

Contribution to the BACKING INDIGENOUS ABILITY Discussion Paper

by **Strong and Smart Incorporated**
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We wish to take this opportunity to respond to some of the ideas in the BIA Discussion Paper.

We welcome the initiatives and in general support the delivery strategies and approaches implicit and explicit through the paper. It is clear to all that a concerted effort and substantial resource allocation in the area of telecommunications and the new media is of major importance for our communities. It is also clear that innovative approaches to the introduction and upgrading of the technology, to training and to community interfaces have to be encouraged.

We would like to add our thoughts to the discussions.

Strong and Smart Incorporated and the Cherbourg Digital Project have worked in Cherbourg and Woorabinda bringing digital technology skills to school children and adults since 2002. We have used the Strong and Smart ideas - begun in practice at the Cherbourg State School - in our training and in production of digital products.

In our digital storytelling and video production we have seen that creativity, self-expression and confidence are the underlying elements in overcoming fear of and encouraging the sustained use of technology. Where the outcomes and goals are about telling a story, reflecting on one's life and community or simply having fun, the technology becomes a means to the end to be mastered and not a foreign object blocking the way.

Put in another way, our experience has shown us that the technology is best introduced and used in the context of the full range of activities in the community. Technology should be seen as part of the continuum – community, family, education, culture. To isolate the technology from the other activities and lifestyle choices in the community is a potentially critical error.

While banking and paying bills over the internet and the like are important services for all, we believe that these alone will not

promote community ownership or acceptance of the technology, nor develop the necessary skills and thus not sustain the technology over the medium to longer terms.

Where are these technologies most likely to be taken up, used, re-used and owned by the community?

- It is the internet, computer games, digital photography, digital video, digital music production, etc, where the community youth will connect.
- It is with archiving, storytelling and the cultural and family histories of Indigenous peoples that community (particularly the adults) will use and benefit from the technology.
- It is with the younger children being introduced to the technology in schools, wanting to extend their horizons and pursue their journeys in the modern world;
- Storytelling, artwork, music, educational products – managed and promoted in a culturally appropriate manner – will draw in the community.

We are of the opinion that this is an opportunity to promote the immense creative power of the culture. It is here that Creativity and Connectivity intersect and the children, the youth and the adults in the community will be encouraged and empowered.

We are very supportive of the ideas around digital archiving (we are currently partners in such a project with the Cherbourg Historical Precinct Group and the Winifred Fisher Indigenous Knowledge Centre). But, we believe, archiving is but one component of the larger picture. The key to community acceptance and ownership of this technology is by using it in programs that facilitate expression, create content, support exploration and innovation, connect to the peoples' cultural lives.

Telecommunications is not and cannot be distinct from arts, culture, historical works, education and all other cultural pursuits in the community. The sustainability of these programs, in large part, really depends on Backing Indigenous Abilities in the area of culture.

Note: Dr Chris Sarra is co-author of this paper with Mark Newman in his capacity as President of Strong and Smart Incorporated. It should be noted that while Dr Sarra also holds the position of Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Arts Board of the Australia Council, this paper is not reflective of that position nor that organisation.