



COMMUNITY FIRST
DEVELOPMENT

SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION'S PHILANTHROPY INQUIRY

MARCH 2024



OUR VISION

First Nations' peoples and communities are thriving.

WHO WE ARE

Community First Development is a First Nations' led community development and research organisation that creates positive change in and with First Nations' communities.

WHAT WE DO

We promote the skills, talents, and cultural strength of our people, and facilitate activities where they lead positive changes for their communities.

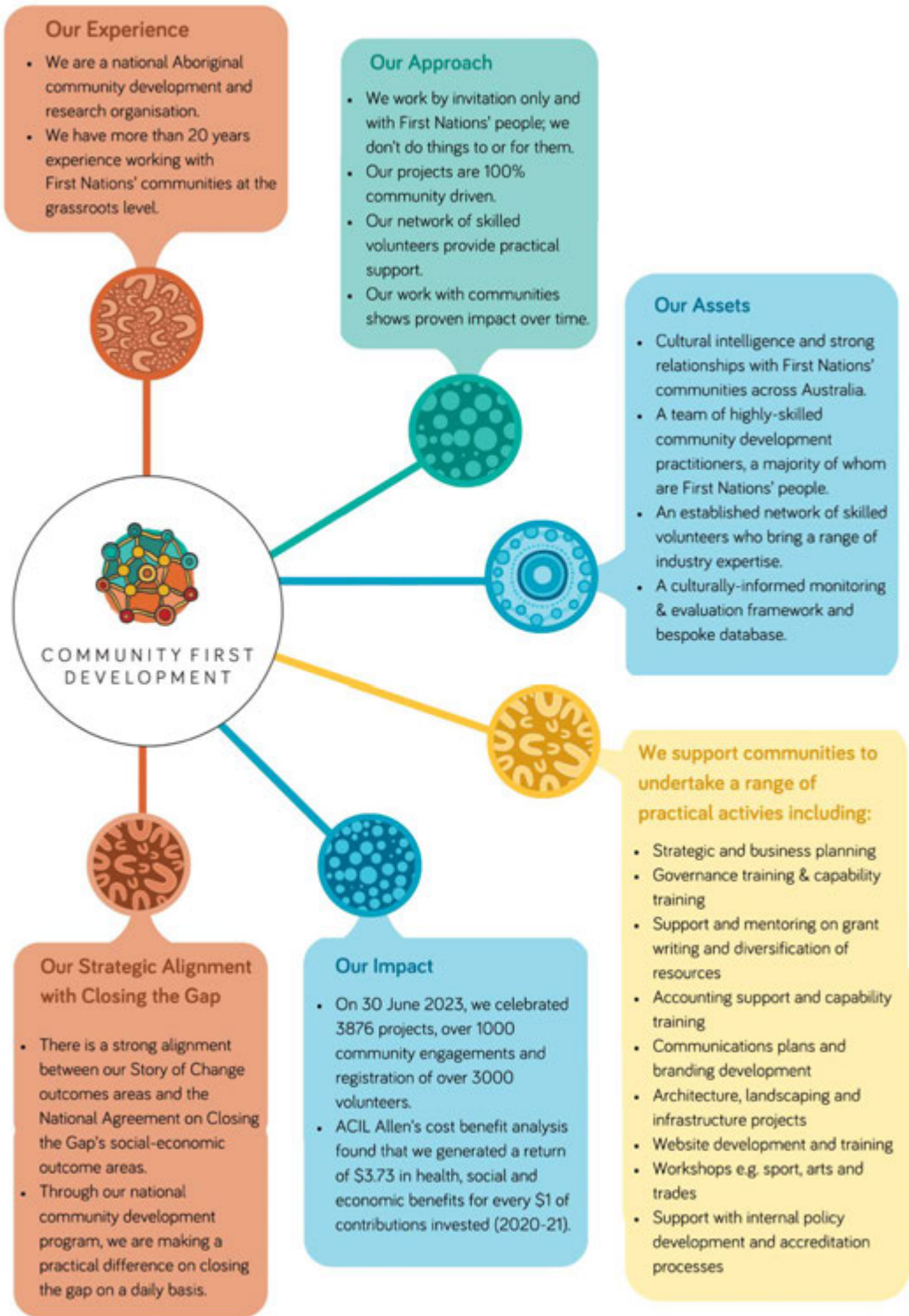
We acknowledge our responsibility to contribute to a more just and equitable world for First Nations' people. We undertake social and economic development, and research projects in partnership with First Nations' communities, businesses, and people. Communities have control; they name the priorities and choose the design, assets, capabilities, and approaches to achieve their vision. We provide tailored support through community partners, skilled staff, trained volunteers, key supporters, and service providers.

OUR APPROACH

The model we work to is one that:

- Operationalises self-determination: First Nations' peoples are always in control, leading and owning projects and programs that impact them.
- Disrupts disadvantage: through reclaiming the dominant narrative and elevating successes, we are seeing First Nations' peoples disrupt disadvantage and the ongoing impacts of colonisation.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country through Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.





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OVERVIEW

Community First Development is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led¹ organisation. We are a registered charity and not-for-profit community development and research organisation. On 30 June 2023, we celebrated 3876 projects, over 1000 community engagements and the registration of over 3,000 volunteers with specialised skills. Since commencing fundraising, tens of thousands of members of the Australian public have supported the work of the organisation, contributing over \$38 million in donations.

As an organisation, we are looking beyond the gap, and incremental change. We are thinking strategically about the next 20 years and how our assets, expertise, effective program and large networks of community relationships and specialist volunteers could be best leveraged to support stronger economic, health, and social outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission's (the Commission) Philanthropy Inquiry. The Commission released its draft report, *Future foundation for giving*, in November 2023, and invited feedback from us in relation to two draft recommendations and our experiences with philanthropy more broadly.

As a First Nations-led organisation with extensive experience in fundraising and engaging with the philanthropic sector, as well as more than 20 years' experience working at the grassroots-level with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities² across Australia, we feel we are uniquely placed to respond to the specific information requests.

To help set the scene, the first section of our submission provides an overview of our values-based approach to working with First Nations' communities, including our approach to connecting communities with skilled volunteers. It also provides an overview of our work in supporting communities to acquire funding and strengthen their capabilities in grant and tender writing.

The second section of our submission provides an overview of our observations and experiences accessing philanthropy. We share our perspectives as both an organisation that has supported First Nations' communities to engage with philanthropy and an organisation that has engaged with philanthropy in pursuit of our vision to see thriving First Nations' peoples and communities.

The third section of our submission provides feedback on the two draft recommendations relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. While we agree that there is an urgent need to address the obstacles faced by First Nations' organisations in accessing philanthropy,

¹ 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' people, 'First Nations' people and 'Indigenous' people are considered interchangeable and are used throughout this document. We note that the language to refer to so many separate and diverse nations is viewed differently, and through these terminologies, we seek to acknowledge and honour our differences, and shared knowledge and experience.

² We define 'Community' in two ways:

- Community of Interest: A social group which shares a common culture, background and location, often structured as a community organisation – this is the meaning used in this submission.
- Community (geographic): A group of people residing within a geographical boundary. For the purpose of this submission and unless otherwise stated, any references to 'community' should be taken to mean 'Community of Interest'.



we are not convinced, with the current information available to us, that an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foundation will adequately address these obstacles.

Similarly, while we provide in principle support for the draft recommendation aimed at increasing recognition of volunteering by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, we believe the whole concept of volunteering needs to be decolonised. The current concept of volunteering, including the focus on formal and informal volunteering, fails to recognise, reflect and capture the value and extent of the unpaid work that First Nations' peoples and communities undertake.

Based on our extensive experience engaging with the philanthropic sector and observations gained through working with First Nations' communities across Australia, we believe that the only way substantial change will occur in this area is if philanthropic organisations decolonise their systems and processes. Through shifting power, there is acknowledgement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know what is best for themselves and their communities.

We hope that the Commission will consider our submission and the feedback outlined within. We would be happy to talk with you further about anything outlined in our submission.

SUBMISSION STRUCTURE

This submission consists of three key sections.

- Section one provides an overview of our approach to working with First Nations' communities.
- Section two provides an overview of our observations and experience accessing philanthropy.
- Section three provides feedback on the Commission's specific information requests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our responses to the 'information requests' should be interpreted as recommendations. Specific recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

That the Commission consults widely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the proposal to establish an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foundation to see if this is what they need or want.

Recommendation 2:

That the Commission explores processes and incentives to promote the decolonisation of the philanthropic ecosystem.

Recommendation 3:

That the Commission recommends that the Australian Bureau of Statistics effectively engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to explore and redefine concepts of volunteering and to develop new measurement methodologies.



Recommendation 4:

That the Commission recommends that government funding be provided to existing First Nations' organisations currently providing capability support to First Nations' organisations in navigating funding acquisition systems and processes.



1. OUR APPROACH

Community First Development’s approach to community development is based on a strong foundation of ethics. These include rights, respect and recognition, negotiation, consultation, agreement and mutual understanding, participation, collaboration and partnership. This values-based approach underpins our [Community Development Framework](#), a cycle of understanding, engagement, genuine co-design and delivery and reflection. The framework is evidence- and strengths-based, built on 20 years of experience working alongside First Nations’ people and communities.

We work by invitation only and towards community self-determined goals. Our genuine partnership approach offers practical and specialised support to First Nations’ communities across industries. As communities have control and hold the decision-making power, they can—with tools and support from us—design and carry out community development projects that align with their aspirations and directly meet their needs.



1.1. CONNECTING COMMUNITIES TO SKILLED VOLUNTEERS

Community First Development’s approach to volunteering is embedded in our community development approach. Our Community Development team, consisting of a group of highly skilled community development practitioners located across Australia, connects communities with skilled volunteers. Our Senior Community Development Officers (SCDOs) are the first point of contact for First Nations’ communities who invite us to work with them. SCDOs engage with communities to identify their goals and work with them to co-design and facilitate projects aimed at achieving these goals. Key to the success of these activities are community control and ownership, and the development and maintenance of strong relationships underpinned by trust.

But there's trust with Community First Development, they're our partners. We love that concept and work with that concept of ownership that Community First Development mandates with the involvement with any community group in getting community development off the ground. I don't think it's about holding back any sort of information, and there's no information that should be held back in any discussions. Community First Development, of course, with our particular development, there's so much transparency.

- Community member



At Community First Development, our volunteering opportunities differ from traditional volunteering – we utilise skilled volunteers according to the needs of our community partners. Our skills-based approach to volunteer recruitment involves a comprehensive screening process designed to ensure that potential volunteers understand our values and approach, and are prepared and ready to undertake a project with us. This process may include: a phone interview; referee check; police, medical and working with children checks (where needed); completion of our online induction course; and participation in our face-to-face cultural induction.

Once volunteers complete the induction process, they are registered on our Community First Development volunteer database. Volunteers are matched to projects according to the skills communities request and communities have the final say on volunteer selection.

1.2. SUPPORT WITH FUNDING ACQUISITION AND CAPABILITY BUILDING

During the last few years, we have observed a strong demand for projects aimed at supporting communities to acquire funding and strengthen capabilities in grant and tender writing. Communities have requested support to:

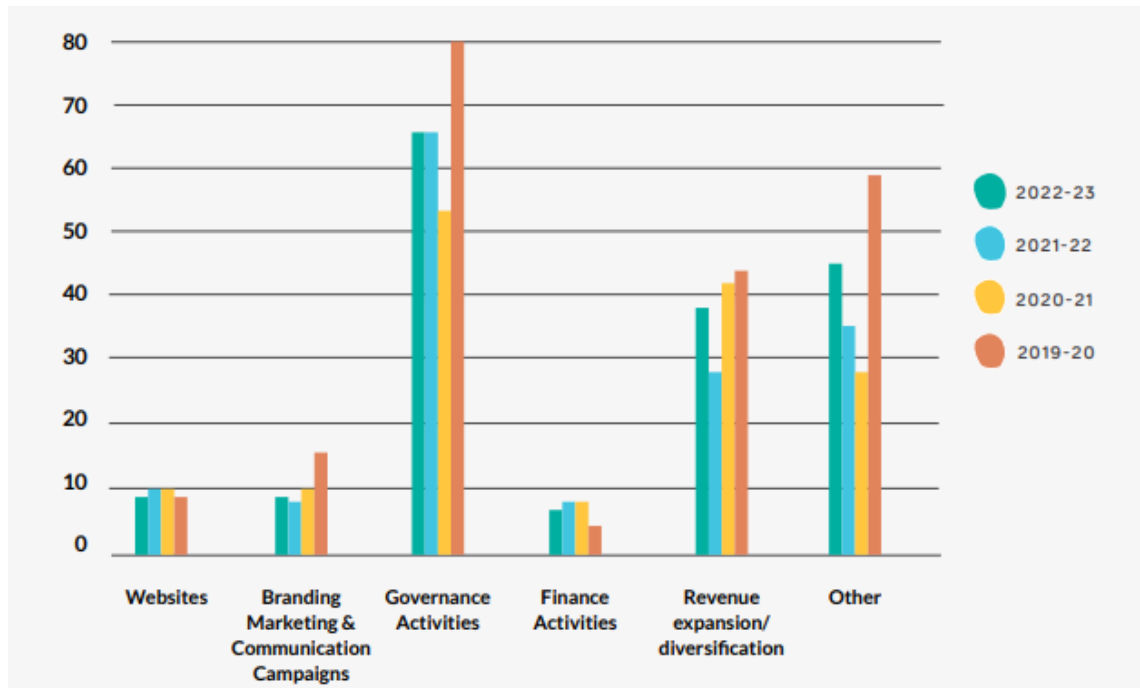
- work with them to identify potential and relevant funding and tender opportunities (philanthropic, government, social capital)
- mentor them and strengthen their knowledge and skills around grant and/or tender processes, including proposal writing and advocacy and lobbying strategies
- work with them to translate and communicate their strengths and visions in grant and/or tender proposals
- accompany them to meetings with potential funders and decision-makers, and
- assist them to navigate complex processes to apply for deductible gift recipient (DGR) endorsement.

Figure 1 below provides an overview of total projects by project categories. Approximately 20 per cent of community-requested projects during the last four years have focused on revenue expansion/diversification.³ This category includes projects with a focus on one or more of the areas listed above.

³ Note this is a new dataset and the breakdown of projects into these categories is an approximate only based on project names. 'Other' projects may include (but are not limited to) hands-on workshops e.g. sports, arts, trades and infrastructure, legal, development of specific projects and mentoring.



FIGURE 1: TOTAL PROJECTS BY CATEGORY - FOUR-YEAR COMPARISON (2019-23)



The four case studies attached to this submission provide examples of how we have supported communities to navigate funding and tender processes, acquire funding and tenders, as well as strengthen their knowledge and skills in these areas:

1. Kings Narrative (navigating Central Land Council and philanthropic funding opportunities)
2. Dharug Strategic Management Group (navigating DGR endorsement processes)
3. Xtra Mile Transport (navigating Granites Mine Affected Areas Aboriginal Corporation funding opportunities)
4. First Nations Traffic Management (navigating a large tender opportunity).



2. OUR OBSERVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

2.1 COMMUNITIES' EXPERIENCES ACCESSING FUNDING

While we cannot speak on behalf of communities in terms of their experiences accessing funding, we have observed several common themes through supporting communities in this area. These observations are backed up by the findings from our 'Good Governance' participatory action research project with 11 remote, regional and urban communities.¹

Our first observation is that First Nations' communities and organisations have little choice but to engage with western governance systems, processes and institutions, to achieve their dreams. As our action research project confirmed, there is an intersecting space where First Nations' governance practices meet with western governance requirements. Through creating 'bridges',⁴ First Nations' organisations are constantly *navigating* and *negotiating* this intersecting space out of *necessity* rather than choice. Funding acquisition is one of the main reasons communities engage in this space.

Right now, we are at that stage where we have to. We rely on that money. I don't know for how long. I don't want it to be forever, but we really rely on that support from western governance.

- Community member

Our second observation is that limited support currently exists to assist First Nations' communities to navigate funding acquisition processes and opportunities in both the government and philanthropic sectors. Many communities who request our support are run by volunteers (whether that be the board or operational staff) and/or a limited number of paid staff (if any). Many communities do not have the resources (human, time, financial) required to navigate complex funding acquisition processes. This is one of the reasons why communities are reaching out to Community First Development for support.

Our final observation from supporting communities is that these funding acquisition processes can be very time consuming, bureaucratic, and complex to navigate. This is particularly the case with seeking DGR status, something several communities have invited us to support them with in the last few years. We have observed that many of the DGR-focused projects have taken months, if not more than a year, to navigate, with communities facing continual hurdles along the way. This is even with the support of skilled Community First Development volunteers with accounting expertise.

Among a range of other activities, we supported Dharug Strategic Management Group (DSMG) with their application for DGR registration. One of DSMG's Directors provided the following reflections on the process:

⁴ The strategies, tools and pathways to navigate into and within the intersecting space where First Nations' governance and western governance meet.

It's like a bureaucratic process, what you think should be fairly straight forward has an incredibly convoluted pathway. And even when you have expert advice, as we've had from Gilbert and Tobin and from CFD volunteers and so on, when you walk that path, you find there's hurdles that you didn't imagine were possible that are really straightforward hurdles, but are difficult to get over. So, the first one we faced was the definition of what's allowed to be a deductible gift recipient.

- Dharug Strategic Management Group Director

The Commission may be interested in DSMG's submission² to the Treasury inquiry, 'Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) Registers Reform' (19 January – 19 February 2023). The submission explores the challenges of navigating the DGR application process and the strain this placed on DSMG's voluntary board. DSMG provide specific examples on how the process could take a more holistic approach to accommodate Indigenous Knowledges.

We celebrate the simplification of process proposed in the amendment but voice our continuing concern that it continues to assume the only sort of charitable purpose for Indigenous groups is to relieve "Indigenous disadvantage". Surely this nation has moved beyond such myopic, restrictive and colonial thinking. Surely this is an opportunity to recognise the ways in which First Nations thinking to integrate rather than separate culture, environment and social responsibility fits into the charitable endeavour worthy of DGR recognition.

- DSMG, submission to the DGR Registers Reform

2.2 OUR EXPERIENCES WITH PHILANTHROPY

Community First Development has a long history in the fundraising/philanthropic sector. Our First Nations' Chief Executive Officer and Board (a majority of whom are First Nations' peoples) are very experienced in the challenges facing, and opportunities available for, First Nations' communities and organisations in relation to fundraising and accessing philanthropy.

The obstacles to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations accessing philanthropy (Draft Report, p333) certainly resonate with us. Our experiences include that:

- Seeking philanthropic funding is resource-intensive and challenging.
- A power imbalance exists between large donors or philanthropic organisations and organisations seeking funding. Many employees of the former do not appear to be aware of the negative impact this unequal engagement has on First Nations' organisations.
- Funding opportunities are siloed meaning that they are designed to meet funder interests not community needs. This results in piecemeal funding opportunities rather than larger, multi-year funding opportunities required to move an organisation forward on a path of sustainability. Siloed funding keeps organisations on a continuous funding-seeking and acquittal cycle which is a waste of resources.
- Funder requirements are often very narrow and rigid, and we have to continuously try and adapt what we do to tick the boxes. Due to the invitation-only and community-driven nature of our approach to working with First Nations' communities, we often miss out on funding opportunities.

- Following on from the above, we are constantly trying to adapt how we measure impact/define success to fit in with specific funder requirements and funder definitions of 'success'. This has the potential to impact our data integrity.

While we welcome, in principle, the Australian Government's commitment to double philanthropic giving by 2030, this must complement, rather than replace, Australian Government funding. Governments have commitments and responsibilities under the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (CTG Agreement). The focus on philanthropy should not provide governments with an opportunity to reduce or cease funding for First Nations' communities and organisations across Australia, including those currently funded under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. If the Commission's recent final study report for its first independent review of the CTG Agreement is anything to go by, governments need to be doing *more* to deliver on their commitments and to support First Nations' peoples' needs and priorities.



3. RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS

3.1 DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 10.1

What feedback do you have on the draft recommendation on the establishment of an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foundation, including the foundation's focus, governance and organisational structure (draft recommendation 10.1)?

As previously outlined in our submission, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities face multiple obstacles to accessing philanthropy. We also believe that there is a need to support First Nations' communities to strengthen their capabilities to build partnerships with the philanthropic sector and to access funding. As outlined in the draft recommendation, we note that the proposed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander philanthropic foundation will have a capacity building focus but also an ability to administer grants. With the information currently available to us, we are not convinced that the establishment of the foundation will adequately address these obstacles.

We note that the draft recommendation states that 'the design of the foundation should be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' and that the foundation would be 'controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'. We also note that our feedback on this reflects that of only one First Nations' organisation and we strongly urge the Commission to consult widely with First Nations' people, communities, and organisations on this proposal to see if this is what they need or want.

Concerns

We have several concerns with the current proposal. Firstly, we are concerned that the foundation would be drawing from a very limited pool of funding available for First Nations'-related projects. In Australia, only 0.5 per cent of philanthropic funding goes to First Nations' communities.³ While we note that the draft recommendation states that the foundation will have a focus on 'supporting new and existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander giving vehicles', there is a risk that the foundation will be viewed as the 'default option' for First Nations' organisations seeking funding. With the strong demand for philanthropic funding across the not-for-profit sector, First Nations' communities' opportunities to access philanthropic funding may inadvertently decrease.

Secondly, while we note that the proposed foundation aims to have a capacity-building focus, there is no mention of how it will strengthen the *capabilities* of First Nations' communities to engage in often complex and bureaucratic funding proposals and negotiation processes. While the foundation may assist some First Nations' communities to better connect with philanthropic organisations, opportunities and volunteer networks, capability-strengthening initiatives are also required to support organisations to effectively engage in these processes, maintain community-control, and help to address the power imbalance that currently exists between funders and those seeking funding.

Thirdly, while we broadly support the set of principles that could help guide the operation of the foundation (Draft Report, p335), we see these as a starting point to build from rather than a comprehensive list. The key factors for us are how the foundation will operate in practice and how the foundation will benefit the diverse, self-determined needs and aspirations of First Nations' communities across Australia.



The need for decolonised systems and processes

From our perspective, such a foundation will only work if:

- it is community-initiated and led
- there is broad support among First Nations' peoples, communities and organisations for establishing the foundation
- funding is flexible rather than siloed, and provides opportunities to address the diverse, self-determined needs and aspirations of First Nations' peoples
- it has clear and accessible measures to ensure transparency and accountability around decision-making, including an oversight mechanism
- there is recognition that First Nations' communities operate across both western governance and cultural governance, and that the governance structure reflects the strong accountability First Nations' peoples hold within cultural governance
- it has and adheres to a strong values framework that is underpinned by the principle of self-determination; its focus is much broader and holistic than simply administering funding
- it includes both a focus on capacity building and capability building for First Nations' communities
- it is complemented by well-funded and well-designed government programs and initiatives that reflect governments' commitments and responsibilities under the CTG Agreement.

Sustainable and significant change will only occur if there is a shift in the practices of how funds are administered across the philanthropic ecosystem.

Shifting power

As part of the process of shifting power, philanthropic organisations need to look for opportunities to decolonise their processes. This is not about reducing accountability, transparency and standards, but about recognising and respecting that First Nations' peoples have existing governance and accountability frameworks in place.

Funding models need to respect and value First Nations' peoples' right to self-determination. Philanthropic organisations should not fund in silos but provide flexible opportunities to address the diverse, self-determined needs and aspirations of First Nations' peoples. Reporting processes, including impact measurement, need to be flexible and provide opportunities for First Nations' organisations to define what they see as 'success' and/or align these processes with their internal reporting processes and approaches. Alternatives to written reports, such as videos, audio and/or face to face engagement, should be considered.



Case study – untied funding

In recent years Community First Development has been fortunate to work with some philanthropic funders who are committed to learning and improving their interactions with grantees. They also understand the benefits of minimising and streamlining reporting requirements and in particular, the benefit of providing untied funding.

Untied funding has allowed the organisation to have the flexibility to respond to community demand, rather than a funder's chosen topical outcomes requirement. It has strengthened the organisation's agility and supports the self-determination of the communities we work with. It has been a demonstration of trust and confidence in our expertise, knowledge, governance and self determination.

Building trust through transparency and communication

Philanthropic organisations also need to look at ways to improve accessibility to grant opportunities, information, and resources, as currently payment is required to access much of this information. Effort needs to be made to identify ways to improve communications channels and ensure relevant information reaches Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in timely and effective ways.

Decision-making processes need to be transparent and ensure that opportunities are available for First Nations' organisations to receive constructive feedback that will assist them with future grant opportunities. Anecdotally, we have heard of many instances of First Nations' communities being advised that their grant applications were unsuccessful with no opportunity to receive feedback. Philanthropic organisations should also consider inclusive decision-making processes that involve First Nations' peoples in the assessment and allocation of funds.

Summary

We urge the Commission to consult widely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the draft proposal to establish an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foundation, to see if this is what they need or want.

For the proposed foundation to effectively support more First Nations' communities to achieve their goals and aspirations, it must include decolonised systems and processes. What we mean by this is the shifting of power from funders to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and in doing so, acknowledging that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples know what is best for their communities.

To achieve genuine and sustainable change, processes and incentives should be explored to promote the decolonisation of the philanthropic ecosystem.

Recommendation 1: That the Commission consults widely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the proposal to establish an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foundation to see if this is what they need or want.

Recommendation 2: That the Commission explores processes and incentives to promote the decolonisation of the philanthropic ecosystem.



3.2 DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 9.5

What are your views on the draft recommendation that the Australian Bureau of Statistics develop methodologies to increase recognition of volunteering by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (draft recommendation 9.5)?

We believe that the current reporting of volunteering by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is barely scratching the surface in terms of contributions in this area. The current definition of volunteering does not capture the majority of volunteering and unpaid work that occurs within First Nations' communities. We therefore agree, in principle, with the draft recommendation that the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) develop methodologies to increase recognition of volunteering by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We also note that the draft recommendation includes amending the questions on volunteering in the Census to capture data on both informal and formal volunteering. Currently 'informal' volunteering is the category where most volunteering undertaken by First Nations' communities would fit. This is problematic in that the word 'informal' downplays the value of this unpaid work and implies the provision of low/unskilled support rather than pro bono professional support.

Delegated authorities

Through working with a diverse range of First Nations' communities across Australia for more than 20 years, we have observed how many of these communities/organisations are run by volunteers (whether that be the board or operational staff) and/or a limited number of paid staff (if any). While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may not think of this as 'volunteering' in the more traditional sense, we have observed that they undertake this unpaid work because they want to see some sort of change in their communities. As discussed in our action research project final report, *Good governance practice leads to good relationships*,⁴ First Nations' people and organisations have little choice but to engage with western governance systems and processes to achieve this change.

One of the bridges or tools First Nations' organisations use to operate in the space where First Nations' governance and western governance intersect is a 'delegated authority'. Delegated authorities are individuals with highly developed skills in brokering partnerships, sourcing funding and navigating western governance systems. They have been delegated authority by Elders, or those with authority in the community, to act on their behalf. This role comes with important responsibilities.

Key components of a delegated authority's roles are listening to, and engaging with, the wider community, facilitating and/or understanding community consensus and defined goals, and navigating pathways through western governance to achieve this – all the while shielding and/or maintaining community cultural values and practices and meeting cultural obligations.

As our former regional manager Doyen Radcliffe stated, the roles and associated responsibilities are expected to be undertaken the 'right way'.



As an Indigenous person – ‘Right way thinking and doing’ is embedded in us as a cultural norm of being and it is part of your world view, to how you act, behave and interact with others. It is all connected or interwoven through kinship and cultural protocols and cultural governance. It is going in with your cultural lens on and understanding your surroundings and working with communities to bridge the western anomalies on the other side.

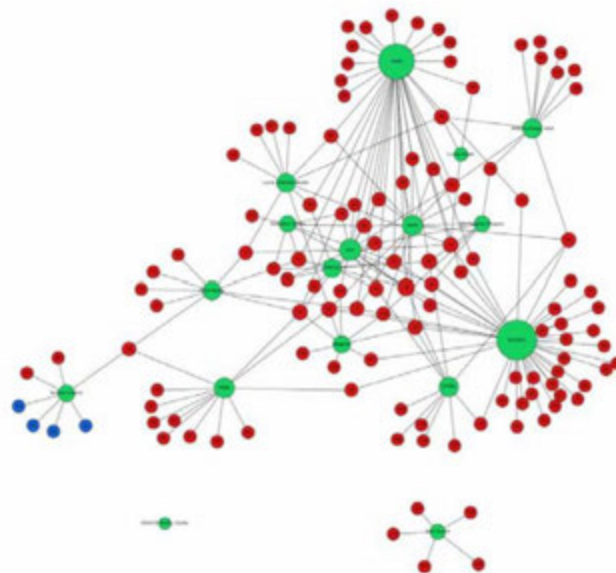
- Doyen Radcliffe, Former Community First Development Regional Manager

Despite a delegated authority’s significant responsibilities, they often undertake this role within their community in an unpaid capacity. We have observed how some of these individuals have dedicated extensive periods of time, in some cases decades, to developing a shared common language between the two forms of governance, to achieve their community’s goals.

In many communities there is not enough support, time, and opportunities for First Nations’ people to learn the skills to engage in western governance processes and systems. This often means that responsibility for constantly navigating these two worlds falls on the shoulders of a few.

For example, a study of remote community Yuendumu, Northern Territory, identified 125 people (118 Warlpiri) involved in the governance of 16 boards operating within the community.⁵ One community member was on 17 different boards, including a board external to the community; 19 people were on three or more boards; and five people were on five or more boards. The study also showed that, for this community, most paid senior and middle management positions were held by non-First Nations’ people, while most of the board positions which were held by First Nations’ people were voluntary. Figure 2 shows the cross-representation of people on local boards in Yuendumu. Local boards are in green and affiliated board members are in red (noted as the formal representation of Warlpiri leaders).

FIGURE 2: CROSS-REPRESENTATION OF INDIVIDUALS ON LOCAL BOARDS



SOURCE: CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY. 2017, P. 448.



Decolonising the concept of volunteering

There is a clear need to decolonise the concept of volunteering and how volunteering is measured, to better reflect and recognise the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. The concept of volunteering needs to encompass and equally value both organisation-based volunteering and grassroots/self-determined volunteering. It is critical that the ABS effectively engages with First Nations' peoples and communities to explore and redefine concepts of volunteering and to develop new measurement methodologies.

Recommendation 3: That the Commission recommends that the Australian Bureau of Statistics effectively engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to explore and redefine concepts of volunteering and to develop new measurement methodologies.

3.3 OTHER IDEAS

Do you have any other ideas, or examples of existing initiatives that help improve:

- *access to philanthropy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations, where they seek philanthropic support (information request 10.1)*
- *how philanthropic organisations engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.*

We believe that the greatest obstacle to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities accessing philanthropy is philanthropic organisations' systems and processes. As previously mentioned, philanthropic organisations need to look at ways they can decolonise their systems and processes and stop taking away from First Nations' sovereignty and self-determination. The shifting of power from funders to those seeking funding, is not just about First Nations' organisations but everyone who seeks funding across the not-for-profit sector.

Cultural safety and understandings

From our experience, a lack of cultural safety is commonplace among philanthropic organisations. While we have had more positive experiences engaging with some philanthropic organisations, such experiences have been rare. While cultural safety can be defined in several ways, the CTG Agreement defines the term as follows:

Cultural safety is about overcoming the power imbalances of places, people and policies that occur between the majority non-Indigenous position and the minority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person so that there is no assault, challenge or denial of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person's identity, of who they are and what they need. Cultural safety is met through actions from the majority position which recognise, respect, and nurture the unique cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Only the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who is recipient of a service or interaction can determine whether it is culturally safe.

- National Agreement on Closing the Gap



To strengthen First Nations' communities' access to philanthropy, philanthropic organisations, at a minimum, should mandate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety training. Beyond such training, there is a strong need for philanthropic organisation employees to commit to continually broadening their understandings on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's unique histories, cultures, ways of being and doing, needs, and aspirations.

We also believe that there needs to be an increased focus on learning and capability building opportunities for First Nations' peoples to become more involved in the philanthropic sector and start working on change from within. This could also include opportunities for First Nations' peoples to share their experiences with genuinely interested philanthropic organisations that are looking to change their systems and processes.

There are perhaps opportunities to learn from the work of The International Funders for Indigenous Peoples (IFIP)⁶, the only global philanthropic network focused on Indigenous Peoples worldwide that promotes thought and strategic collaboration between the funding community and Indigenous Peoples. IFIP does this work by elevating and supporting Indigenous leadership and advocating for direct funding to Indigenous led initiatives and organisations, and Indigenous Led Funds. With over 20 years of experience, IFIP has been a key convener and, as such, a catalyst for defining and developing the field of Indigenous Peoples' funding.

IFIP seeks to transform the relationship between the funding world and Indigenous Peoples to one of mutual understanding and benefit. IFIP is led by donors and Indigenous leaders to advance a new movement in philanthropy that better values, supports and partners with Indigenous communities. It builds capacity for both Indigenous communities seeking support and donors interested in high impact philanthropy.

Engagement and relationships

Connected to cultural safety is the need for philanthropic organisations to focus on engaging with and building relationships with First Nations' communities. There is need to move beyond transactional engagement to engagement that facilitates trust. Through focusing on building relationships, philanthropic organisations will also continue to strengthen their understandings of First Nations' peoples' diverse needs, strengths, and aspirations.

Self-reflection, assessment, and ongoing learning

Philanthropic organisations should explore collaborative methods to measure the impact of their investments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives. Any such evaluation should involve genuine engagement with and consideration of the perspectives of grant recipients. It is critical that such an approach includes accountability measures aimed at ensuring philanthropic support aligns with First Nations' communities' needs and aspirations.

As part of a continual learning journey, philanthropic organisations should also reflect on and assess the effectiveness of their approach to engaging with First Nations' communities. Openly discussing and learning from both successes and failures in their engagement is the only way for change to occur.



Strengthening the capabilities of First Nations' organisations to access philanthropy

As previously discussed, Community First Development has more than 20 years' experience working with First Nations' communities across Australia in urban, regional, and remote settings. As outlined in Section 1.2, during the last few years, we have seen an increase in community demand for support to acquire funding and strengthen capabilities in grant and tender writing. In addition, we have substantial fundraising experience and experience engaging with the philanthropic sector.

As part of its wider consultation, we urge the Commission to consider existing First Nations' organisations that may be in a position to deliver on aspects of the draft recommendations. For example, working only at the invitation of community organisations, Community First Development is well placed to provide support to strengthen capability in accessing philanthropic support. Funding intended to deliver on this recommendation could be directed to scale a First Nations-led organisation already providing this support.

Recommendation 4: That the Commission recommends that government funding be provided to existing First Nations' organisations currently providing capability support to First Nations' organisations in navigating funding acquisition systems and processes.



4. CONCLUSION

The Productivity Commission's Philanthropy Inquiry provides an important opportunity to increase philanthropic giving and strengthen the critical role not-for-profits play in Australian communities. For First Nations' communities, it provides both an opportunity to address entrenched barriers to accessing philanthropy and to recognise the contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to their communities and the broader Australian society.

We believe that the only way substantial change will occur in this area is if philanthropic organisations decolonise their systems and processes. Through shifting power, there is acknowledgement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know what is best for themselves and their communities.

We thank the Commission for the opportunity to contribute to its Philanthropy Inquiry and we look forward to the release of the final report.



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