
# REGIONAL INTERNET AUSTRALIA PTY LTD
# BACKING INDIGENOUS ABILITY
# SUBMISSION

**RE:**

# BACKING INDIGENOUS ABILITY
# DELIVERING A COMPREHENSIVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS PACKAGE
# IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

DISCUSSION PAPER
March 2006

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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

Through Backing Indigenous Ability the Australian Government is seeking to address deficiencies in telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Indigenous communities1 and build on the success of previous programs, in particular the Telecommunications Action Plan for Remote Indigenous Communities (TAPRIC).
While the $89.9 million program covers both broadcasting and telecommunications, this discussion paper deals with issues relating to the $36.6 million telecommunications component.

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

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This Submission is made up of questions posed in the Backing Indigenous Ability Discussion Paper and responses to those questions.

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

The TAPRIC report found that the greatest unmet telecommunications need in remote Indigenous communities is access to telephone services. It did not look at the overall Telecommunication and Information Technology needs of indigenous people.

TAPRIC did not focus on unmet needs of indigenous people in relation to technology.

There is a major shortfall in ability to take up of broadband technology telecommunications opportunities. Because of a lack of infrastructure, which is required to speed up broadband connections across vast distances. This is amplified in the indigenous community.

Up skilling Indigenous People into the computer age is a big task, those that are technologically minded are excluded from participating because there are very few strategies that embrace indigenous participation.

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

Indigenous participation in the design of a program to address their issues and enhance the delivery of telecommunications technology to indigenous communities is integral to the success of this strategy. Long Term sustainable quality telecommunications solutions for Indigenous communities is achievable with the empowering the Indigenous People to drive and participate in the delivery of quality telecommunications solutions for Indigenous communities. Strategies should be developed at all levels to facilitate the uptake of telecommunications technology.

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

Installation of an Optic fibre grid which can facilitate improved telecommunications services in Indigenous communities by addressing the need for telephones, Internet and videoconferencing, encouragement and aggregation of demand, online content and training.

There are innovative ways to do this, but it requires cooperation at all levels of government to facilitate a program that can work.

Q4 Is it appropriate to use regional agents and ICC's 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?

It is appropriate for regional agents and ICC's in the Identification and Application process only.

Priority Communities have been identified in the TAPRIC report.

Access to high speed Broadband. – which then facilitates improved telecommunications services in Indigenous communities by addressing the need for telephones, Internet and videoconferencing, encouragement of online content and training.

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?

No TAPRIC census enough.
Need Qualitative a Quantitative data on capacity of the infrastructure to accommodate the program which will help to improve telecommunications services in Indigenous communities by addressing the need for telephones, Internet and videoconferencing, encouragement and aggregation of demand, online content and training.

The Government needs to steer indigenous telecommunications to new technology.

Making high speed broadband available to indigenous communities is important.
Relying on outdated phone systems and infrastructure to meet the telecommunications needs of the indigenous community is not acceptable.

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?

No TAPRIC census enough.
Facilitate Technology fast broadband – Optic Fibre
– Satellite
– LAN etc.

Analyse the current telecommunications infrastructure and either plan for a better service.
There are so many different types of technology already deployed, which don't make the grade as far as delivering infrastructure that meets the needs of communities out there.

There is a need for an Indigenous Telecommunications Plan.
This would analyse what is out there and plan for future infrastructure in remote communities.

Through this process infrastructure costs could be determined.
Prioritising target communities.
Strategise the deployment, so that all levels can maximise the outcomes for the funding available.
Formulate programs to maximise the uptake of the technology.

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?
Hub Communities are appropriate for public access.

To maximise uptake of the technology it is better to have infrastructure available to all in the community.

With institutions within the community utilising the infrastructure for their programs and services.
Utilising:

A spheres of influence – Model
National;
State;
Local;
Community;
Interest Groups
Individuals

Q8 Should ICC's, 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?

Yes Identification and Application only.
Issues Based – Schools, Health, Commerce, Interest groups, Individuals etc.

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?

Yes Identification and Application only.
Access to Infrastructure;

Tailored Community Infrastructure Plans to address shortfall in capability to access technology based infrastructure.

Technology needs to be accessible to everyone in the community that wishes to use it.

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?

SRA's might be a part of the arrangements, but I would think it would be more the case that each community would embrace facilities that are available to them. Once Communities are aware of the technology and its uses, they would be looking to use it voluntarily.
The Problem will be getting institutions to utilise the technology.
Corrective Services – Community Video Conferencing with isolated communities.
Health – Isolated Consultations etc.

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

There are indigenous groups throughout the developed world who have delivered internet access programs for their communities in some innovative ways.

I believe a desktop study of what has worked elsewhere and working out what will work in Australia.

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?

Yes, PC-based webcam videoconferencing facilities are appropriate for Indigenous community needs. No need to set any parameters, get the technology into the communities and households which are enabled then they will be able to use the technology. Dedicated facilities can be placed with agencies that need dedicated facilities. Every household that has a computer is an appropriate place.

Sustainability ?
It will be like a phone once enabled people will use it.

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

Lack of access to Broadband Infrastructure which enables the technology to accommodate videoconferencing, training etc.
The triple play solution is solved with a high speed broadband connection.

Q14 Should ICC's, 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?

Remote communities Yes.
Mainstream communities No.

Develop a Videoconferencing strategy.

Identify communities that can be enabled quickly.

Strategise how to do the more isolated communities ASAP.
Most Communities have computers, PC based webcams are cheap enough, all they need then is access to fast broadband infrastructure.

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?

Set up facilities Utilising Spheres of influence – Model
National;
State;
Local;
Community;
Interest Groups
Individuals

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?

No need to identify appropriate application processes.
Key element is access to fast broadband connection.
Demand could be a criteria for establishing infrastructure.

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?

No need for SRA or other local or regional agreements.
Web Cam facilities are able to be connected to any computer with a web cam. Plug into USB, program and use.

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?

Skills gaps will always be where there is little access to the equipment and familiarity with the equipment is non existent.
Once equipment and infrastructure is deployed.
Computer lessons on its usage is accommodated.
Familiarity with the equipment will promote a uptake of the technology.

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?

Training Video Lessons with Indigenous Actors which can be distributed with the new technology.
Animations.

Interest Groups facilitating technology discussions.
Online Interest Forums – Economic, Health, Schools, Issues based forums.
Online Assistance.
Online Communities established.
Referrals as they train.

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

Yes with an National Indigenous Committee facilitating and making decisions on spending and programs.

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

Through existing educational programs.
Tailored programs via agencies.
Self help programs, interest groups, which will stimulate use via interest in a range of issues.
Champion in each region or community promoting training and development.

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

Access to infrastructure and equipment.

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?

Yes a need for champions – also a need for Forums and interest groups to form to discuss and promote usage.

Q24 What roles could community champions play within communities?

Promote interest groups and forums.

Stimulate interest and let if grow on its own.

Role models.

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

Promote interest groups and forums.
Picking the right person to be the champion from these groups.

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?

Remunerate where necessary.
Interest groups and forums are happening.

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

Promote interest groups and forums.
They will develop codes and processes which will self regulate the sector.

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?

Internet forums and groups will sort out for themselves the structures.
The sector will self regulate, with some abiding with established protocols and those that don’t.

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

No it wont encourage usage, but will be a added service which is enabled by the technology.

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

Research undertaken by AIATSIS informs policy development in priority areas such as Native Title, health, intellectual property and Indigenous knowledge systems. Other key areas of research include:
• Language maintenance;
• Governance;
• Education;
• Natural resources management;
• Family and community histories;
• Cultural transmission and transformation; and
• Archaeology and cultural heritage management.

AIATSIS could also digitise material which can be accessed by Indigenous Groups with protocols for access negotiated and implemented.

Q31 Who should facilitate demand aggregation within communities and regions? Is it appropriate that ICC's, regional agents and community champions assist with demand aggregation or should alternative models be implemented (for example using a demand aggregation broker)?

Demand Aggregation is a process of identifying demand and meeting that demand when the economics of delivering allows.
Most communities will never fulfil the requirements to finance the broadband infrastructure in their own right.

But backed by government funding programs that are able to deliver broadband infrastructure, negotiate with carriers to strategically deliver broadband infrastructure.

This can be facilitated via COAG programs.

With communities, local, state and federal governments working together to plan and implement broadband infrastructure.

A community Champion might bring all the parties together for negotiations, application and implementation talks.

Q32 What other initiatives could assist in demand aggregation?

Programs that allow a range of providers to access the infrastructure. Competition is good.

Q33 What innovative and/or flexible approaches are being used elsewhere that could be used to deliver elements of Backing Indigenous Ability?

Undertake desktop study and identify strategies and have recommendations about what would work in Australia for Indigenous communities.

Q34 What technologies offer greater flexibility and why?

There are a range of technologies, all of which have there advantages and disadvantages. It would be best to tailor broadband infrastructure to the community which is being targeted. This would include a study into what already exists and what is required to bring infrastructure up to the standard required. Tailored community telecommunications infrastructure plans.

Q35 What are some innovative means of service delivery to provide telecommunications improvements to Indigenous communities?

Tailored packages.

Q36 What are some innovative approaches that could be used to fund communities in need under the Backing Indigenous Ability program?

Economic, Health, Governance, Training, Community and Social Programs, etc.

All of which have their own funding which could contribute and assist the communities they are trying to service.

Q37 How should funding be provided under Backing Indigenous Ability?

Target Providers who know what they are doing and get them to facilitate the program. Ones with indigenous program and community knowledge. Keep most of the money with one or two providers whom show the most understanding of the Indigenous Community and the processes to engage and facilitate an action plan which is relevant to the communities that the Backing Indigenous Ability is trying to deliver to.

A piecemeal uncoordinated approach will deliver little and Indigenous People will miss out on a valuable opportunity.

Q38 What type(s) of funding provision best suit each program element?

The majority of funding available should go towards tailoring plans on how to get fast broadband infrastructure to the communities.

The communities will purchase personal computers and hardware necessary to meet their needs.

Q39 Should a mix of funding approaches be used?

Yes a mix of funding approaches should be used, whilst identifying funding and programs which could benefit in the long run.
These programs should invest in the development and funding of the infrastructure required to facilitate their programs.
E.g. Health, community and social programs.

Training should happen and be funded via training bodies.
Health Programs via Health programs
Corrective Services via Corrective Services
And so on.

Q40 How can communities be assisted to develop grants applications so as to compete on a more equal basis for funding?

Funding should be targeted and infrastructure be targeted by participation in a range of programs.

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

Promote participation in a range of forums and online events.

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

Online forums and information sessions.
Online material.

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

Services delivered to Indigenous communities can become operationally and financially sustainable.

Broadband costs over time will go down as long as there is good competition between providers.

The technologies enable cost savings.
VOIP
Shopping online.
Communication via video conferencing will go down.
ECommerce
Forums
Communication and information exchange.

Q44 What innovative and flexible approaches could be used by communities to aid in the sustainability of telecommunications technology?

Access to the technology and the benefits that flow from using the technology.
Available to all.

Q45 How could telecommunications industry participants be encouraged to form partnerships with Indigenous communities? What form might these arrangements take?

Via the following methods:
Joint Ventures;
Ecommerce Strategies;
Health Strategies;
Tourism Strategies;
And other Online Strategies which enhance culture, lifestyle and well being.

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

Training in a range of vocations that implement and support the telecommunications industry.

Q47 How should Backing Indigenous Ability use arrangements such as Shared Responsibility Agreements to facilitate arrangements with communities?

Let communities engage on their own.

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?

Only those based around social programs.
Health etc.

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?

No the use of Regional Partnership Agreements will not work, what is needed is infrastructure and the programs will facilitate themselves once the infrastructure is in place.

Indigenous Communities don't know what benefits will be derived from participation in the Connect Australia package until they can see tangible outcomes.

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?

It can't, the old infrastructure is old infrastructure.

If backing indigenous ability is about the future and the future has fast broadband which enables a range of services and telecommunications options to happen.
It also facilitates access to a range of social, services and economic opportunities.

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

The Indigenous Community and telecommunication companies parties that can make a difference.

Q52 How best can Backing Indigenous Ability link in with the other elements of Connect Australia to ensure an efficient and effective delivery of telecommunications into Indigenous communities?

Online Communities.
Online forums and information pages.
BLOGS etc.

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

By uptake of the technology and the difference it make to the lives of indigenous people.