



BACKING INDIGENOUS ABILITY

WARLPIRI MEDIA ASSOCIATION INC

BACKGROUND

Warlpiri Media Association Incorporated (WMA) was established over twenty years ago and is based in Yuendumu, a remote Aboriginal community located 300km north west of Alice Springs. WMA began operating in the early 1980's broadcasting its own locally produced television programs on a low power transmitter. Satellite transmission began in 1986, with the launch of the Aussat satellite and free-to-air arrived in Central Australia. Since then a deliberate effort has been made to represent Warlpiri society for audiences in Yuendumu and other Warlpiri speaking communities. WMA has a strong and long history of quality video production, including the hugely popular AFI (Australian Film Institute) Award winning documentary *Bush Mechanics* and the childrens' series *Manyu Wana*, amongst many others.

While our video productions have put WMA on the map nationally and internationally, it is our work in remote communities in the Tanami region which is the foundation of our current operations. We provide training and technical assistance to thirteen remote Indigenous communities and many outstations for their television, radio and in nine communities IT provision. WMA works with communities to produce appropriate media content for broadcast on our regional radio network (PAW Radio Network) or on ICTV, the Indigenous Community Television Channel broadcast through Imparja. We also produce important information campaigns on issues such as health and government services, video commissions and our own productions for a wider audience.

The inclusion of IT into all our services and the roll out of the PAW IT Training and Technical support project means that Warlpiri Media is well positioned to be able to respond to the questions and proposals put forward in this discussion paper.

OVERVIEW

Warlpiri Media Association Inc's view is that government needs to come from a position of knowledge (including extensive consultation) and clearly identified, shared principles in order to use this funding effectively to significantly improve communications and telecommunications in remote Indigenous communities in Australia.

Indigenous people need to be involved extensively in this process. It is not unreasonable to expect government agencies to meet with people in remote communities and their elected representatives to engage with the issue of telecommunications and communications.

However, government needs to revisit the role communications and telecommunications in contemporary culture. **It is our view that access to affordable communications and telecommunications should come under a Universal Service Obligation. Increased affordable bandwidth and mobile phone coverage** to all remote communities with 50 people or more would have a massive impact on the lives of people in remote Indigenous communities.

RESPONSE TO SELECTED QUESTIONS

IDENTIFIED NEEDS

Q1 What did TAPRIC and previous initiatives do well? Where did TAPRIC and previous initiatives fall short?

Please note, we are only able to comment on the Internet Access Program as this is the only program we received funding for.

a) TAPRIC, through the roll-out of two satellite internet services and associated hardware at subsidised rates made the internet accessible to people in remote communities.

b) Short falls

PROMOTION

Unfortunately, despite the goodwill of the program, there were significant shortfalls in terms of promoting any awareness of the program, for example during the first roll-out only two organizations in Yuendumu were aware of the program. Many communities were aware of the second roll-out, however there was very little publicity about the third roll-out until applications. TAPRIC could well have benefited by developing a communications strategy aimed at targeting people and organisations in remote communities.

That actual application process was also prohibitive to a lot of organizations and individuals.

TRAINING & SUPPORT

Many computers were installed in communities and outstations without any training or technical support in place. Consequently while these systems were used extensively in the initial period, long term usage declined once there were minor technical problems.

In addition there was no management plan in place for these systems. Government may well argue that it is up to communities to develop and implement management and support systems, however with most communities having difficulty sustaining basic service delivery of health, education, sanitation etc., it is unrealistic to expect 'someone' in the community to take on service, without appropriately support and infrastructure.

Q2 How can the design and delivery of Backing Indigenous Ability be optimised to achieve long term sustainable quality telecommunications solutions to Indigenous communities?

Long term quality telecommunications solutions can only be achieved through the development and implementation of national, regional and local Communications Strategies which takes into account a range of considerations such as:

- μ Nature of the use of technology, in particular portable technologies by Indigenous people in remote communities;
- μ Opportunities for the delivery of consistent, increased, affordable bandwidth to users in remote Indigenous communities;
- μ Sustainable management plans which would include housing for both staff and a facility;
- μ Technical Support & Training;
- μ Capacity for improved literacy and numeracy skills for users.

SHARED COMMUNITY PHONES

We understand that this refers to public phones.

Q3 Should the installation of community phones into Indigenous communities be regarded as a priority under Backing Indigenous Ability.

While the need for increased and improved telephony in Indigenous communities is a widely agreed priority, the reasons for the small number of community and homes phones to date needs to be identified.

In contrast the take-up of mobile phones for communities with CDMA access has been phenomenal. We would argue that all Indigenous communities could well do with more community phones, however perhaps the roll-out of mobile phone technology and increased bandwidth, which would allow low cost telephony through VOIP and mobile phones, would be a higher priority, and more effective.

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.

Depending on the familiarity of ICC Project Officers with the communities in the particular region and their relationships with individuals and organisations in the region, the ICC's may or may not be appropriate as regional agents. Either way is important for policy and decision makers to liaise directly with remote communities, possibly through the Community Councils or RIMOs (Remote Indigenous Media Organisations) and to allow the communities to identify their own needs. Bearing in mind that technological developments are not always easy to communicate, and a third party may be useful during such consultation.

Q5 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 applications process? What are the alternatives to using an application process?

It would seem obvious that rather than get side-tracked with applications etc, that under a USO, there should be some obligation by government to provide a public/ community phone per capita, if there is a low take-up of home phones and no mobile phone coverage. A figure may be that for every 50 people (5 houses) who do not have a home phone, then a community/public phone should be provided.

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.

Telstra has developed a metal telephone that is proving to be successful in remote communities. Evidently it would be useful to look at the Telstra experience of developing and installing community phones as a first port of call. An audit of telecommunications service provision in remote communities to date would no doubt provide essential information on future funding directions.

PUBLIC INTERNET ACCESS

Q7. Are hub communities the appropriate location for implementing public access facilities? If so, how best can hub communities be prioritised as appropriate locations for new Internet access.

Warlpiri Media Association considers hub communities as being part of a larger model of Internet public access. In the Tanami area Councils have with various degrees of success established at least one public access facility.

However as suggested in the preamble to this section of Discussion Paper they face challenges in providing the required training and in those cases where an existing LGANT IT support service.

The Warlpiri Media Association experience has been that a hub community can provide regular support to such communities for both training and technical support. A hub community generally has a larger skills base and resources to service outlying communities, however they are generally stretched in terms of resources.

Over time it would be expected that individuals in outlying communities will be able to develop skills sufficient to support other community members and with further time sufficient skills to provide front-line technical support.

The experience of desert communities is that people come to larger towns such as Yuendumu for family, social and cultural reasons with time fully occupied in such activities. Where people travel to towns for accessing services the chosen town tends to be a regional centre such as Alice Springs.

It needs also to be stated that the very premise of public access facilities is based on timely access to computer resources and the Internet. The desert communities that Warlpiri Media Association serves are at a minimum of 1 hour distance over often impassable roads given seasonal conditions. Typically these communities are a ½ day drive distance. Providing computer services at a hub community alone is a significant barrier to 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?

Organisations with a strong regional development presence and strong links to communities are ideally the best placed to identify community needs for public access. Such organisations tend to have an existing network of contacts and a regular schedule of consultations and work with communities. Given the nature of communities needing access to computer and Internet facilities, joint development of an application is an important part of the process enabling local needs to be complemented by regional networks.

Q9. Is it appropriate to use an application process for communities to identify a need to Internet facilities? If so, what should be the key elements of the application process? What alternative could be used?

All communities need Internet access and thus it is interesting to have this question asked. In a sense the answer is No – each small community should be given gain at least one publicly funded Internet connected computer with a funded one year ISP service at an appropriate download rate.

However it is important that this provision is not via “a drop in delivery, set-up and leave process”. Rather there needs to be a community awareness and start-up training program attached to the provision ideally provided through a funded regional organisation that has a continuing relationship with the community.

Q10. Once implemented in the community, how best can the use of the facilities be encouraged? What arrangements such as Shared Responsibility Agreements or other local or regional agreements could be used for communities to support the installation and maintenance of Internet services?

This question appears to be based on the pervasive model of separating technology provision from training and community development. Provision of technology must be based on a fuller model of technology skills development that sees skills development, technology provision and community planning as the three key components of increasing the penetration of new technologies into Aboriginal communities. People need a reason to use technology; a computer and Internet access in and of themselves are of no use unless there is a reason to use.

Regional programs promoting and working with communities on the effectiveness of technology for various activities are badly needed. For example CDEP payments and other forms of payment by Government are slowly moving to direct deposit arrangements. An effective approach to support technology take-up in remote communities would be for regional benefits providers to form partnerships and linkages with regional bodies such as Warlpiri Media Association so as to support people train in online banking and basic computer use.

Q11. Are there any innovative models of delivering Internet access to Indigenous communities?

An innovation would be for a communications company to provide affordable ADSL to communities.

VIDEOCONFERENCING

Q12 Are PC based web cam 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 community is appropriate to receive videoconferencing facilities in the context of sustainability?

Low-level videoconferencing capability through software applications such as Skype and MSN Messenger has in a sense overtaken this question. PC based web cam videoconferencing is already here and are very suitable for Indigenous communities where bandwidth of a minimum of 128KB is available.

Dedicated videoconferencing facilities using 256KB and above bandwidth (IP or ISDN) based continue to present significant costs above the ability of small community facilities to sustain. The security protocols required by Health and Corrective Services type government agencies generally preclude community facilities from providing services to the very groups that could best support financial viability of community based dedicated videoconferencing facilities.

The increasing capability of mobile phone technology to provide videoconferencing for individuals will further erode the market for videoconferencing.

Q13 What factors are contributing to the low use of videoconferencing facilities in many communities?

COST

- μ Low penetration of videoconferencing into many towns – that is there are no facilities at the other end
- μ Telephone conferencing is easier
- μ Security requirements of health and corrective service videoconferencing

Q14. Should ICCs, regional agents or other assistance be used to identify communities with 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?

Low level web cam based facilities are simply best treated as another peripheral option.

Robust videoconferencing facilities (256KB and above using IP or ISDN protocols) are best placed in the government agencies (local, Territory/State, or Commonwealth) that have an ongoing need for videoconferencing. The application process for a community needs to be a negotiated arrangement where community access to government agency facilities, under acceptable conditions, is available to communities. Funding in these circumstances could flow to such agencies so as to provide for administrative costs involved with managing community access. In such circumstances given that the lease costs of the communications in most cases are already covered within the costs of the organisation then only the time charge costs may be passed onto the individual.

Establishment of demand for videoconferencing services is essential with demand not only assessed at the near end but also at the far end.

Q17. What arrangements such as Shared Responsibility Agreements or other local or regional agreements could be used for communities to support the installation and maintenance of videoconferencing facilities? What form should these take?

Given the position stated above that any dedicated high level videoconferencing facilities should be placed in existing government services then community agreements as such are not applicable.

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 areas of telecommunications? How else could the training and skills development needs of communities be identified?

We take this section to mean the development of computer and Internet skills sufficient to justify the provision of improved telecommunications into communities.

From where Warlpiri Media Association is situated it is clear that there is simply a yawning skills gap in basic IT literacy. To ask a question about skills gaps is to ignore the reality of desert communities where even basic IT literacy is totally underdeveloped. It is also important to state that basic IT literacy cannot be separated from English literacy and numeracy given the dominance of English in software application menus and on the Internet.

Furthermore skills development needs to be clearly linked to the needs of the people receiving training. It is critical that training be linked to community wide social and economic development plans so that training is not isolated from the overall development of the community.

Using a place management approach to developing a training strategy is suggested as an alternative approach to the development needs of communities.

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?

The basics of using a computer

- μ Email
- μ Internet
- μ Basic word processing
- μ Listening to digital music
- μ Browsing slide shows of photos
- μ Online banking

For the areas in which Warlpiri Media Association works one-on-one training is the preferred model with training needs led by the learner. Whilst this extends training over a period it provides for continuous contact with learners and continuing adjustment of training as needs and interest change.

School age children and young adults on the other hand are more comfortable with group learning situations and skilled guidance based on working from the interests of the learners presenting from training.

There are also cultural issues involved with training and the availability of both men and women trainers is an important factor in training success.

Our experience has been that training in communities by people is the preferred model rather than taking people out of communities for training. Our experience also has been that people are not attracted to enrolling in formal computer courses.

Q20. Is a grants program an appropriate way to fund communities to deliver training and skills development sessions within accountability guidelines?

Yes. The communities Warlpiri Media Association works with do not have the financial capacity to pay on a user pays basis for the capital, human and recurrent costs involved in delivering a training program.

Q21 How could communities support appropriate training and skills development programs?

This question is partly addressed under Q18 above, More specifically the provision of in-kind support such as the utilisation of spare accommodation (if any!) could be useful forms of support.

Q22 What obstacles exist for the successful delivery of training and skills development?

- μ English literacy and numeracy
- μ Low number of language speakers with IT and training skills sufficient to deliver computer a training program

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

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?

Role models are important for providing positive messages about any new technology and it is presumed that it is in this context that local community champions are proposed. However the separation of a local technology community champion from a broader concept of a community development champion is not acceptable.

At a broader level a promotional campaign – short, slick and entertaining – on Indigenous TV and radio may pay more dividends for raising interest in technology which could flow into community development planning for training provision.

Q24 What roles could community champions play a role within communities?

Working within a place management framework to support planning for training and technology infrastructure as underpinning components of a wider community development program.

The ICCs could have a role in organising regional showcases of IT training and telecommunications with the goal of catalysing engagement by community organisations in technology initiatives,

Q25 How could community champions be identified within regions and communities?

The role should be a paid role based regionally.

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?

See question 25.

Culturally Appropriate Content

Q27 What models of delivering increased culturally appropriate content to the Internet could be introduced under Backing Indigenous Ability?

Some clarification is needed here on what is understood as “increased culturally appropriate content” within the context of the Internet. Aboriginal people, like people around the world access and will continue to access the Internet where possible for a number of reasons: one of these reasons may be to affirm their language and cultural identity, but there are also a range of other reasons.

The paper here should address ways to encourage the development of content for the Internet that is of interest and relevant to Aboriginal people. The most useful model would be one based around training and support as a starting point. Once Aboriginal people in remote communities have a better understanding of the scope of the Internet, consultation should take place as to the development of appropriate content.

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?

Ultimately the questions and decision of the appropriateness of content should be remain with Aboriginal people and communities. Government are

not in a position to make decisions on this matter. A funding model which would support Aboriginal people through training and development, possibly through a third party agency that has direct connection with the community might be one option.

Q29 Will the ability to digitally record and archive culturally significant material encourage usage of Internet services.

It is highly unlikely that the Internet would be used as a platform for culturally significant material other than as a database of keeping places and relevant cultural institutions. In our experience the most important cultural material needs to be accessed offline.

Q30 What funding approach could be adopted to encourage the recording and archiving of culturally significant material under Backing Indigenous Ability.

There has been a significant amount of recording and archiving of culturally significant material.

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?

The current experience of Warlpiri Media Association is that a grass roots based person is an effective method of aggregating demand. However the outcomes of any demand aggregation in remote communities remains entirely dependent on Telstra terrestrial technologies and any satellite technologies as may be available.

It remains a continuing issue that the commercial realities of telecommunications provision are such that small remote communities, such as those in the desert communities served by Warlpiri Media Association, are not able to provide the numbers of sign-ups needed for a ROI. A Universal Service Obligation remains the lifeline of desert communities.

For those higher bandwidth services able to be delivered into remote communities, affordability is one of the key factors going against take up, The lack of an unlimited ISP plan through satellite creates huge costs for any facility offering a basic public access Internet service.

The best demand aggregation service for communities is simply to provide a minimum of terrestrial delivered 128KB bandwidth to the front door so as to enable the provision of unlimited ISP plans, This will in itself drive demand.

Q32 What other initiatives could assist in demand aggregation?

See above.

Funding

Q37 How should funding be provided under Backing Indigenous Ability?

In relation to the yawning gap in computer skills WMA consider that direct funding of those service providers with direct and continuous relationships with communities is a preferred model. A set of criteria would need to be developed to ensure that selected providers have:

1. Requisite skills and infrastructure to deliver skills training
2. Have management structures in place to ensure accountability for funding received
3. Have existing in-situ arrangements in place for provision of skills training
4. Are an acceptable organisation for the selected communities as shown through evidence of consultation and support

For program areas that address more complex implementations such as content development a competitive grants program may be more suitable. Similarly for infrastructure programs strategic funding as guided by local, regional, Territory/State and Commonwealth government bodies is desirable.

Industry

Q43 How can telecommunications services delivered to Indigenous communities become operationally and financially sustainable and remain sustainable beyond the life of the package?

It is unrealistic to expect telecommunications services, including associated training and public access facilities to become sustainable in anything other than a very long term period even where communities have 3,000 or more community members. There are not the markets to support these services. It must be argued that the provision of telecommunication delivered services is a basic service and right that is not even questioned for metropolitan areas.

As governments move towards increasing delivery of services through the Internet payments to public access centres at a proper rate may be one source of funding that matches a service outcome to funding.

Q46 In what ways can local Indigenous Australians assist in service delivery of telecommunications to Indigenous communities?

The presence of Aboriginal Australians as trainers and in positions such as Essential Services Officers (ESOs) is a powerful motivator for engagement in telecommunications based services. Ways to achieve this may require investigation of good practice through places such as Jumbunna at UTS into developing the level of skills required to take on these positions.

An Integrated Approach

Q 48 What elements of Backing Indigenous Ability should or should not be formalised through agreements with communities to share responsibilities and ensure appropriate service delivery?

In referring back to our overall position, a USO for telecommunications and communications would discount the need for a Shared Responsibility Arrangement. It is also highly unlikely that without providing some access in the first instance to improved communications and telecommunications, that the scope of this technology would be readily understood by people in remote Indigenous communities, in for an SRA to have any chance of success.

Using Existing Infrastructure

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?

An audit of infrastructure and services delivered to date would be extremely useful in informing future telecommunications funding.

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