

Beth Howard
Indigenous Telecommunications Section
DCITA
Via email: BIA@dcita.gov.au

May 2006

Re: Backing Indigenous Ability Discussion Paper

Dear Ms. Howard,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above discussion paper.

About CTN

The Consumers' Telecommunications Network (CTN) is a national peak body of consumer and community organisations, and of individuals representing community interests, who participate in developing national telecommunications policy. CTN advocates policies for better access, quality of service and affordability of telecommunications facilities for all residential consumers.

CTN's members are national and state organisations representing consumers from non-English speaking backgrounds, deaf consumers, indigenous people, low income consumers, people with disabilities, young people including children, pensioners and superannuants, rural and remote consumers, women and consumers in general.

Overview

This submission has been developed with input and guidance from the following organisations, in addition to CTN staff and Council:

Cape York Digital Network
PY Media
Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media
Northern Land Council
Central Land Council

Our submission highlights a number of components that must underpin the BIA program if it is to reach any measure of success. We have detailed comments in this submission but in brief they are:

- Improvements in the telecommunications services available to Indigenous people must be central to any proposal approved for funding under BIA. These may be tangible or intangible.

- Long term, sustainable projects must be given priority, and recognised as the only way to address the fundamental flaws in current remote telecommunications infrastructure and services. In remote communities, sustainability may require ongoing government funding. Piecemeal approaches specifically do not meet the long-term objectives and should not be given funding priority.
- Services should be rolled out where they are needed- this is not simply a matter of requiring communities to nominate themselves, it should be proactive and DCITA should play an integral role in advising communities of their rights to services and creating accessible ways to achieve this.
- The outcomes of the projects being funded need to be culturally appropriate and meet the direct needs of the communities being provided with those services.
- A formalised set of basic principles must be used to evaluate and compare all proposed projects, to ensure the tender process is fair and transparent and the criteria of being a sustainable project are met in the long term.
- Wherever possible, funding from other Connect Australia programs must be used for infrastructure due to the size of those other funds compared with BIA.
- BIA funding must not shelter or buffer Telstra from its USO obligations.
- Administration costs must be minimised to ensure the greatest possible benefit is received from investments
- Community participation and consultation should exist at all stages of the process.

This submission firstly comments on broad themes of the discussion paper (Section 1) and then in turn responds to the questions directly posed therein (Section 2).

SECTION 1- General comments and issues

Program Funding

It is worth noting that the amount allocated to the Backing Indigenous Ability program funding represents only 3% of the total Connect Australia package. There has been a wasted opportunity here to address the widely recognised inequality between the communications services available to remote Indigenous communities and the rest of the country. If the government wants to deal with the problems and issues that exist

for the most disadvantaged and systematically overlooked groups in society, then adequate money needs to be made available to achieve this outcome.

Whilst we are disappointed with the inadequate dollar distribution of the BIA initiative, we do note that it may be possible to leverage money from the other programs specifically for indigenous projects.

CTN would like to encourage the approach where applicable, that funding for projects for much needed infrastructure should be sourced from the other programs in the Connect Australia suite so that BIA funding is used specifically for projects that would otherwise not receive funding.

Furthermore, CTN would like to recommend that funds from the Communications Fund, deriving from the sale of Telstra, are allocated to the ongoing funding of BIA projects. Sustainability of funding is the only way to ensure ongoing provision of services when there are no commercial drivers that will do so. This is exactly the situation of services to many remote indigenous communities.

Role of ICCs and Regional Agents

The use of recommendations from regional agents and Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) to identify and assist communities in an application process is reasonable. However until the establishment problems of the ICCs outlined in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner's *Social Justice Report 2005*¹ are addressed, the successes from the use of ICC's may be compromised. CTN is very concerned that the lack of DCITA staffing in an ICC may preclude a community from accessing the BIA funding pool. Ensuring that applications are simple and culturally appropriate is key. ICC staff and regional agents could be used to alert communities to the process.

All Connect Australia indigenous projects must recognise and avoid the serious problem of overblown and exhaustive administration costs². CTN wants DCITA to carefully consider the proportion of funding that will go to administration versus implementation when considering projects to be funded by BIA, especially given the limited amount of money available.

Infrastructure

Because of the small amount of money available to this particular program, we strongly suggest that infrastructure projects be funded from the Broadband Connect and Mobile Connect funding pools. This will mean that other projects that don't

¹ http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/sjreport05/chap3.html#ii-the

² See examples of the extent of the problem in K. Walsh "Red-Tape Costs blow out while communities suffer" *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 March 2006.

necessarily qualify for Mobile Connect or Broadband Connect will be able to be met under the BIA program.

CTN's comments to the Broadband Connect program outlined 3 key features that should underpin decisions to allocate funding. They are replicated below:

- Programs and funding policies need to be strategic and long-term in their approach, to ensure the deficiencies of the HiBIS scheme are not replicated
- Funded infrastructure should be 'future proof' as much as possible, i.e. it should embody capacity and service delivery characteristics that minimise ongoing investment to accommodate future demand (this includes the provision of symmetrical bandwidth)
- Government/public monies should only be spent on infrastructure that is bundled with previously agreed arrangements permitting competitive access. The key objective is to get infrastructure rolled out and services in use, but we need to think about how to maximise efficiencies. This will be achieved by minimising barriers to the sharing of infrastructure and the facilitation of competition.

CTN's Mobile Connect and Broadband Connect submissions are available on our website at: <http://www.ctn.org.au/content.cfm?ContentType=Content&ContentID=154>

One of the most important ways to advance telecommunications uptake in Indigenous communities is the strategic roll out of infrastructure that can be leveraged from a regional basis to provide better services. Of course infrastructure is not a "stand- alone solution". In addition, training programs and culturally appropriate technologies need to be employed in order to garner interest in making use of the services. But it's important to note that without that investment in infrastructure, real advances will be relatively few.

One recent proposal we are aware of is optical fibre being laid in the Top End, which then could see hubs form in off-shoots to communities in a fishbone effect. This is the type of infrastructure approach we think should be given priority. This project will provide a backbone for other projects and access for communities on a regional basis. There is a similar initiative in the Cape York region.

Culturally Appropriate Technology and Applications

Culturally appropriate technology should be given high priority. For example mobile phones are particularly appropriate for transient populations, and can be kept on the person. Mobile phone coverage also allows visitors and non-permanent residents access to services, and helps avoid bottlenecks that can exist for payphones. The types of projects funded under BIA should therefore be taken into account when funding is allocated- and as previously highlighted, infrastructure funding for mobile phones should be derived from the Mobile Connect funding pool. BIA monies could be allocated to creating education packages to help people manage and avoid debt,

or create mobile phone services for low- income consumers. Ensuring remote communities have access to a range of telecommunications services could be used in conjunction to great effect- for example sending message from a PC with broadband to individuals with mobile phones to ensure important messages are delivered via SMS in a timely manner.

Access to broadband services would impact on the ability of Indigenous people in ways to preserve culture and history.³ Other applications that require broadband speed internet, such as podcasting, could have a major impact on the delivery of training in language and language maintenance for a broader amount of people. There are many instances in Indigenous Communities where the initial presumed result is never reached but what eventuates is a far more innovative outcome than could ever be perceived.

In all, the potential applications of new technologies need to be taken into account as not only a means of meeting telecommunications needs but also the broader cultural benefits. It is time to take steps to give Aboriginal people the same opportunities that technology has given the broader population.

2005 Indigenous Telecoms Forum- some reflections

In the June-September 2005 issue of the CTN Quarterly Newsletter, we published an article on our experiences at the May 2005 Indigenous Telecommunications Forum. In considering the approach outlined by DCITA for BIA, we revisited the views expressed at that Forum and the lessons that needed to be incorporated into future projects, such as the BIA. Below is an extract from that article, which highlights a number of faults with programs to date that we feel will also feature in the BIA project. We do so in the hope that DCITA reflects on how to avoid widely recognised problems before embarking on the BIA program.

“CTN recently attended the Indigenous Telecommunications Forum in Alice Springs...It aimed to bring together community representatives, government departments, regulators and other stakeholders to assess the quality of telecommunications services available to Indigenous consumers, the barriers that still exist for Indigenous consumers trying to use telecommunications services. More broadly, it tried to understand how effectively products and services are being delivered and more importantly how they can be improved.

Much of the forum canvassed how the so-called “whole of government” approach to service provision was working. Essentially this involves resources to Indigenous consumers being allocated across state and federal government departments. The idea is that a whole of government approach will avoid duplication and waste of resources, with attendant improvements in efficiencies. The near unanimous assessment of the current approach to facilitating Indigenous telecommunications that came out of the Forum was mentioned by every community group who

³ <http://www.maningrida.com/mac/bwc/bush.html> where Women’s only areas of the site are identified

presented and contributed from the audience: funding arrangements for programs are inadequate for the outcomes they are trying to achieve. Non-recurrent government funding is damaging the positive outcomes that come from the individual projects, because resourcing runs out or is discontinued.

Many of the examples provided by community representatives at the Forum suggested that rather than one stand-alone program being an enormous success and having lasting impacts on telecommunications services, a suite of related projects is often necessary to have an effective impact. For example, an infrastructure roll out to a remote community which creates access to broadband services is not in itself sufficient to deliver outcomes and benefits to the community. Funding may be required to enable the service on an ongoing basis; resources may be needed for computers; programs which train users how to use the service (and train other end users) are needed. Perhaps the most important program needs to skill users in how to create content to view the web in appropriate formats and languages. And of course, resourcing for maintenance of all the above programs is required for the initial projects to have any impact and to achieve their goal of enabling the communications needs of indigenous consumers. In short, projects are often interdependent on others for their success.

The performance indicators, milestones, outcomes and successes of programs are often obscured because it is in fact the longevity and continuity of a program that provides benefits to the community. Implicit in the assessments delivered to the Forum is the suggestion that programs that do appear to be successful are actually a result of a suite of programs; there may not be a key component driving the success, but rather, the combination of intangibles generates the outcomes. This of course is nearly impossible to quantify in such a way as to win funding from government agencies who require tangible outcomes in order to fit within usual accountability frameworks.”⁴

SECTION 2- Response to specific questions

Program Design

- Q1 What did TAPRIC and previous initiatives do well? Where did TAPRIC and previous initiatives fall short?
- Q2 How can the design and delivery of Backing Indigenous Ability be optimised to achieve long term sustainable quality telecommunications solutions for Indigenous communities?

Whilst we're pleased to see that DCITA has recognised that the level of telecommunications infrastructure in Indigenous communities is relatively poor (page

⁴ “Indigenous Telecommunications Forum- May 2005”, *CTN Quarterly*, June-Sept 2005, pp13-14.

2 of the discussion paper), we are concerned that the approach being taken by the BIA program is insufficient to achieve the improvements required to bring equivalent telecommunications service to Indigenous communities with the rest of the country. There is a fundamental right to these services that is not being explicitly recognised. The right to services needs to be the basic building block of these programs, with a commitment to building sustainable, long term solutions that will see foundations built that can be used into the future. This needs to drive all applications being considered for funding under BIA.

It is not enough for DCITA to simply fund stand-alone projects that appear to meet the objectives of the program but are not part of a long term strategy to ensure facilities are introduced with the view of them existing indefinitely. Without a long-term strategy guiding the selection of programs chosen, BIA funding will face the same inherent limitations of all previous programs - when funding for discrete programs run out, the services to communities will cease. This will serve to undermine what could be achieved in a strategically planned, coordinated and consistent set of programs.

We note that the TAPRIC review of January 2005 undertaken by DCITA highlighted that basic telephone services are still the highest priority in remote indigenous communities (page 4), but also note that it is relatively difficult for communities with little to no services to clearly envisage the future of technology and their available options.

We'd suggest DCITA, in consultation with Indigenous communities, formalise a list of key principles and commit to using these to choose projects funded by the BIA fund. The key principles outlined on page 6 are an excellent start, and we would suggest that the principles of access, affordability and awareness also be added. There is a need to directly link the programs with the communities being provided with these services, and this could be stipulated more clearly as a key principle and objective. This will help ensure that DCITA is clearly focused on ensuring that the projects will provide direct benefits to that community, rather than the project fitting within guidelines but without a clear reference to the community it will be servicing.

Community Phones

- | |
|--|
| <p>Q3 Should the installation of community phones into Indigenous communities be regarded as a priority under Backing Indigenous Ability?</p> <p>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?</p> <p>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?</p> |
|--|

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?

CTN is aware that DCITA has recently engaged a consultant to evaluate the community phone trial. This evaluation will need to play a role in determining if and how extensively the community phone scheme continues to be rolled out. In particular, we think the appropriateness of the siting and usability of community phones will need to be assessed to ensure they are the best solution for the communities they are servicing.

We are aware of a number of problems with community phones and we expect the issues will be identified and addressed as part of the trial review. Particular problems include:

Location Problems:

Community phones are being located in communities that already have payphone facilities, meaning that some communities have multiple services whilst others continue to have none. Further to this, there are examples of where the choice of site has not been made with proper consultation. In Baggot, the community phone has been placed on the Council's office wall, which is not the prime position for the community to have use 24/7 due to lighting issues.

Awareness and Access Problems:

There is not enough training for people on how to use the calling cards that go with the community phones, meaning people are less inclined to use them compared with a payphone, despite the cheaper prices. There are very few outlets where the calling cards can actually be purchased, which obviously limits the use of community phones. The calling cards themselves are difficult to use (not intuitive) and the print on them is too small for some people to read.

Fault Rectification and Equipment Problems

We are hearing reports that faults are not being routed to the Indigenous Call Centres, which is exacerbating problems getting faults fixed. In some instances Indigenous consumers from Central Australia are calling the Indigenous Call Centres staffed by Northern Queensland Indigenous peoples, which is not appropriate. Indigenous Call Centres need to be, at least, regional to provide an appropriate service and be staffed by Indigenous staff that can speak the right language and know the area and be sensitive to the issues pertaining to the consumer's own individual story. Furthermore, the community is responsible for repairs. Such an onerous condition is not imposed on other payphone users and it is decidedly inequitable to do so for community phone users. There are problems hearing the phones ring that may need to be addressed, as do a number of training issues.

DCITA needs to ascertain from this review whether or not the communities find these services appropriate and how they can be improved to ensure uptake of new community phones is maximised. CTN does not support the extension of the trial without confirming these services are what the people want- this needs to be the cornerstone of the decisions made under BIA.

Community phones do not address the problem of bringing services to areas currently without any telephone facilities at all. Phones need to be brought into un-serviced areas as the first priority. If community phones are rolled out under BIA funding to areas without existing payphones as the discussion paper suggests, we run the risk of effectively (and needlessly) subsidising Telstra's USO obligations. Whilst in theory community phones and new payphones should be unrelated issues, the reality is that they are not.

CTN has heard complaints that Telstra is still not providing payphone services to small remote Indigenous communities of more than 20 permanent adult residents under the USO agreement. New infrastructure is expensive, but this is not meant to be an excuse to not provide services- this is what the USO provides for. It is our strong belief that BIA money should be going to projects that are not infrastructure, because infrastructure projects should be covered by Broadband Connect, Mobile Connect, or the USO. Infrastructure projects must be funded to progress telecommunications services in remote areas, and DCITA needs to be aware of the importance of linking in with the other Connect Australia programs to ensure maximum benefits are delivered.

Part of the problem for getting infrastructure into communities seems to be related to the difficulty of knowing where to apply for these services and how. Application processes seem to favour those communities that know the application process exists, are able to access and complete the application form, submit and follow-up the process. At the Indigenous Telecommunications Forum in May 2005 speakers from the floor outlined their problems getting payphones, highlighting that they would apply to Telstra and nothing would happen.

DCITA needs to use funding from its own community education funds- *not* BIA money- to run a public education campaign explaining in simple terms and community languages how to apply for a payphone and a community phone. Application packs (including fact sheets about the benefits, how to use them, and an application form) could be sent to local community organisations, land councils and local councils in language. There needs to be a more pro-active approach by the Department if it is serious about getting services out.

There needs to be recognition in DCITA that getting Telstra to meet their USO obligations is difficult for those who want the services and we need a review into the processes and their effectiveness as a matter of urgency. We also think that the criteria for obtaining a payphone needs to be reviewed, as it appears that requiring 20 adults permanently living in a community is not resulting in adequate numbers of payphones being installed in Aboriginal communities.

The community phone scheme must not be seen as a suitable substitute for the roll out of payphones under the USO without careful consultation with the community. Conventional payphones are established and intuitive to use, and broadly acceptable to the community. Community phones, with the problems they currently have, are not a suitable substitute at this time. With improvements, they could function a lot more effectively and the benefits of these phones could be enhanced enormously and become more widely accepted by indigenous people.

The idea of identifying “priority communities” as the paper requests is fraught with difficulty. Those with the most resources are the most likely to have a louder voice when it comes to identifying themselves as in need of services. This has no bearing on need or demand at all. The basic problem that exists is that there are communities with no services at all and are without a means of getting them (be that a lack of awareness of the process to obtain a phone, Telstra not processing their application, or any other reason). These communities should be the priority recipients. They are entitled to basic phone services, and a more pro-active approach needs to make sure they are given these services, rather than being made to jump through bureaucratic hoops to get them.

The government needs to take responsibility for making sure services are being offered to communities identified as without services, infrastructure rolled out, and ensuring that the services are meeting the needs of the people. There is a clear role for DCITA and other government agencies as appropriate to take the lead in ensuring basic services are being rolled out where they are currently without.

Public Internet access

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 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? |

Community hubs may be an appropriate location for implementing public access to Internet facilities, however again it is up to the Community to decide. If the community already has broadband Internet capabilities, coin-operated Internet kiosks may be a way of providing services that bring are partially self-funding. These kiosks can be purchased or leased. Further to this an appropriate Community body could ensure that access was blocked to sites deemed inappropriate at a whole-of-community level. If it were located near the local training organisation it could possibly encourage people to seek ICT training. Other benefits would include

- Ability for informal training to occur 24/7 depending on the location
- They are robust units
- Units, if purchased, could be painted in a design by a local artist/s
- A homepage could provide hyperlinks to online culturally appropriate training modules and other community news.
- Installation is a part of the package

A maintenance contract could be developed that involved the transferal of maintenance skills to appropriate community members.

One example of an innovative model to deliver public Internet access occurred in Maningrida, where the “Humbug Shack” was set-up. Essentially it was a room with a PC, desk, phone and broadband satellite connection. One staff member of the local training organisation would then facilitate Internet banking, reading and writing of letters and other duties. The success of this project shows that a “hub community” needs proper consultation of the users there already and the need for resources to meet the growth in demand.

ICCs and Shared Responsibility Agreements are discussed elsewhere in this submission, however essentially CTN discourages their use in providing Public Internet access. It is a community decision to be made and projects providing these services that receive funding under BIA should be able to prove to DCITA that they have communicated directly and appropriately with the community.

Videoconferencing

- | |
|--|
| <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> |
|--|

- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?

CTN supports the funding of videoconferencing as part of the Backing Indigenous Ability plan. The Government should consider the wide range of community needs that can be met by videoconferencing, including applications to education, health and other essential services. CTN would also like to highlight the intangible and cascading social benefit that videoconferencing provides communities, especially in facilitating communication between family members and communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in prison facilities. As such, the Government should also take into consideration the costs, both intangible and tangible, associated with the absence or removal of videoconferencing facilities in and from communities.

In looking at the issues surrounding low use of videoconferencing facilities, the Government should investigate the low use of videoconferencing by its own agencies; and should also investigate issues around the underlying infrastructure which supports videoconferencing – namely problems with the availability and delivery of high speed broadband connections. Recognising this, the Government should also understand that videoconferencing facilities may not be commercially sustainable and will therefore require on-going support – support that is well justified. BIA may be able to provide ongoing funding for video conferencing services where Broadband Connect funding has rolled out infrastructure to provide the service.

The identification of priority locations for videoconferencing facilities should include proper consultation with Indigenous representative bodies (see our comments to Section 5 – Whole of Government Approach of the plan), and consideration should be given to models of access that have already been successful. Specifically, site locations can be tied into existing, sustainable information and communication technology ventures such as public Internet hubs, whose facilities are maintained as part of a whole network.

Staff can be sourced from the local community and job tasks can include advertising the videoconferencing facilities and ensuring clients utilise them as arranged. The Cape York Digital Network's Centres provide an example of this type of model. Any staff that are sourced from the local community need to be supported and resourced. Staff turnover can be high due to a myriad of personal circumstances and combating obligations. Employment outcomes are important, however sustainability of service to the Community is imperative. CTN cautions the use of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) in the delivery of videoconferencing facilities – a position expanded on in our comments to Section 5 of the plan.

Training and Skills Development

- 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?

A Training Needs Analysis (TNA) best identifies skill gaps. Local education institutions, schools or Community Registered Training Organisations (RTO) are best placed to conduct these. Look to projects such as the Jawoyn Association Technology Education Program⁵ for guidance. That particular Networking the Nation project was innovative “because it provided an opportunity for local Aboriginal people to work and be trained as community educators or community development agents in

⁵ http://www.dcita.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/8793/NTN_Web_List_of_NT_Projects.pdf

their own communities. The university's role was to provide an intensive training program to the Aboriginal community educators. This involved field supervision, delivering in-service training workshops and coordinating their work in the Diploma in Adult Education. A detailed training needs analysis was developed to deliver culturally appropriate information technology training to people in the Jawoyn community and other geographically isolated people living in close proximity to the Jawoyn lands. “

A useful example of culturally appropriate accredited and non-accredited training has been co-developed, delivered and assessed in Maningrida, Arnhem Land. This included the delivery of accredited ICT training as part of the Certificate II in Business. Localised work programs for units were co-developed with Indigenous trainers to ensure their cultural appropriateness. “Culturally appropriate” includes process as well as content in this context.

Non-accredited training could include, for example, action-learning programs centred on capacity building Internet banking skills. Each time a community member logged onto a community Internet capable PC the community member would go directly to their personal web page where the links they use, such as Internet banking sites etc, were hyper linked. The community member could then elect to go through some more online training in that session. Such online training programs could be delivered in language if appropriate and could be short modules that build on capacity. Questcon's *Burrarra Gathering* is an example of innovative delivery of information for white people about culture⁶ however does provide an example of an appropriate delivery format if say it was in language.

A grants program may be an appropriate way to fund communities to deliver whatever training and skills development that they deem to be appropriate for their community.

Communities must have input in the planning, developing, delivering and assessing of any training. Communities must also have input into the cultural appropriateness of the content as well as the cultural appropriateness of the process that will deliver such training. Key community people would be identifiable through the local education institutions, including the schools and RTO's. It is imperative that the community is intimately involved at every step of the way, therefore engaging support for programs from the start.

We have also identified a non- exhaustive list of obstacles, which may assist in avoiding potential pitfalls.

Ideological obstacles: Successful delivery of training and skills development requires a more flexible approach at each stage including the development, delivery and outcome stages. Whose idea of 'success' needs to be ascertained? If 'success'

⁶ http://burrarra.questacon.edu.au/Main_New.html

means numbers of students that have completed assessment of accredited training then the concept of 'success' will be the major obstacle, be it ideological in basis. 'Success' for different communities can mean different things. At it's most basic level it can mean how many community members were exposed to the training in any form? This exposure can take place outside of normal training hours, happening at home or around the fire at night for example.

Cultural 'obstacles': From the outset CTN does not believe that cultural obligations are an obstacle per se. Where CTN is coming from is that to design, deliver and measure successful delivery of training and skills development cultural and family obligations have to be taken into account, Flexibility to ensure cultural and family obligations are taken into account at a local level is imperative.

Using accredited training is not always going to be appropriate. Training content, delivery and assessment needs to be locally appropriate and developed in consultation with key community members. There is not going to be a 'one size fits all' model to roll any training out across the nation.

Geographical obstacles

Infrastructure (ICT tools for training) installation, repair and maintenance are obviously challenged due to geographical access limitations. Geographical obstacles add to the expense for delivery and service of equipment and out-sourced trainers. Geography is also an obstacle to a connection to the decision makers in the Government department. Environmental factors of heat, sand and the like also impact on the shelf life of equipment.

Logistical obstacles

Locating appropriate venues, physically getting community members to training, ensuring their needs are accommodated in regard to avoidance relationships, catering, other community business including cultural business are some of the logistical obstacles that exist. Flexible time tabling, in built funding for transport and catering, culturally appropriate agreed venues, in built funding for community translators and appointment of a resourced community liaison person or organisation with a vehicle can overcome some of these obstacles.

Community Champions

- | |
|--|
| <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> |
|--|

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?

Appointing community champions may be a good strategy for some communities but in practice they can be problematic. Feedback about champions provided to CTN suggest that in many instances government agencies put onerous responsibilities on community members without providing them with appropriate levels of support. Whilst we acknowledge there may be communities where community champions are appropriate; these community champions must be properly resourced with a workspace, office equipment and connections, a mentor and on-going training and evaluation. This of course can potentially put more stress on the community champion as they now have access to resources and, due to cultural relationships, may be obliged to share them. Other issues include absences due to funeral business and ceremony time. For various reasons there's also the potential for decisions to be made that favour one family over the entire community, which may undermine service or program provision in the long term.

A more sustainable appropriate model for community champions would be to resource existing educational institutions to function as ICT community champions. This would take the onus off the individual and allow the institutions that are already the community educators to continue that role. This would support a number of community members who have employment with these institutions and enable ICT education to sit inside the current educational typography of the community. It would also have a greater ability to ensure employment outcomes. This can be done by engaging students whose ICT skills are high, as well as actively promoting future employment opportunities for them to become community educators.

Culturally appropriate content

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?

The Maningrida project outlined earlier in this submission also included the creation of appropriate content, which is relevant to use as example here. The successful

application of a LearnScope⁷ project enabled the development of a local organisations website and the capacity building of 5 local Indigenous youth (15-19) in the elements of website design who assisted in the development of the final product. Furthermore, staff members of the organisation were given training in web editing so content could be updated at the local organisational level.

This project was seen as the first stepping-stone in enabling future e-learning approaches into teaching and learning in Maningrida to be a reality by providing a central e-platform for the Community's education priorities. The project allowed for the development of the website to be community driven, thus ensuring its cultural appropriateness and local content and application.

During the project the students were encouraged to write their own pages⁸ and were capacity built to assist in the building of the organisations website. This is one example of a model of delivering culturally appropriate content to the Internet. The idea of sharing your story is very culturally appropriate. Ensuring that culturally sensitive content is protected is imperative. This could be done by ensuring content was reviewed by a content committee of community members before the information went live onto the Internet. Such a committee would need culturally appropriate representation to perform its duty.

The LearnScope funding model was, in essence, a successful funding model for such projects. The reporting was not onerous and the students enjoyed showcasing the results in Darwin. Continued funding of this kind could ensure these skills are sustainable. One off grants are probably appropriate in the first instance, however staged project maintenance or sustainability grants should have a place and an uncomplicated application process to ensure their continuance.

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?

The concept of demand aggregators being used for this purpose seems to be appropriate in principle. As CTN understands, the needs of communities could be grouped and tendered for to ensure the best price. CTN recommends that tendering

⁷ <http://learnscope.flexiblelearning.net.au/learnscope/>

⁸ <http://www.maningridajetcentre.edu.au/blake.html>

systems be transparent, including any “in commercial confidences” that may inhibit full disclosures.

In regards to meeting the needs of Indigenous communication needs, the biggest risk we see is that Connect Australia as a whole suite of packages is that it will be difficult to remedy the under-investment in communications infrastructure that has disadvantaged Indigenous Australians up to now. A factor of this is the enormous difficulty for Indigenous communities have demonstrating their interest in services. It is also often a quantum leap, for communities whose telecommunications infrastructure might presently be a single payphone, to the understand what benefits high speed broadband could provide when they’ve had no exposure to it. For some communities broadband is such a technological advance compared to what’s currently available that it will affect perceived “demand”. It should also be recognised that demand for services will grow once they have actually have begun to be delivered and consumers have understood the benefits better.

Demand aggregation could skew the program projects away from what communities want to what the winner of the tender can give. Checks and balances including aggregated payments tied to milestones for successful tenders are imperative. Milestone reporting must be done by independent auditors and not be self-generated.

Other issues include:

Timetabling- if a successful aggregated tender has to deliver infrastructure or service to many communities, commercial decisions could be made that hinder projects being completed in the usual business time for such projects.

Personnel- Ensuring that personnel of successful tenders are of good character and have gone through any relative Aboriginal Land permit system that may apply to a particular area.

In our view, it is the responsibility of DCITA to actively inform communities about the opportunities the services that can be delivered under Connect Australia in order to effectively gauge demand. This could be done by seeking interested communities by directly advising community stakeholders (be they land councils, grass roots organisations, local media stations, local councils, etc) in an appropriate form outlining the key technologies they hope to fund- videoconferencing, broadband, community phones- and inviting them to nominate their interests and needs. Without this, BIA will be inherently flawed in that it will be set up to only meet the demand of those seeking to provide services, rather than meeting the needs of the people - which is the entire purpose of the program.

Funding

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?

The funding approach chosen may depend largely on the type of project given funding. We reiterate our earlier point that there will not be a one-size-fits-all answer to the projects that receive funding and the funding mechanisms will need to adapt to the project in order to ensure the desired outcomes for the community come first. Longer funding cycles, direct funding to community organisations and pooled funding initiatives are supported in the House of Representatives Standing Committee report into the capacity building of Indigenous communities.

Sustainability and Industry

- 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?

We think that there is great potential for some partnerships to be created, but we caution that businesses are likely to seek to look after their business needs first- they are not necessarily concerned with getting services to indigenous communities as their first priority. DCITA needs to be careful not to give priority to “partnerships” just because a commercial partner has been provided. Regard must be given to the quality of the proposal, and the contribution (including monetary amount) that is committed to a project. Again, sustainability and a focus on what’s best for the community needs to be at the centre of successful project proposals.

Successful corporate partnership models do exist in the Cape York area. CTN’s recent discussions with the Cape York Digital Network pointed to the amount of time that these relationships had taken to develop (5-6 years). This time frame must be taken into account when assisting the facilitation of such partnerships.

The use of partnership brokers, such as the Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships (IEP) is a useful mechanism to establish such relationships. Supporting organisations such

as IEP could ensure successful partnering between telecommunication and technology corporations and communities.

Whole of Government Approach

- 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?

A 'whole of Government' approach to Indigenous Affairs is only recent Government policy, and it is therefore premature to either wholly support or oppose its application to the Backing Indigenous Ability plan. CTN stresses that it is crucial that the feedback currently available on this approach is strongly taken into consideration in the development and execution of the plan.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's (HREOC) 2005 Social Justice Report⁹ identifies a number of areas of concern in the whole of Government approach and makes recommendations for its improvement. Specifically, the Report urges the Government to incorporate proper monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure accountability. In this regard CTN would like to highlight the principles supported by recommendation 7 of the House of Representatives Standing Committee report into the capacity building of Indigenous communities¹⁰ which states that Government should provide public reporting regimes including, reporting to the relevant Indigenous communities, and develop program benchmarks in terms relevant to Indigenous people.

The HREOC report also expresses concern over Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs), specifically the compliance of SRAs to human rights standards in relation to their negotiation and their content. CTN believes that indigenous peoples should not have to negotiate with the Government to receive the same basic telecommunication services that other Australians receive without negotiation, and as such the use of SRAs in the development and execution of this plan should be extremely limited or not used at all. SRA's are often coercive in nature and intent and we do not support

⁹ http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/sjreport05/index.html

¹⁰ <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/atsia/indigenouscommunities/report.htm>

any attempts to subject Indigenous peoples to unfair contracts in order to receive what they are entitled to.

Furthermore, HREOC is concerned over proper consultation and engagement with indigenous communities in the delivery of Government services, specifically the lack of representation at local, regional and national levels. CTN stresses that Indigenous people must participate in the determination of priorities, decision-making and delivery processes involved in the Backing Indigenous Ability Plan. Referring again to the House of Representatives Standing Committee Report, CTN believes that Government should create frameworks for service delivery that are familiar and acceptable to Indigenous people, and consultation and service delivery should therefore be flexible and aim to go through regional representative bodies that can link to local, as well as state and national levels.

We hope these comments are of use to you. Should you wish to discuss this response in more detail please contact myself or Sarah Wilson at the Consumers' Telecommunications Network on 02 9572 6007 or at ctn@ctn.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Teresa Corbin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Teresa Corbin
CTN Executive Director

This submission was prepared by Teresa Corbin, CTN Executive Director, Sarah Wilson, CTN Policy Advisor, Annie McCall, CTN Information Officer, and Ryan Sengara, CTN Project Officer. It has been approved out of session by the CTN Council.