gaps in communities could be determined by consulting with regional telecommunications groups, ICCs, community champions and regional Development Commissions. Given the fast changing nature of the telecommunications industry it would not be appropriate to refer to written reports over a year old. Personal surveys carried out face to face may be of greater use in determining skill gaps especially in remote Indigenous communities.
19. The type of training and skills development sessions required will vary from region to region and any program to address this must be very flexible and adaptable to different regions. Training and skills development should come from within the regions to ensure relevancy, awareness, sustainability and local skills development. Any program designed for skills development and training must recognise the problems associated with training and development in a non face-to-face environment (i.e. Information retention and re-enforcement of training). Face-to-face and one-on-one training is the most effective and sustainable form of training in remote areas especially in terms of the Indigenous population.
20. A grants program is most appropriate to determine how funds for training and skills development should be allocated. Such a program must be flexible and targeted on a regional level and allow for innovative and practical approaches that suit the characteristics of different regions.
21. Communities could support appropriate training and skills development programs through a buddy system. This would reinforce their training and encourage others to take up the offered training. Furthermore communities should be required to demonstrate they will be able to make use of the training through the implementation of live 'projects' that will set the community up for advancement beyond the life of the training.
22. The successful delivery of training and skills development will be influenced by the design of the training program. Delivery methods may vary in different regions due to geography. Similarly content may vary according to demography, cultural sensitivities and skill levels. A flexible approach will need to be adopted in order for a training program to be successful in different regions. Regional research on appropriate delivery methods, prior to the implementation of the program, would contribute towards the success of the training and targeted use of Government funds.
23. Community champions would be appropriate to engage their own community in using telecommunications technology. Every community with a telecommunications facility would need a local champion regardless of the size of the community.
24. Community champions could play the role of IT expertise and trouble shooter especially if incorporated into a paid position such as Telecentre manager or community manager.
25. Community champions could be selected through an application process. This would involve the selected community champion being awarded some form of retainer to carry out the services of community champion. Community Champions must be based within the community itself and not be itinerant visitors. Similarly community champions must have the respect of other members of their community to effectively promote use of telecommunications.
26. Contract employment would be the most appropriate way to engage and compensate community champions. Performance parameters would need to be met and a reporting system would need to be established to ensure progress towards goals.
27. A model to increase culturally appropriate content to the internet must appeal to the characteristics of each community. For example one community may possess a number of people gifted in arts and crafts. This leads to the opportunity to use

- the internet to market the arts and crafts or to connect artists to other worldwide artists. This thereby localises the internet to that community.
28. A grant model would be appropriate to help develop culturally appropriate content on the internet. DCITA would need to conduct awareness raising of the program in each applicable region. Communities would require assistance in preparing applications and identifying the most appropriate projects for a grant.
  29. The ability to digitally record and archive culturally significant material may encourage usage of internet services, especially if this idea is incorporated into the training stage as a 'project' to encourage skills development and interest at the same time.
  30. Funding models could be designed to not only record culturally significant material but also historic material in the region related to Indigenous and non Indigenous people. This may encourage a partnership approach to the program.
  31. If community champions are to be engaged on a contract these identities could be utilised for identifying the possibility of demand aggregation in their own community. An outside demand aggregation broker may not be appropriate nor would aggregation across very remote areas be possible in many instances or of any advantage to residents. A designated overseeing body could be established to ensure best available value and equal opportunity for all remote communities to access services. Alternatively existing bodies like telecommunication advisory or industry representative groups could be utilised.
  32. Demand aggregation would not be appropriate for attracting internet service providers in many remote areas due to low population bases and a lack of infrastructure between communities to aggregate delivery. However demand aggregation in terms of delivering a suite of services at one location (telephone, internet and videoconferencing) would be more appropriate to individual communities.
  33. The grant model is the most appropriate way to determine innovative and flexible approaches in delivering the Backing Indigenous Ability. This is why the grant model must be flexible enough to allow for innovative approaches to delivering in each region and to suit regional characteristics.
  34. New technologies may provide greater flexibility to delivering the Backing Indigenous Ability program. For example wireless technology would offer some flexibility in remote locations.
  35. Innovative means of delivering telecommunications improvements to Indigenous communities will vary from region to region and hence the need to call for ideas from industry through a tender or grant process. For example robust phones, ID pin numbers, home phones with pin numbers may all be implemented to prevent abuse of service.
  36. Rather than innovative approaches, it would be more appropriate to focus on regionally based and targeted approaches to fund communities in need under the Backing Indigenous Ability program. This ensures the feasibility of any approach can be easily determined, verified and monitored for effectiveness.
  37. Funding should be promoted to individual communities and regions and assistance provided where necessary for communities to prepare applications to the Backing Indigenous Ability program. A flexible approach must be incorporated to allow for packaging of different telecommunication needs and different training and skills development techniques. In any funding model the selection panel must seek comment from regional representatives such as Regional Development Commissions.
  38. The type of funding provision for each program element will depend on a range of factors such as remoteness, individual community populations, and lack of infrastructure, services or skills.
  39. A mix of funding approaches would be appropriate to ensure flexibility of the model.

40. Communities could be assisted to develop their grant applications through contracted community champions if the champions possessed the skills. Alternatively funds can be made available through the Backing Indigenous Ability program to enlist professional assistance in preparing the applications.
41. Establishment of a community based group would be appropriate to enable acceptance and ownership of technology in individual communities. Such groups would be involved in selection of technology, implementation of technology and management.
42. Community consultation in person is important in terms of engaging communities in planning, development and implementation of new technology. This should be supported through awareness raising and education adapted to each region.
43. Telecommunication services delivered to Indigenous communities are unlikely to become operationally and financially sustainable in the longer term. Recurrent funding may be necessary beyond the life of the package to ensure the telecommunication services continue.
44. In order to aid in the sustainability of telecommunications technology, community groups could look at their training and development needs and be asked to identify how this could be utilised to increase earning capacity of the community. An increased earning capacity would enable the purchase of further technology and training expertise or maintenance of existing technology.
45. DCITA could make direct approaches to telecommunications industry participants to form partnerships with Indigenous communities. A financial incentive may be required.
46. Indigenous people could assist in service delivery of telecommunications in their own communities by providing local knowledge on needs and issues. In addition trainee positions could be offered to help maintain and deliver telecommunications.
47. Shared Responsibility Agreements could be used to facilitate arrangements with communities. Such agreements would outline agreed practices with other stakeholders and training bodies. Agreements should be between the provider and community with set outcomes and dates to meet activities.
48. To determine what elements need to be formalised through agreements, the DCITA must consult with individual communities as needs will vary according to region.
49. The use of Regional Partnership Agreements may work within the Backing Indigenous Ability program and the wider Connect Australia package. To determine whether this would work DCITA may need to first trial a model in a region.
50. Existing infrastructure and services in communities could be used to provide access to a wider range of uses and users from the community however this would need to be discussed with each individual community.
51. Further stakeholders to approach for comment should be identified through the community consultation process and further discussions with communities.
52. The Backing Indigenous Ability program could link in with other elements of the Connect Australia package by a coordinated release of all programs. This would help facilitate an efficient and effective delivery of telecommunications not only into Indigenous communities but all communities.
53. The progress of Backing Indigenous Ability would be best monitored and assessed using progress reports on an annual basis. Community Champions may be key drivers in providing such reports along with successful grant applicants. DCITA may also schedule site visits during the progress of Backing Indigenous Ability to ensure projects are progressing to a suitable standard and to provide assistance in overcoming any issues that may have arisen.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this discussion paper. For any queries please contact our Grants Officer Fiona Shallcross by email, [fshallcross@gdc.wa.gov.au](mailto:fshallcross@gdc.wa.gov.au), or phone 08 99411803.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Yule  
A/Chief Executive Officer

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