

BACKING INDIGENOUS ABILITY

Response by Aston House Consulting Services

Aston House Consulting Services (AHCS) has worked with the Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation through its Cape York Digital Network (CYDN) project which completed (in 2004) the rollout of computer, video conferencing and internet facilities to 16 communities in Cape York was completed. Aston House Consulting Services also has an involvement in the Mapoon TAPRIC project to deliver a broadband backbone in the community and provide services under a trial project. Contact with indigenous people, organisations and communities have been far reaching over a 4 year period.

- 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?

Q1 response:

AHCS comments are related to its experience in partnering with Mapoon Council for the CPDP. There are a number of areas that have been identified that TARPIC might address, these being:

- Better communication on the progress of an application
- Improved timeliness in decision making
- Engagement and consultation with applicants throughout the process
- Leadership with respect to industry development that directly affect proposals and programs.

Q2 response:

There needs to be a recognition that the culture and history of indigenous people with respect to differences in approaches and application to modern communication technologies and the management of those services than that experienced by mainstream Australian. This in turn means that the design and delivery of programs such as BIA can not be readily optimised towards sustainability in the short term. In addition, applying principles that might be easily accepted under Broadband Connect and Clever Network programs, are likely to fail if applied to BIA guidelines and approaches.

Sustainability requires mass usage and acceptance of telephone and internet services in indigenous communities. These two key sustainability criteria are unlikely to occur in low social economic areas without long term programs. Programs that focus on telecommunications programs in isolation and do not address economic sustainability in the communities will not produce maximum outcomes. In reality it is likely that they will instead produce piecemeal solution that lack sustainability and/or realisable community benefits.

The government might consider TAPRIC or its replacement consists of a representative advisory body with appropriate membership from industry, community, regional bodies and NBSIG. This

advisory body should have an active involvement in decision relating to funds disbursement and priorities.

The segregation of the broadcast component from this BIA discussion paper is disappointing given the synergies readily apparent between circulation of content through electronic medium to boost the richness of community radio and the development of communications structures in indigenous communities which this discussion paper seek to address. Perpetuating a silo mentality towards complex issues should be avoided. For instance the economic welfare of communities is linked to jobs, employability, education, business incubator programs and health (to name a few) and telecommunications service must be viewed as an enabler towards greater rewards not an isolated element that can stand alone without linkages to other applications.

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

Q3 response:

The government should avoid the trap of isolating voice service at the expense of more holistic solutions that embrace the conversion of voice and data. To do so would potentially reduce the opportunity for indigenous communities to gain the advantage of new internet based voice services (offered by Skype, engine, yahoo etc) and the financial advantage VoIP is expected to offer. The lack of active competitive voice services in indigenous communities could be addressed through these new technologies whilst at the same time providing opportunities to address other service gaps (e.g technology literacy capability to enhance experiences such as online buying)

Q4 response:

DCITA could take the feedback provided by regional agents and ICC's to determine priority. ICC may need to engage assistance from other regional bodies that have experience in the ICT field and/or proven relationships with communities in the use and promotion of ICT usage.

Q5 response:

Methods DCITA might consider are:

- Application process
- Targeted funding

- Priority funding

DCITA should consider in any application process the structure and level of support in any region or community. The applicant or recipient of funding should be able to address representative community support through:

- A committee that demonstrates representative membership
- Awareness to the proposal
- An assessment procedure
- An implementation phase consistent with the size and shape of the proposal.

Q6 response:

The community phone (defined at DCITA web site http://www.dcita.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/32720/Factsheet_CommunityPhones.pdf) provides for 1 public access phone per 40 -50 people and up to 5 per community. There are other benefits related to call plans.

DCITA should be considering other options to increase phone penetration such as Community owned (and operated) telephone/Internet/Data facility.

Home phone ownership must address issues of credit management, budgeting, multiple family residencies in a single home and low income households. Programs such as the Family Income Management (FIM) are geared to assisting in the operation and education of budget principles. FIM is a good example of the previous reference to a silo approach to program design. That is, without education on managing phone bills and payment, simply creating new telephone connections is unlikely to maximise the longer term benefits of government expenditure.

There is unlikely to be competition from suppliers to provide phone facilities so a tender process to provide phones is not a realistic option. The best option may be to have several solutions that address specific situations and allow the community to demonstrate how that solution will meet their need AND how the community will support continued connection of the service.

- 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?

Q7 response:

Hub communities may be an appropriate approach but this needs to be tested through pilot implementation.

A number of principles could be established to prioritise communities seeking internet facilities. Examples include:

- The community's previous history in implementing and supporting programs that drive outcomes consistent with that expected in providing such facilities. A simple approach is, what is the "can do" culture in the community;
- The leadership within the community to rally support and resources for new initiatives;
- Does the community have champions who work through adversity and create real improvements in their community? What example can be cited?

The cydn hub model is an example of the community hub and a regional hub where delivery mechanisms have proved effective.

Q8 response:

Same concepts as per Question 4 should be applied.

Q9 response:

The concepts described in Question 7 and Question 5 should be applied.

Q10 response:

Use of the facilities can be encouraged by linking usage to jobs and community projects so that it becomes an integral tool for community advancement.

The SRA process is only part of the solution. The commitment of government services in a demand aggregation model would lead to more economic and sustainable outcomes.

Q11 response:

DCITA should note the innovative approach CYDN has developed to the issue of internet access (and associated services) to remote Cape York communities.

CYDN is providing fast, secure and reliable internet and helpdesk services to remote communities, from a base in Cairns. The innovative part is that it is a centralised model, where all communities use the same private (and therefore secure) method to link back to the main office in Cairns. Therefore there is only one 'in point' to the network to control and monitor network performance and issues such as security. It has network model similar to corporate networks. This model can be expanded to other (non Cape York) communities so that economies of scale are achieved and improved approached developed.

More information can be found at www.cydn.com.au

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

Q12 response:

The location of the internet connection contributes to the privacy and security of a videoconference service. For instance the cydn facilities are often in community common areas that can be unsuitable for certain technologies. Over time technologies and adoption are likely to change therefore no single “winner” solution is apparent.

However our experience does indicate that the solution must be capable of meeting multiple uses. For example the use by government for services such as TAFE training via videoconference or community meeting with ICC/DEWR (etc) would need to meet technology implementations by these organisations. There is no indication of widespread adoption of webcam technology in government agencies.

Q13 response:

Add to this the general lower quality of digital services by carriers available to remote areas as compared to metropolitan areas, this also can add to the frustration of the participants. (eg. calls dropping due to radio bearer faults etc).

The government funding of duplicate videoconference services in communities also contributes to low acceptance. For example Queensland Health gained government funds to install videoconference facilities in communities where cydn had already installed (with the assistance of DCITA funding) industry standard videoconference facilities. Duplication contributes to uneconomic services, an inability to fund upgrades, differential usage costs (from zero cost to

commercially sustainable costs) and lower acceptance of the “virtual meeting” experience through lack of support and user training.

Q14 response:

As opposed to phones, the question of whether or not a community has a public video conferencing facility could be answered easily by the ICC/regional agent or local council.

If there was no existing facility, the local council could use a simple and short application process. DCITA could then work with the ICC/regional agents to investigate the merits of any application.

Perhaps it would be appropriate that any request for a video conferencing service to be placed in a community that the local council or government departments agree to a fixed fee-for-service arrangement to actually use the service, therefore increasing the likelihood of sustainable service delivery.

Agencies such as Centerlink are not effectively using this type of technology, instead preferring to travel. Better allocation and use of government resources (cost and resource use) would be obtained through government committing to use this technology.

Q15 response:

As previously advocated the government must mandate the use of videoconferencing for the management and operational requirements and delivery of government services into the community. For example a percentage of travel budget could be reallocated for video conference, programs could have inbuilt videoconference usage (e.g legal aid, new Councillor education, community education of new laws or community consultation). The Queensland government encourages videoconferencing to replace travel. Balkanu has not experienced additional videoconference demand and it is believed that without reporting measures and high level management usage and commitment whilst the intention is admirable but the scheme will not achieve its designed aims.

See comments in Question 14. It should be a government KPIs to use the technology for productivity improvements.

Q16 response:

The same principles as described for voice and internet should be applied.

Q17 response:

All three levels of government should undertake a formal commitment to place their usage in a demand aggregation type model. An agreement describing the undertakings and financial liability must be signed prior to the grant of funds. This approach may address the sustainability issue.

The recent letters to The Australian typifies community perceptions of continuous public servant travel to communities are the associated waste.

“IMAGINE a town where at night there are no shops open, no cinema or other entertainment options, no sports clubs, gymnasiums or skate parks – nothing for the kids to do. This is Lockhart River, an Aboriginal community on Cape York.

Recently, some community volunteers opened the public library at night for a two-week trial. The result was an overwhelming success, with 30 to 40 young people visiting each night between 5pm-9pm and about 10 inside at any one time. The State Library of Queensland has been extremely supportive of our library and has just replaced the entire collection.

The library is currently managed part-time by a community development officer, but we have no funds to pay for a librarian. If the well-meaning public servants who come to Lockhart River for meetings (mainly with other white people) reduced their visits by half and did that work by phone, about \$100,000 could be saved annually. This would easily cover the cost of staffing the library for 12 hours each day.

It is just absurd that, in the current climate of concern for Aboriginal kids, we are unable to fund a simple practical alternative to having them wandering, unsupervised, around the streets at night.
Rod Cordell Lockhart River, Qld”

- 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?

Q18 response:

Skills gaps are but one aspect that needs identifying. Equally is the requirement to practice the acquired skill through workplace participation. Training without reference to jobs placement is unlikely to maximise the outcome of the program. It is recognised that some training (e.g. basic computer literacy) will not produce an economic benefit. However economic advancement through training should be a priority and therefore the necessity for linkage to other government programs that lead to jobs, jobs jobs.

Q19 response:

The level and variety of work with a direct relationship to telecommunications (e.g. voice maintenance, data networking, IT maintenance) to support a full time job and competent role is not applicable to most indigenous communities. The better way to approach the issue is to identify persons with an aptitude and “willingness” to undertake training and advancement. Then implement appropriate and sufficiently supported programs to train these persons AND provide

jobs. This is a long term proposition! Any attempt to fast track the processes to achieve short term statistical results is unlikely to succeed.

Apprenticing these persons to and organisation like cydn would increase the probability of success and expose the “apprentice” to a rich variety of technical equipment and work activity.

Q20 response:

Communities lack the skills and mix of capacity to deliver such programs as suggested so its unlikely to be a commonsense approach. It would be better to identify appropriate organisations sponsored by the community to deliver the program. The level of funding in remote programs is the key success. The program would need to address numerous factors, no the least being the need for one-on-training, greater training times, multiple training sessions over a defined period, not just a single session, mentor linkages and the increased costs.

Q21 response:

See answers to previous questions!

Q22 response:

One area the government might consider is creation of service delivery hubs in larger communities that in themselves will lead to employment, training and skills development in the community. For instance, the establishment of a call centre in a larger community (800-2000 population) to delivery government services (such as homework help line, domestic violence support, substance abuse advice, government regulation - car registration, tax or interpretation services) would create an economic benefit for the community. The government would be bringing service delivery closer to the point of need and community members would experience first hand the relationship between up skilling and employment.

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?

Q24 What roles could community champions play within communities?

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

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?

Q23 response:

Absolutely. Our experience is that without

- a community champion,
- leadership and
- a “can do” attitude

projects fail.

Community size is irrelevant. It is the ability of the three factors above which lead to the the project’s success. Community support follows above factors (the champion being one factor) not the other way round.

Q24 response:

It’s an imbedded element due to normal processes. That is, they are integral to functioning and progressive communities. Communities without strong champions and leadership are unlikely to be progressive and hence benefit from BIA initiatives.

Q25 response:

They would most likely to be:

- very active in improving community life and standards
- prepared to generate support
- recognised and respected within the community
- has a history of achievement
- believes in the beneficial effects of ICT to community members
- prepared to lead by example
- has experienced the advantages of applications – online buying, job opportunities etc

Examples of functions they might occupy in the community are; library, elected Council member, Council administration officer, independent business operator, resources officer.

Q26 response:

Monitoring and assessment should be negotiated prior to the beginning of the project and must be specific to each community. Setting absolute criteria such as number of attendees to a course is unlikely to achieve sustainable and progressive results. It is better to link training to jobs and other government programs (DEST, DET, apprenticeships, school based training, etc).

Best to engage via ICC or other peak bodies.

- 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?

Q27 response:

Deliver a training project with an IT outcome. We suggest the Traditional Knowledge Recording project (www.tkrp.com.au) as a good example.

Must recognise that some cultural content is restricted and the Internet may not be an appropriate distribution method.

Q28 response:

Structure

- achievement based
- must have community support
- must have multiple objectives: jobs, historical significance, skills development

Risks:

- inappropriate resourcing
- poor selection of project personnel
- sponsoring organisation inappropriate to the task and delivery requirements
- expect longer timeframes than similar non-indigenous “sample” projects

Q29 response:

Digital content can be stored on non Internet media (DVD, CD, etc) and there might be a mistrust in the security of culturally sensitive information stored on the Internet. It will need to demonstrate how they still “own” the content.

Q30 response:

Funding approaches should include:

- governance arrangements
- maintenance of the content
- security issues
- promotion and advertising of the project where appropriate
- education initiatives
- promotion of the program to attract recording projects

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?

Q31 response:

The experiences gained in the broadband demand aggregation should be modified and applied to indigenous communities. Models have typically utilised a community engagement process through a steering committee with government and community representation. The processes employed involved numerous phases including:

- The setting of objectives and priorities
- An awareness campaign
- Developing a business case
- Supplier engagement

There must also be direct engagement of government agency demand.

ICC and community champions may play a role but their skills and experiences may limit their effectiveness and hence the outcomes. Engagement of specialists is recommended.

A regional model is considered the best approach.

Q32 response:

Experience indicates that governments are significant users of ICT services in communities. There appears to be no process for intergovernmental cooperation to maximise the purchasing power and community benefit through ICT procurement. Evidence shows that governments consistently apply a number of inhibitors that it is believed can be removed if sufficient willingness and endeavour were applied. The areas to be addressed are:

- Panel period contracts
- Preferred supplier agreements
- Information technology empires
- Security impediments
- Departmental procedure and practices
- Risk adverse practices

- Q33 What innovative and/or flexible approaches are being used elsewhere that could be used to deliver elements of Backing Indigenous Ability?
- Q34 What technologies offer greater flexibility and why?
- Q35 What are some innovative means of service delivery to provide telecommunications improvements to Indigenous communities?
- Q36 What are some innovative approaches that could be used to fund communities in need under the Backing Indigenous Ability program?

Q33 response:

The cydn model of a regional approach to multiple communities should be replicated where appropriate.

Q34 response:

As stated in the initial response the implied direction of the BIA by separating various ICT applications, voice videoconferencing and Internet is an inappropriate model. It will lead to indigenous communities being more than 5 years behind the rest of Australia at the end of the funding period.

The better approach would be to apply the BIA funds to developing IP capable networks that support voice, data and video as part of an integrated network. This facilitates better support and maintenance methodologies and hence improved service delivery.

The program should be looking towards a triple play communications network model rather than a POTS and basic Internet model.

Q35 response:

The cydn regional delivery and ICT support model.

Q36 response:

Only fund those that can demonstrate project that have been successful and that have support via leadership, champions and “can do” attitudes within the community or region.

- 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?

Q37 response:

Under a funding deed that sets realistic target and funding dollars.

Q38 response:

It is unclear what this question means

Q39 response:

Destroy the “silo” mentality within government and implement the multiplier effect by making departments and governments recognise the value proposition of integrated programs. Using the ICC or regional peak bodies in trail regions is a possible way forward.

Q40 response:

Offer assistance via experts in ICT projects with similar outcomes – e.g. demand aggregation and regional ICT network development and maintenance.

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

Q41 response:

Demonstrate the impact on remote life of acceptable and realistic applications.

Q42 response:

The Mapoon broadband CPDP trial project would be one example.

- 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?

Q43 response:

This is unlikely to be a realistic objective within the timeframes.

Q44 response:

Integrate ICT elements into all aspects of new projects and into the delivery of services to the community. For example our experience suggests some Councils will not entertain allocation of monies for Council wide email and Internet services, a deplorable situation in remote community

life. This in turn leads to administration staff not being exposed to ICT training and experience in online and technology applications in their workplace. Such Council must be encouraged to show leadership in the community.

Q45 response:

The government might consider a number of incentives for industry participation that address shareholder value and give greater priority for indigenous involvement. These include;

- Tax incentives through accelerated depreciation schedules or zoned allowances;
- Short term tax deductions incentives;
- Hosting industry collaboration seminars;
- Relaxation of regulations for specific purposes – e.g. trial implementation, technology experimentation;
- Awareness campaign of existing government incentives;
- Target campaigns to create alliances similar to the SRA.

Q46 response:

SRA's and solutions brokers. IT needs to be considered as essential infrastructure just as it is in the rest of Australia not a luxury optional extra.

- 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?

Q47 response:

Not answered.

Q48 response:

Not answered.

Q49 response:

Possible to use the arrangements such as cydn.

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?

Q50 response:

Assess the capacity and capability and assist develop expansions with recognised and appropriate operating organisations.

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?

Q51 response:

Not answered.

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?

Q52 response:

In the same way that Clever Networks is being integrated.

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?

Q53 response:

By using normal community standards and assessment. Assessment of current levels of use and infrastructure with the goal to reach levels of penetration and infrastructure equivalent to non-indigenous communities. The goal should be to set timeframes of achievement and set KPIs.