



STRONG GOVERNANCE SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONAL SUCCESS

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

SHARING STORIES FROM THE 2016
INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE AWARDS



AUSTRALIAN
Indigenous
Governance
INSTITUTE

Introduction

Effective governance is key to success for any enterprise. Effective Indigenous governance is accountable to both Australian legislative, financial and policy demands, and Indigenous law, social and cultural priorities. By creating governance models that are effective and legitimate in two worlds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations are examples of successful self-determination and two-way governance in action.

The Indigenous Governance Awards were created by Reconciliation Australia in partnership with BHP Billiton Sustainable Communities in 2005 to identify, celebrate and promote effective governance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations and initiatives.

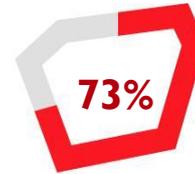
The Awards provide a fantastic opportunity to gain insight into current practices, understanding and innovation in Indigenous governance.

In 2016, the Awards received a record number of 138 applications from Indigenous incorporated and non-incorporated organisations. An analysis of the 40 top-ranked applicants' governance solutions is presented in **'Strong Governance Supporting Organisational Success: Stories from the 2016 Indigenous Governance Awards'** to be published by the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute and Reconciliation Australia.

Here we share an overview of key findings. The full report will be available at www.aigi.com.au.

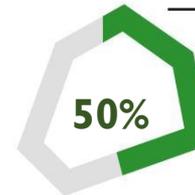
2016 at a glance

Organisations exemplify adaptive, responsive and sustainable governance with the majority in operation for well over a decade



73% of incorporated applicants established before the year 2000.

Organisations are 'for purpose'; prioritising design of governance and operations to suit those they serve



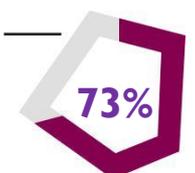
Only 50% of incorporated applicants are registered under the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC). About half describe themselves as not-for-profit.

Organisations are exploring innovative ways to fund culturally informed and effective programs



73% of incorporated applicants' financial plans focus on diversification to reduce reliance on grant funding.

73% of incorporated applicants utilise a mixed funding model that combines: corporate philanthropy, NGO partnerships, self-generated income and government grant.



Despite widespread funding uncertainty, organisations are strengthening their governance processes to meet community demand



47% of incorporated applicants will strengthen their governance processes as part of their future development plan.

Organisations are diverse and are supporting their future leaders



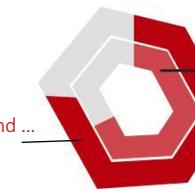
25% of non-incorporated applicants and 17% of incorporated applicants offer youth engagement programs and initiatives as part of their operations.

80% of the top 500 ORIC corporations have more than 30% female representation.



Culture plays a central role in effective operations

93% of incorporated and ...



88% of non-incorporated applicants use culture-smart solutions throughout their governance arrangements and organisational practices.

Indigenous leadership underlies self-determination



60% of incorporated applicants and 62% of non-incorporated applicants demonstrate self-determination through Indigenous leadership.

Key findings

CULTURE-SMART

Applicants frequently emphasise the importance of culture-smart solutions in their governance arrangements and organisational practices. 'Culture-smart' solutions are governance arrangements that are determined locally, capture members' priorities, resonate with their cultural values and relationships, and enable outcomes to be achieved. These arrangements are developed in a deliberate, considered and performance oriented manner emphasising practical applications that are workable and credible at the local level. This approach to governance innovation builds on existing Indigenous capabilities and expertise and reinforces collective identities and rights.

The Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC) is an organisation which incorporates culture-smart solutions into many aspects of its governance. Established in 1993, WYDAC is a not-for-profit Aboriginal corporation made up of representatives from the four Warlpiri communities of Nyirripi, Willowra, Lajamanu and Yuendumu in the NT. WYDAC works closely with Warlpiri communities to deliver a range of programs addressing the needs of youth, community and Indigenous leadership.

"Our approach combines traditional cultural practices with contemporary methods to provide a holistic long-term response."

WYDAC, 2016

WYDAC has devised a range of culture-smart protocols to support Warlpiri and non-Warlpiri staff work together with the Board in a bilingual and cross-cultural environment. Non-Warlpiri staff are required to complete cultural competency training delivered by a Warlpiri facilitator as part of the induction process. This induction involves a structured discussion about Warlpiri land, culture, language, social organisation, and community life, as well as a bush trip with Warlpiri Elders to Warlpiri country, which reinforces the importance of Jukurrpa (the Law Dreaming) and respect for land. WYDAC meetings are bilingual and conducted in both English and Warlpiri. Warlpiri staff mentor non-Warlpiri staff in working with Warlpiri people and culture, and non-Warlpiri staff support their Warlpiri colleagues in the areas of English literacy, and written policies and procedures.

INNOVATIVE MODELS

Applicants are devising innovative governing structures and representative selection processes in response to local conditions and circumstances addressing the social, cultural and geographic requirements of their communities. Equitable representation is a central priority. Dedicating reserved positions for particular Indigenous groups/interests is an important method for creating fair representation of the different groups within the operational region. These frequently reflect traditional family and social structures, knowledge and rights holders, and geographical distribution.

Kalyuku Ninti – Puntuku Ngurrara (Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa) stands out for its innovative, culture-smart approach to representation on its governing body. Based in Newman, WA Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ) is an Aboriginal corporation established in 2005 to assist Martu communities look after their culture and heritage, and ensure connection to country remains strong. Today, KJ works with Martu to build strong, sustainable communities through an extensive ranger program, a leadership program, a return to Country program, and cultural knowledge management support. These programs have generated social, cultural and economic transformation across the five Martu communities.

KJ mixes traditional relations, reserved positions, nomination and voting processes in the selection of its majority-Martu governing body. The Board is made up of 12 Martu Directors: two representatives from five Martu communities, and two from the Martu diaspora. Martu Directors are elected for two year terms at the Annual General Meeting from nominations determined at community meetings. No prerequisite skills are required of Martu Directors.

The Board also appoint three non-Martu Advisory Directors to ensure a suitably skilled governing body. Advisory Directors are considered on the basis of their professional skills, experience, and understanding of Martu culture and history. Advisory directors provide advice and share responsibility for legal, financial, compliance and other governance related issues, but do not have voting power, ensuring Martu have genuine control of major decisions. KJ invites Martu Elders to attend Board meetings for cultural and political advice, and Advisory Directors are asked to leave the room for some agenda items.

INVESTMENT IN PEOPLE

Applicants are committed to local investment: a targeted investment in the capacity of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or nation members. Many report the intention to employ, train and develop opportunities for local Indigenous people. These initiatives include Indigenous employment strategies, transition to work programs, ongoing training and professional development activities and career pathways support.

The Muru Mittigar Aboriginal Cultural and Education Centre (Muru Mittigar) is an organisation invested in the social and economic capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Established in 1998, Muru Mittigar is an Aboriginal corporation which aims to create a better understanding of Aboriginal cultures in the Greater Western Sydney region, particularly the local Darug culture. Muru Mittigar also aims to support improved opportunities and life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the region.

Muru Mittigar works toward this vision by investing internally in staff, and externally within the Greater Western Sydney community. Staff training is a high priority for Muru Mittigar, and every staff member is supported to design and implement their own customised career pathway as part of the annual performance review process. All staff are provided with access to training and assistance programs delivered by Muru Mittigar in collaboration with the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE.

Externally, Muru Mittigar works in partnership with a range of key stakeholders to provide culturally appropriate training, work experience and employment opportunities to local Aboriginal people. These opportunities are offered across a range of industries, and include but are not limited to: financial counselling, no-interest loans, conservation and land management training, and support for Aboriginal job seekers facing barriers to employment.

"Muru Mittigar's corporate vision sees all of our team having access to meaningful, rewarding and safe employment."

Muru Mittigar, 2016

DATA GOVERNANCE

Applicants describe data as critically important in their approach to developing and re-designing programs and services in line with community needs and priorities. Organisations are proactive in seeking feedback from clients and stakeholders via surveys, service provider evaluations and more informal means such as community meetings or social media.

As part of strategic planning, applicants collect data on many aspects of their programs and services. Information on areas such as program attendance and participation is used to evaluate impact and identify areas in need of change, and can be used as evidence to funding bodies in support for program demands and design. Noticeably, about a quarter of applicants use the financial and performance reports that they prepare for external funding bodies as a tool for their own performance evaluation. This indicates an opportunity for funders to work together with organisations to redesign reporting processes that better align with community, donor and grantee purposes.

Data governance has been central to the work of the Western Australia Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation (AFLS). AFLS incorporated in 2010 in response to the need for an independent family violence legal assistance service. Currently, AFLS provides legal assistance to all Aboriginal people and families across WA, including support around legal advocacy, casework, court support and representation in matters related to family violence and sexual assault.

"AFLS' commitment to strong governance and leadership ensures it remains in a position to deliver services efficiently and effectively, with a vision to long-term sustainability."

AFLS, 2016

Measuring and evaluating programs over time has been central to AFLS' success. AFLS records its client and non-client related activities on the Community Legal Services Information System (CLSIS) database, and follows strict internal policies to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of sensitive data is maintained. This secure online database is reviewed monthly and communicated to the funding body. AFLS is committed to maintaining accurate, accessible and up-to-date records through the CLSIS, and ensures the relevance of services and partnerships by gathering client and stakeholder feedback through a variety of written, verbal and technology-based mechanisms.

WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE

Applicants emphasise the key role of Indigenous women in governance, as well as the unique challenges faced by women in leadership positions. It is clear that the strength of Indigenous women is in their unique knowledges, value systems and where appropriate acknowledging matrilineal societies. However, notions of race and gender have historically, and continue to intersect, disadvantaging Indigenous women in various ways. Applicants are increasingly looking for ways to make culturally safe spaces for Indigenous women in leadership positions, including reserved positions on governing bodies, mentoring, promoting strategies for self-care, and working respectfully around cultural boundaries.

Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women's Resource Centre (MWRC) stands out for its efforts in featuring and supporting Indigenous women in governance and leadership. MWRC (meaning women of the region coming together) is a not-for-profit Indigenous corporation established in 1991 to provide a safe space for women releasing themselves from domestic and family violence in the Fitzroy Valley WA. MWRC continues to be a vocal advocate for the rights of women and their families, and offers a range of services to promote healing and self-worth, individual and collective empowerment, cultural pride, leadership and economic security.

MWRC's Board features local Aboriginal women from the five language groups of Bunuba, Gooniyandi, Nyikina, Walmajarri and Wangkatjungka. MWRC's approach to personal and professional development is proactive. MWRC's recognition that not all women in the organisation have formal governance training has led them to produce a tailored governance manual for the board. Young employees receive support through an array of opportunities such as a peer support group, in which young women work through traumatic events and collectively support each other. On-the-job experience has enabled women from this group to develop their leadership capacity, enabling two women to be promoted to management positions and complete leadership courses.

"We must remember that when we as Aboriginal women, step into roles of responsibility, whether it's in our families, communities or an organisation, that we stand on the strong shoulders of the strong woman who have gone before us."

**June Oscar, CEO
MWRC**

eGOVERNANCE

Applicants are putting considerable creative thought into how new media and technology can support their governance and operations. The low cost, convenience and adaptability of electronic communication tools are particularly crucial to the functioning of non-incorporated groups. These media platforms facilitate effective communication with residentially dispersed members, staff operating across varied service areas and with board members in different communities. More and more organisations also present their cultural vision and governance charters up on their websites, as a way of telling the culture story of their governance.

The Ara Irititja project demonstrates effective use of media and technology to support an ever-growing digital records conservation and management system. Ara Irititja was established in 1994 as a project of the Pitjantjatjara Council's Cultural Heritage Unit. Meaning 'stories from a long time ago', Ara Irititja aims to create a sustainable, growing collection of historic and cultural multimedia material related to Aboriginal people from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in SA, NT and WA.

"Today we live in the computer technology time. The computer has a huge brain and is very clever. It can hide things if necessary, and then bring them back later. The Ara Irititja computer is clever like a Dingo."

**Wilton Foster, Former Chair
Pitjantjatjara Council**

Anangu have managed complex cultural information systems for thousands of years. Today, Ara Irititja provides access to more than 160 000 digital records through a browser-based, cross-platform, multimedia knowledge management system called Keeping Culture KMS.

Cultural priorities have been integrated into the design of the digital archive, including the use of passwords to restrict access to sensitive material, separate databases for men and women, and the ability for users to 'flag' material to discuss with project managers. The archive includes an interactive facility where users can make comments in spoken or written word, enabling Anangu to tell their stories in real time for future generations to observe. Pitjantjatjara language is used wherever possible, and a hybrid online/offline version of the program is available to those without internet access.

Australian Indigenous Governance Institute

The Australian Indigenous Governance Institute (AIGI) is an Indigenous led national centre specialising in governance knowledge and excellence. We envision a future Australia where Indigenous nations can pursue and exercise their right to self-determination and economic development through strong self-governance. We know that practical, effective and culturally legitimate governance is the fundamental building block for delivering real change. AIGI supports the economic, social and cultural aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by connecting them with world-class governance practice, research, thought leadership and educational resources.

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