

Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project

Build ■ Strengthen ■ Sustain

BRADFIELD NYLAND GROUP
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CONTENTS

1. Context

1.1	Background	1
1.2	The project: Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project...	2
1.2.1	Methodology.....	2
1.2.2	Project stages.....	3
1.3	This Report	4

2. Project Outcomes: Organisation and Project Assessments

2.1	Organisation and project assessments	6
2.1.1	Findings from staff and management committee surveys and consultations	6
2.1.2	Assessment findings	9
2.1.3	Results Based Accountability and Good Practice Guidelines.....	13
2.2	Feedback and actions plans.....	13
2.3	Aboriginal projects or services in mainstream organisations	14

3. Project Outcomes: Consultations and Capability Issues

3.1	Community consultations.....	16
3.2	Consultations with government workers.....	16
3.3	Capability issues.....	17

4. Project Outcomes: Findings and Planning Forum

4.1	Overview of forum	19
4.2	Funding.....	20
4.2.1	Issues	20
4.2.2	Ideas.....	21
4.2.3	Discussion.....	23
4.3	New projects and organisations	24
4.3.1	Issues	24
4.3.2	Ideas.....	25
4.3.3	Discussion.....	25
4.4	Improving understanding around communication, culture and expectations	26
4.4.1	Issues	26
4.4.2	Ideas.....	27

4.5	Managing community expectations and impact on organisations.....	27
4.5.1	Issues	27
4.5.2	Ideas.....	28
4.6	Administrative support	28
4.6.1	Issues	28
4.6.2	Ideas.....	29
4.6.3	Discussion.....	29
4.7	Governance development.....	29
4.7.1	Issues	29
4.7.2	Ideas.....	30
4.7.3	Discussion.....	30
4.8	Senior manager support and development	31
4.8.1	Issues	31
4.8.2	Ideas.....	31
4.8.3	Discussion.....	32

5. Strategic directions

5.1	Aboriginal NGOs in the Metro West region	33
5.2	The strategic issues	35
5.3	The strategic framework	37
5.4	Implementation.....	39
ATTACHMENT 1: Participating services.....		40
ATTACHMENT 2: Staff and management committee surveys		41
ATTACHMENT 3: Confidential report pro forma.....		44
ATTACHMENT 4: Example Action Plan		48
ATTACHMENT 5: Forum program		50

Tables

Table 1:	Participation levels in service assessments	6
Table 2:	Training and other supports identified	7
Table 3:	Dedicated administration hours	9
Table 4:	Bookkeeping.....	10

Charts

Chart 1:	Practice within the organisation.....	11
Chart 2:	Systems and processes (part 1)	11
Chart 3:	Systems and processes (part 2)	12
Chart 4:	Overview of organisational assessments	12

1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

1.1 Background

The Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project was developed in response to long standing concerns in the Metro West region of the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) about the longer term sustainability of the Aboriginal services sector.

These issues were the shared concerns of the Department and the Aboriginal Capacity Building Advisory Group (ACBAG), established to provide advice to the Metro West Region of DoCS, on the development and maintenance of a strong and capable Aboriginal services sector.

The Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project was an initiative of the ACBAG in partnership with the Department and other government agencies. It follows on from work commenced by the ACBAG in September 2005, when the Department and the ACBAG hosted a forum on capacity building for Aboriginal organisations.

At the time, it was hoped that the forum would provide specific information that would lead to the development of an 'Aboriginal Organisation Capacity Building Strategic Plan'¹. Although the forum identified a number of issues, there were few practical forward directions identified. A conference was proposed as the next stage in developing a plan.

The issues that prompted the forum were a reported decline in the number of Aboriginal community controlled organisations in the area and a general climate of concern about governance and management in Aboriginal organisations.

The Western Sydney Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Plan 2003 – 2006 made specific statements about this decline in organisational numbers and attributed this to 'a number of factors, including management and governance issues; deficit in organisational capacity; inadequate funds/resources; and inability to attract and retain appropriately skilled staff.' (p6). The Plan went on to also state:

'The few remaining Aboriginal services are struggling to remain viable. Services have expressed their incapacity to take on additional projects funded through Families First, Community Solutions and the ACYFS. However, these same services are also feeling

¹ Kenney, S (2005): *Aboriginal Organisations Capacity Building Forum: Report of Outcomes*, Beyond Consulting

pressured to auspice projects to enable delivery of essential services to Aboriginal community.' (p6).

At the same time, at a broader level, Aboriginal controlled organisations were coming under increased scrutiny over governance and management, and the notion of 'capacity building' as a response to perceived organisational deficits was gaining momentum.

1.2 The project: Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project

The Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project aimed to work with Aboriginal services and community members in the Metro West region to:

- explore the issues and factors that affect the ability of Aboriginal services to do their work
- assist individual services to review their own capacity and identify how they might strengthen their service
- develop a regional plan for developing and sustaining the capacity of Aboriginal services.

1.2.1 Methodology

The project methodology consisted of three main components:

1. Consultation and community input

A series of initial consultations and interviews were held to enable input from participating organisations and services, government workers and community members and to research general issues and perspectives. These meetings and interviews provided an opportunity to:

- inform people about the project
- discuss their participation in the project
- discuss their ideas about factors that impact on Aboriginal services and about ways of improving the organisational capacity of Aboriginal organisations
- collect information about the particular issues for Aboriginal public servants.

2. Work with individual organisations and services

Prior to the commencement of the project, DoCS called for expressions of interest from DoCS or DADHC funded Aboriginal organisations and projects in the region to take part in the individual services component of the project.

This aspect of the project was designed to combine the research components of the project with practical assistance to individual services by working with a number of participating organisations and services to:

- assess their current operations and identify areas of vulnerability
- provide each organisation or service with a confidential and detailed assessment and report
- develop strategies that would assist to address areas of vulnerability
- provide individual organisations or services with an action plan as an immediate starting point for their own capacity building.

3. The findings and planning forum

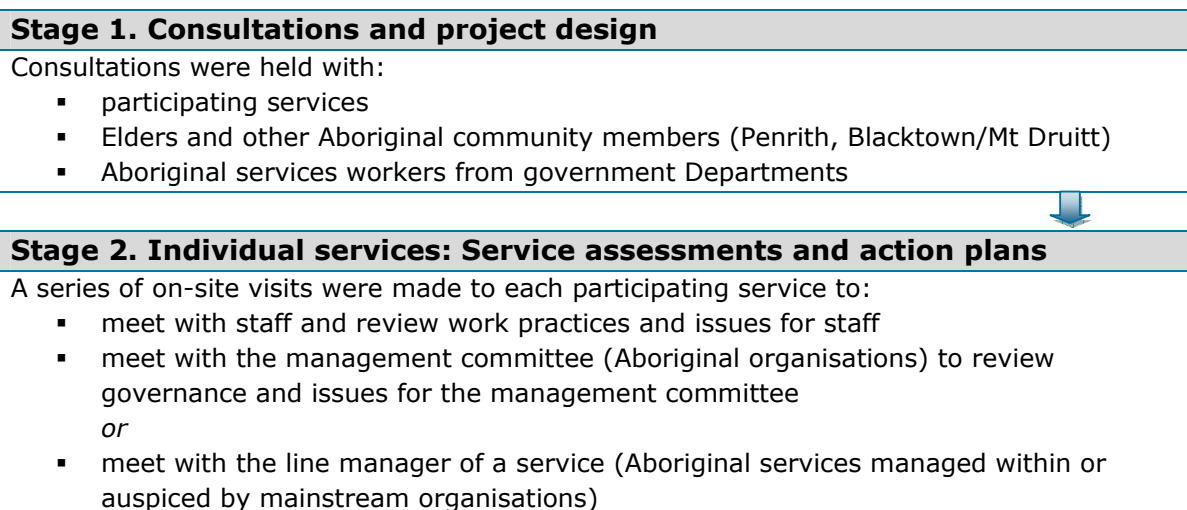
The forum was designed to engage Aboriginal services, community members, and government representatives in developing responses to the issues identified in the research components of the consultations and work with individual services. The findings from this work formed the basis of working sessions in the forum.

The forum provided an opportunity to:

- present the findings of the project
- showcase some of the achievements of local Aboriginal services
- enable Aboriginal service and community representatives to develop their ideas and proposals for a regional plan to support and strengthen Aboriginal organisations and projects
- facilitate discussion between Aboriginal service and community members and government representatives to talk through the proposed ideas and to ensure that the content of the regional plan is realistic and achievable.

1.2.2 Project stages

The project involved the following stages and activities:



- review systems, equipment and processes (Aboriginal organisations)
- short surveys were also conducted with staff and management committee members
- provide a feedback and planning session.

Each service was then provided with a confidential report and action plan. (These are not public).



Stage 3. Development of strategic framework: The 'Findings Forum'

A generic report on the main findings was drafted and presented to participants at a 2 day forum. The forum consisted of:

- presentation and discussion of general findings
- a showcase of good practice by participating Aboriginal services
- working sessions to develop ideas for addressing the issues identified in the findings and identifying future directions
- a 'dialogue' session for community and organisation representatives and government representatives to discuss and negotiate future action.

(Refer to Section 4: Project Outcomes: Findings and Planning Forum for a detailed description).



Stage 4. Final report and drafting of strategic framework

This final report on the findings, the outcomes of the forum and draft Strategic Framework was drafted and submitted to the Reference Group prior to being finalised. The next steps of the project will be:

- drafting of a summary report for general circulation
- a working session of the Reference Group and other ACBAG members to develop the detail of the Implementation Plan
- circulation of a draft Implementation Plan for feedback and discussion prior to being finalised.

1.3 This Report

This report provides an overview of the project, a report on the general outcomes of the work with individual services and the consultations, the findings from the project and the outcomes of discussion at the 'Findings and Planning Forum'.

These outcomes and findings are then reflected in a set of proposed strategic directions for further development of Aboriginal service capacity at the Regional level.

The findings and strategic directions have broader application to:

- Aboriginal services in other regions of NSW, and to a certain extent nationally. Although there are many differences between Regions and across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, many of the issues identified in this report will

be common to many services and communities, particularly those located in metropolitan areas.

- Non Aboriginal NGOs – many of the issues affecting the Aboriginal organisations participating in this project are related to their size as small to medium sized NGOs rather than to being Aboriginal controlled organisations. Many small to medium sized non Aboriginal NGOs experience similar challenges and vulnerabilities, and strategies for supporting them would be similar to those for non Aboriginal NGOs.

The main findings of the project indicate that the Aboriginal organisations in the Metro West region are sound and well managed, but that in addition to challenges related to their sizes and funding bases, they also face specific challenges related to working as Aboriginal organisations within their communities. For this reason, a specific set of strategies is required to strengthen and further develop them for the future.

2 PROJECT OUTCOMES: Organisation and Project Assessments

2.1 Organisation and project assessments

Initially, 17 services nominated themselves to participate in the project, but one remained uncontactable. A list of participating services is at Attachment 1.

Of the 16 services that took part in on-site visits and assessments, 11 were independent organisations and five were projects or services being run within mainstream organisations². Levels of participation varied, and the table below shows the extent to which services completed all aspects of this project.

Table 1: Participation levels in service assessments

n= 16

Total services participating: 16	Independent organisations: 11	Auspiced projects or services: 5
Number completing all aspects of assessment	7	4
Number completing most aspects	2 (management committee not available to meet)	0
Other	2 (missed aspects of assessment/ no final feedback session)	1 (adapted methodology)
TOTAL	11	5

The assessment process was designed to help services:

- identify their own strengths and vulnerable areas
- discuss and identify what could to be done to strengthen these areas
- develop a simple, achievable plan of action.

2.1.1 Findings from staff and management committee surveys and consultations

During on-site visits staff and management committee members were requested to fill in short surveys (refer to Attachment 2 for copies of survey forms).

² 10 of these identify as Aboriginal controlled organisations and one is an organisation with an Aboriginal manager and a significant proportion of Aboriginal staff and management committee members.

▣ Profile of staff

A total of 48 staff working in Aboriginal services took part in the service assessments, and 42 of these completed surveys. The surveys showed that there was a relatively high level of part time staffing, with only 60% of respondents employed full time.

There was also a high proportion of staff relatively new to their current position, with 50% of the group being in their job less than 18 months, and half of these being in their job less than six months. There did not appear to be an unusually high level of staff turnover in most organisations – in fact several organisations had founding staff or very long term staff still employed. The high proportion of recent appointments primarily reflects short term project staff in projects or services that were less than a few years old, and a higher staff turnover in short term projects.

The questions about previous work experience and training revealed the following:

- Previous work experience was varied across the group, with around 26% (11) having teaching or nursing backgrounds, 19% having work histories unrelated to community services and most people having fairly mixed working backgrounds.
- Nearly all respondents had had post school training of some sort (92%), with 85% having post school award qualifications, most of which had direct relevance to their work in Aboriginal services.
- The majority of people had either received mentoring from a more experienced person (68%) and/or provided mentoring (70%) – 44% had both received and provided mentoring.
- The majority self identified their main skills as people relationship skills (such as communication, understanding and compassion, respect).

People were asked to identify training and other supports that would help them in their job, and the following table shows the types of support identified.

Table 2: Training and other supports identified

Multiple responses

Training	Details	Number of responses
Management or administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management: 5 ▪ Finances/bookkeeping: 5 ▪ Administration/computers: 5 ▪ Writing or speaking skills: 3 ▪ Planning and evaluation: 2 ▪ Other: 4 	24
Client support skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Counselling: 4 ▪ General support work: 3 ▪ Case work supervision: 2 	9

Training	Details	Number of responses
Work practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assertiveness training: 2 ▪ Time management: 2 ▪ Other: 2 	6
Working with the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Networking ▪ Cultural sensitivity and awareness ▪ Available services 	3
Other supports	Details	Number of responses
Support processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management mentoring/support group: 4 ▪ Regular supervision: 4 ▪ In house training or staff development days: 2 ▪ Other: 2 	12
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More time: 3 ▪ More staff: 3 	6
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better data collection and analysis: 2 	2

These responses were confirmed in the face to face sessions, where, when asked to nominate one thing that would help them in their job, staff most commonly identified specific skill development (particularly management skills, IT and administration skills, assertiveness and time management) or administration systems (particularly computerising data collection and budgeting).

□ Profile of management committees

A total of 24 members of management committees took part in the service assessments, and 18 of these completed surveys (representing six of the 11 organisations).

The majority (67%) had been on their committee for more than two years, with 23% having been a member of the committee for longer than six years. Most (72%) had experience on other management committees.

About one third of management committee members had attended some form of governance training, and one group was also making use of ongoing governance mentoring.

2.1.2 Assessment findings

□ Governance

In general, four organisations were assessed as having 'very strong' governance, five organisations were assessed as 'sound' but could benefit from further development, and one organisation was assessed as 'developing' and in need of further support.

The areas of least confidence for management committee members were financial management, legal issues, and maintaining the membership of the management committee. Most committee members expressed an interest in aspects of management committee development or training, particularly around financial and legal issues.

The other area of potential vulnerability for some organisations was the extent to which their management committees had a high level of reliance on paid staff and took a relatively passive role in leading the organisation.

□ Administration

Of the 10 organisations that took part in a systems review, eight had a dedicated administration worker position, with most being part time. In the case of the other two organisations, administration was either shared by the manager and project staff or done by the manager. Table 3 shows the number of organisations by the number of hours per week of dedicated administration staffing.

Table 3: Dedicated administration hours

n =7 organisations

Number of hours pw	Number of organisations
10 -15	3
20 - 28	2
Full time	1
3 full time positions	1
Total	7

Nearly all organisations had computerised bookkeeping, although only three had staff who had done formal training in bookkeeping. Most organisations manage their bookkeeping in house, and, as shown in Table 4, in several instances it is the manager who keeps the financial accounts.

Table 4: Bookkeeping

n = 7 organisations

Bookkeeping done by	Number of organisations
Employed bookkeeper	3
Administration worker	3
Manager	4
Parent body	1
Total	11

□ Practice, processes and systems

Each of the independent organisations was assessed for aspects of its practice (based on consultations with staff) and its processes and systems (based on a systems review).

A four part scale³ was used to indicate the level of development for each aspect of the organisation assessed in this process:

- **'Starting out' (beginning):** Some basic systems and processes are in place.
- **'Under way' (developing):** Sound systems and processes are in place.
- **'Got it together' (integrated):** Systems and processes are relatively comprehensive, coordinated and effectively drive organisational responses.
- **'Showing the way' (leading):** The organisation is proactive in developing, integrating and improving its processes and systems, and provides good practice examples for others.

The graphs below show the number of organisations that were assessed as falling into each stage of development across the various aspects of practice, processes and systems

³ Adapted by Bradfield Nyland Group & Spall Watters Group from the Queensland Government Performance Management Review Framework for Governance, 2007

Chart 1: Practice within the organisation

n = 11 organisations

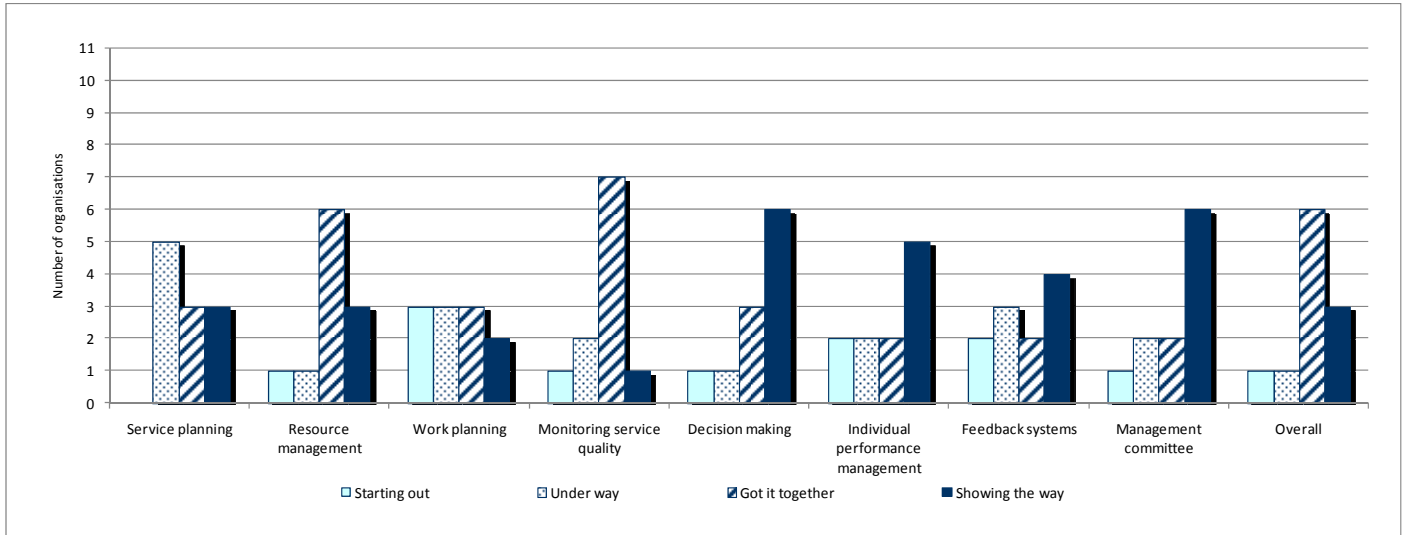


Chart 2: Systems and processes (part 1)

n = 10 organisations

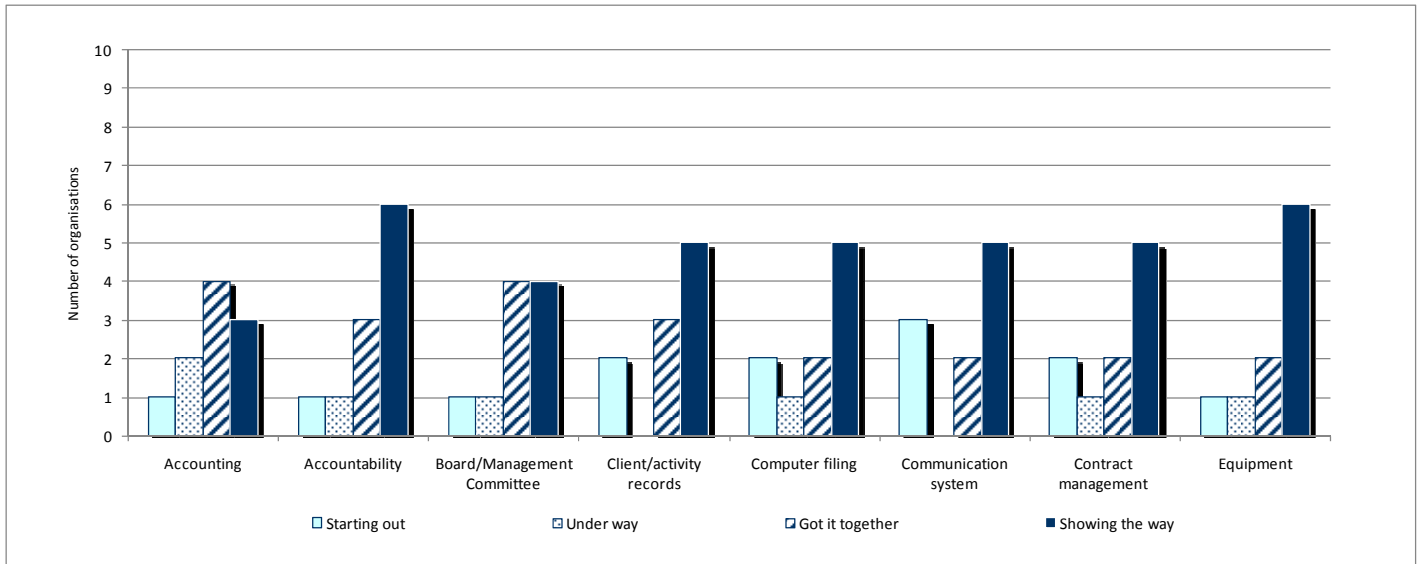
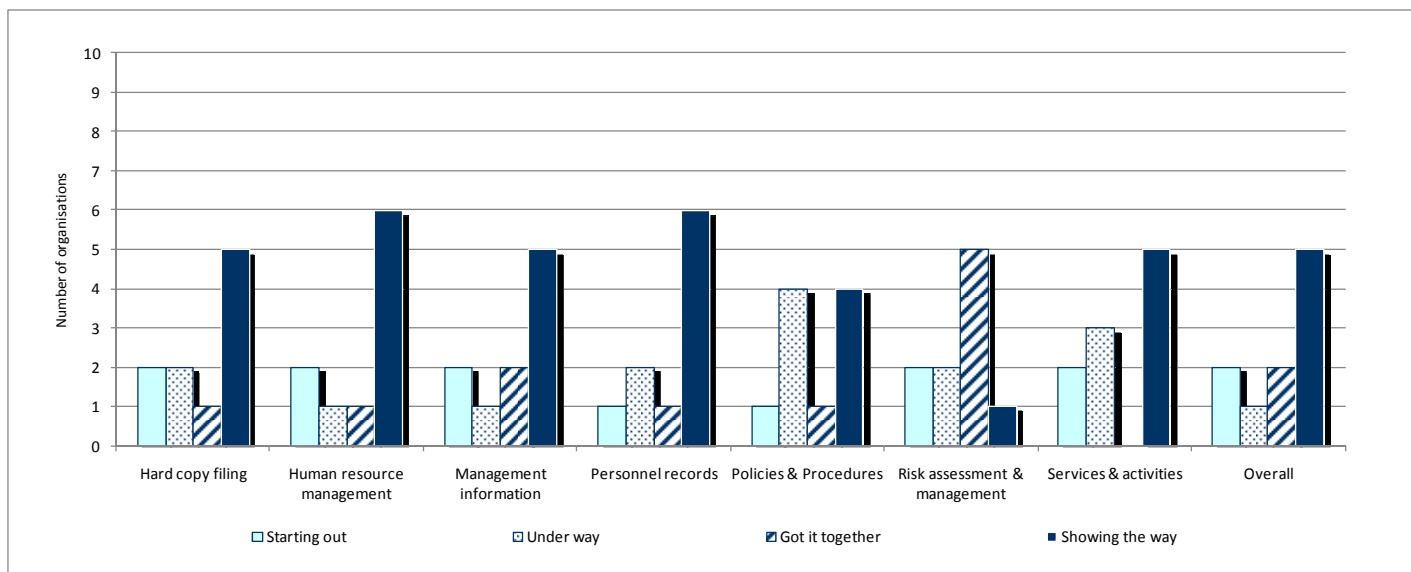


Chart 3: Systems and processes (part 2)

n = 10 organisations



The assessments show that, overall most organisations were in the 'Got it together' or 'Showing the way' range for most aspects of both practice and systems. Only two organisations were consistently in the first stages of development. Of these, one could be described as struggling and the other as still developing. Both these organisations appear to need additional support to remain viable in the longer term.

The following table shows the numbers of organisations that were in each stage of development overall for their practice and for their systems and processes:

Chart 4: Overview of organisational assessments

Development stage	Practice	Systems & processes
Starting out (beginning)	1	2
Under way (developing)	1	1
Got it together (integrated)	6	2
Showing the way (leading)	3	5
Total	11	10

2.1.3 Results Based Accountability (RBA) and Good Practice Guidelines (GPG)

Staff in the participating services were asked to comment on both Results Based Accountability (RBA) and the Good Practice Guidelines (GPG) in their group session with the consultants. They were asked:

- if they had heard of either of these systems
- whether the service had attempted to implement either system
- what use they thought the particular system might be to the service.

▣ Results Based Accountability (RBA)

Of the 11 organisations and three projects that took part in this discussion, all had heard of RBA except for three services (two organisations not funded by DoCS and one DoCS funded). Staff from two services had attended RBA training. However, none of the organisations had tried to use RBA (project staff were uncertain as to whether parent organisations were using it), and only a couple of organisations appeared to have a clear picture of how they might make use of it.

▣ Good Practice Guidelines

Of the nine organisations and three projects required to implement the GPG, staff from two organisations had not heard about the GPG and one other had not attempted to implement them. Six organisations and two projects had implemented or were in the process of implementing the Guidelines (staff from one project were uncertain about whether their parent organisation had implemented them).

The relevant parts of the Good Practice Guidelines were incorporated into the indicators and criteria used in the assessment process for this project. The stages of development for any particular aspect of operation also reflect the extent of compliance with the Good Practice Guideline for that area:

- **'Starting out' (beginning):** Would not meet the GPG.
- **'Under way' (developing):** Would partially meet the GPG.
- **'Got it together' (integrated):** Would meet the basic requirements of the GPG.
- **'Showing the way' (leading):** Would meet all the requirements of the GPG.

2.2 Feedback and actions plans

Following the assessment process, each service met with the consultants for a feedback and planning session. These sessions provided an opportunity to review the areas of strength and vulnerability with the organisation or project, review the assessment in terms of the stages of development and discuss future action that the organisation could take to build its strengths and address weaknesses.

The outcomes of this session were then incorporated into a final short, accessible report and an action plan. The action plans provided a summary of the priority areas for future

work, a guide to resources to carry out the action plan and direct access to online tools and ongoing advice for a further year through Management Support Online (MSO). An example of a pro forma report is at Attachment 3 and a sample action plan at Attachment 4.

2.3 Aboriginal projects or services in mainstream organisations

Aboriginal projects or services are run within a non Aboriginal controlled or 'mainstream' organisations in one of the following ways:

- As an identified Aboriginal position (where the organisation has specific positions for Aboriginal staff to enhance its own capacity to deliver its service to Aboriginal clients).
- As a service or project funded specifically for Aboriginal clients.
- As an 'auspiced' funded project or service, where the intention is that the Aboriginal project operate relatively autonomously or become independently incorporated over time.

The issue of mainstream organisations auspicing Aboriginal projects or providing Aboriginal specific services is often a fraught one for both the Aboriginal community and for mainstream organisations providing Aboriginal services. There is a very strong sense of direct ownership of funds for Aboriginal services by Aboriginal community members and a preference for Aboriginal services to be delivered by Aboriginal controlled organisations.

Nonetheless, there is respect for non Aboriginal organisations that do deliver services to the Aboriginal community in an appropriate and acceptable way.

From a staff perspective, the majority of the projects or services participating in this project were supportive and appreciative of their parent body, although some staff identified communication issues that still required attention. In one organisation, Aboriginal staff identified a number of advantages in being within a mainstream organisation – primarily to do with feeling more protected from criticism from their own community.

Several issues were identified as affecting the operation and management of Aboriginal projects in mainstream organisations:

- Parent organisations being unclear about the rationale and parameters for identified Aboriginal positions, leading to lack of clear job roles and a lack of management guidance to the staff member.
- Communication problems, inadequate consultation with Aboriginal staff and differing expectations around work practices, leading to misunderstandings over

why certain management decisions have been made and disagreements over work practices. The most common area of work practice disagreements was over documentation and the use of formal systems and processes.

- Difficulties with the management of staff performance – non Aboriginal managers reported instances of being accused of not understanding cultural issues, or even of racism, when they try to manage the performance of Aboriginal staff.
- Tensions and disagreements as a result of a service in an auspice arrangement wanting to be independent and there being either no clear agreement about this or no progress towards independence occurring.

3. PROJECT OUTCOMES: Consultations and capability issues

3.1 Community consultations

In addition to an initial meeting for all participating services, two other meetings were held for Aboriginal community members to provide them with an opportunity to participate. These were advertised as catered morning or afternoon tea sessions through participating services, the Koori Mail and directly to people nominated by services and individuals.

The meeting at Penrith attracted only one participant, while eight people attended the meeting at Mt Druitt.

At the initial group meeting for participating services, and during initial contact with each service, people were asked to nominate Elders or significant Aboriginal community members who they felt should be invited to participate. Several of these people were contacted directly and invited to talk by phone if they were not able to attend a consultation meeting. Telephone interviews were then conducted with three people.

The issues and ideas raised and discussed in these consultations and interviews were similar to those raised by participating services, and are incorporated in the capability issues discussed below.

3.2 Consultations with government workers

Two meetings were held with Aboriginal public servants – one for Aboriginal officers from the Department of Community Services (16 people attended) and one for Aboriginal staff from other government agencies at Mt Druitt (9 people attended). These were advertised through the relevant interagency networks (DoCS Aboriginal workers network and Koori Interagency).

Representatives from Blacktown Council, Penrith Council, NSW Department of Education and Training, NSW Health, Housing NSW, Centrelink and the Australian Taxation Office attended the latter meeting.

Aboriginal public servants who attended the project consultations came from a variety of government departments and Local Government positions, and their experiences differed accordingly. Their main concerns, however, related to the way their job roles

are defined and the expectations on them from their employing agency and their communities.

The following issues were identified as those most likely to impact on their work:

- Expectations of their job role from the agency can be very broad, with the worker being automatically assigned anything that involves Aboriginal people. Similarly, members of their own community will also have expectations that they will deal with any issue relating to the particular government agency, and in many cases, solve problems for them that are well outside the worker's job role and power.
- Workers can also find themselves limited to the identified Aboriginal position, only dealing with Aboriginal issues or clients and being overlooked for career advancement through generalist positions.
- Some participants in the project consultations also talked about problems with their line managers, but it was not possible to ascertain whether these issues were related more to poor management skills than to the Aboriginality of the worker.

Government workers generally agreed that interagency and intra-agency Aboriginal worker networks were the most critical support for them as these meetings and interactions gave them an opportunity to share experiences, gain perspective, get support and, in the case of intra-agency networks, develop recommendations or requests to put to their employer agency.

3.3 Capability issues

Based on the work with participating organisations and consultations with Aboriginal community members and government workers, the following issues were identified as the main factors that appear to impact on the ability of Aboriginal organisations to perform effectively:

- The initial establishment phase of an organisation - including:
 - how and why organisations are established
 - the extent to which they have viable funding bases (particularly the viability of organisations set up on short term project funding)
 - the expectations from funding bodies of how long it should take for an organisation to become fully operational and/or a service to reach optimum delivery
 - the type and amount of expertise needed to support the organisation during its 'incubation'.

- Skills and knowledge of members of management committees, senior staff and general staff, with the skills of management committees and senior staff being the most critical for organisational governance and management.
- Aboriginal community issues and cultural obligations – including:
 - expectations and pressure from community members: these impact on work boundaries for staff, who have to balance work with cultural and community expectations, and can impact on the service focus, priorities and workload of an organisation.
 - community politics: issues of ownership of organisations, tensions over whether organisations are sufficiently accountable to the community and criticism of different services often without evidence.
 - founders and family run businesses: long standing staff who are founders of an organisation, or who have close family ties, can provide stability and protection to organisations, but can also leave the organisation vulnerable to future change, narrow control and accusations of limited accountability.
- Service development skills – most services feel restricted and limited by government funding parameters and not able to provide services in quite the way they think necessary. At the same time, there is limited time, resources and skills for more innovative service delivery approaches to be developed.
- Infrastructure issues – in common with many small organisations, smaller Aboriginal organisations struggle with general administration, bookkeeping, data management and compliance reporting.
- Communication between services and funding bodies – this can become unnecessarily tense (particularly when funding body representatives need to raise performance issues with organisations), and misunderstandings on both sides are common.

4. PROJECT OUTCOMES: Findings and Planning Forum

4.1 Overview of forum

The Findings and Planning Forum was designed to share the findings from the research elements of the project with Aboriginal services and community members, government representatives and other interested people, and to develop the directions for a regional plan.

Invitations were sent out through participating services, interagencies and to the mailing list from the consultations. Department of Community Services (DoCS) and Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) representatives on the Project Reference Group took responsibility for coordinating government representation, and inviting senior regional government representatives to attend the 'dialogue' session on the last afternoon.

The Forum was held over two days and was attended by over 60 people (a copy of the program is at Attachment 5). The structure of the Forum consisted of the following:

- A presentation of the findings from the consultations and work with individual services – this incorporated the findings reported in Section 2 of this report and an overview of the main factors that were found to be impacting on Aboriginal services (the 'capability issues' outlined in Section 3 of this report).
- A 'showcase' of good practice and problem solving from local Aboriginal services.
- Strategy development sessions on the main issue areas which provided an opportunity for Aboriginal service and community representatives to discuss issues in detail and begin to identify responses.
- A 'dialogue' session for senior government representatives and representatives from participating organisations to talk through possible strategies together.

The capability issues were grouped into six areas to form the basis of the strategy development discussions. Discussion during the Forum about new projects and organisations raised more general issues about funding and relationships with funding bodies, which forms a seventh area in the following report of the Forum outcomes.

The following sections outline the outcomes of each of the strategy development sessions, and, where relevant, the discussion from the dialogue session on that issue area. Each section deals with one of the main issue areas and is divided into:

- **Issues:** This presents a summary of the related issues discussion by Aboriginal Forum participants during the strategy development session.
- **Ideas:** This presents the ideas for action that were generated in the strategy development session. These are grouped into actions that could be taken by Aboriginal services themselves and action that could be taken by government. These ideas have informed the strategic directions outlined in Section 5 of this report, and will be incorporated into the final implementation plan when this is developed.
- **Discussion:** This presents any relevant discussion on the area from the final 'dialogue' session with government representatives. Two issue areas were not part of the dialogue session ('Improving understanding around communication, culture and expectations' and 'Managing community expectations and impact on organisations').

4.2 Funding

4.2.1 Issues

- **Being able to compete effectively for funding**

Aboriginal NGOs reported the following concerns:

- Many find the process and paper work overly complex and have difficulty making the time available to complete Expressions of Interest (EOIs).
- Some time frames for EOIs are short and/or organisations do not find out about them until close to the due date.
- Competitive tendering makes collaboration across organisations challenging.
- The approach to service delivery that they believe is the most effective for Aboriginal clients may not be competitive in terms of output or cost (see below).

From a funding Department perspective, considerable effort has been made in the Region to simplify funding processes and to support Aboriginal NGOs in preparing EOIs. A small grant program providing a \$500 amount to interested organisations to pay for submission writing was reportedly very well received by NGOs. Funding Departments reported that they sometimes have difficulties attracting EOIs and/or finding suitable organisations willing to take on funded services or projects.

- **The use of Aboriginal expertise and Aboriginal service funding**

Aboriginal NGOs are regularly asked by non Aboriginal NGOs to either 'partner' in an EOI or, once an EOI has been awarded to a non Aboriginal NGO, advise the organisation about how to access the Aboriginal community or provide 'culturally

appropriate' services. This includes situations where the non Aboriginal organisation may have competed with the Aboriginal organisation for the service funding.

These experiences raise the following issues:

- How funds for Aboriginal services are allocated to non Aboriginal organisations and the extent to which EOIs are evaluated in terms of how the organisation will access and utilise Aboriginal expertise.
- The role of Aboriginal NGOs and the extent to which Aboriginal expertise is actually valued by non Aboriginal 'partners'.
- The expectation of non Aboriginal NGOs that they can take up funding for Aboriginal service provision and then make use of free advice from Aboriginal NGOs.

▪ **The service models**

Aboriginal service providers argued that effective and culturally appropriate service delivery to Aboriginal clients and communities requires the building of relationships and trust with those clients and communities in order to provide service. This means that they may require more time to establish a new service and longer time to be spent with individual clients than for comparable services to non Aboriginal clients. Service targets and time frames in service agreements do not necessarily reflect this.

Service models developed for particular projects or funding programs may also not be considered by Aboriginal workers to be the most effective approach for Aboriginal clients or communities, but Aboriginal NGOs see little opportunity for negotiation of alternative approaches.

Aboriginal community representatives also expressed concerns about the limited role of the general Aboriginal community in determining the types of services provided and the extent to which they are consulted about service effectiveness.

▪ **General relationship to funding bodies**

In discussion, Aboriginal NGO representatives reflected that there was still some mistrust about the Government's view of Aboriginal NGOs, and concern that there was an 'agenda' of mainstreaming Aboriginal services.

4.2.2 Ideas

What community organisations could do	What government could do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop partnerships with one another, identifying each other's areas of expertise and collaborating on submissions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Further improve the tendering process to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - better support collaboration and sub-contracting across partnerships

What community organisations could do	What government could do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop more effective approaches to funding submissions by developing a pro forma funding submission kit (working across funding programs) and developing submission writing skills. ▪ Establish a 'skills bank' and look for brokerage funds to pay for specific assistance with issues, including drafting funding submissions. ▪ Work to develop better partnerships with non Aboriginal organisations, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - designing clear agreements or memorandum of understanding (MOUs) for these arrangements - negotiating project implementation that includes specific mentoring and organisational development assistance for the Aboriginal NGO partner or project and, where relevant, provides resources, systems and tools to support the project becoming independently incorporated - ensuring accountability about progress and implementation of any agreed plan of action with a non Aboriginal organisation to both government and the Aboriginal community. ▪ Work together to develop common responses and approaches to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - requests to help with accessing Aboriginal community and use of Aboriginal expertise, including developing a fee scale for this work - how Aboriginal organisations, communities and issues are viewed by other organisations and the general community - responding to standard areas of funding proposals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensure adequate timing of funding bids - reduce complexity and size of papers. ▪ Take a developmental approach to funding proposals that allows for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consideration of how to work with program guidelines that do not fit the needs or approach required for Aboriginal clients or communities - negotiation of a reasonable lead time and implementation plan for new projects - negotiation of the service delivery model through discussion of issues and options - unit costing or service target considerations to be balanced by the potential effectiveness of a service delivery approach - consideration of involving other funding Departments in resourcing service models that cross traditional funding programs. ▪ Improve the evaluation of funding submissions, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consulting with potential services users about the service scope and approach being proposed - checking that accountability will be sound - checking that the proposal is feasible and adjusting funding or service agreement to make a project workable - providing feedback on unsuccessful bids. ▪ Review policies for the funding of Aboriginal service provision by non Aboriginal organisations and consider having specific requirements such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aboriginal referees - an active Aboriginal partner organisation - the organisation undertaking to provide or share administrative support to Aboriginal services sector. ▪ In terms of the general relationship of government to Aboriginal NGOs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide a clear explanation of government's agenda for Aboriginal services - Consider a regional level senior Aboriginal group, equivalent to the Senior Officers Group.

4.2.3 Discussion

Representatives of both NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) and the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) at regional level made clear statements about their respective Departments' commitments to actively supporting a viable Aboriginal service sector and Aboriginal NGO service providers, with the Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project being a practical example of this commitment.

In terms of delivering Aboriginal services, DoCS also made it clear that there will continue to be a role for non Aboriginal service providers so as to ensure choice for service users, and that the Department will need to continue to work within the current funding parameters in its administration of funding.

In discussion of the idea of a senior, regional level Aboriginal consultative group, it became apparent that the 'Two Ways Together' Regional Engagement Group (REG) was established to provide this level of Aboriginal input to regional human services planning. It was suggested that the Aboriginal Capacity Building Advisory Group (ACBAG) make contact with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs regional representative to explore how the ACBAG might have input to the REG.

In discussing ways of improving the tendering process and funding administration:

- Representatives of Aboriginal NGOs discussed the difficulties from their perspective (as outlined in the issues section above). They emphasised the disincentives of the workload involved in putting together an EOI, undergoing audits for accreditation where this was required and then adding to their administrative load the documentation and accountability requirements of a new project if they were successful in an EOI.
- Representatives from government discussed how they learn from each round of EOIs, with DoCS conducting formal reviews of outcomes of past EOI rounds to identify the lessons from the process. They emphasised the importance of ensuring a good response for EOIs and talked about the challenge of supporting organisations to become robust enough to take on more or new services.
- There was general discussion about the capacity of funding bodies to conduct select tenders and the possibility of adding an additional weighting for an applicant's demonstrated capacity to work with Aboriginal communities. There was also discussion about the potential for negotiating partnerships for select tenders and of supporting better matches between smaller Aboriginal organisations and large agencies, with each organisation complementing the other with their specific expertise. A suggestion was also made that the identification of Aboriginal specific components in mainstream programs could be increased, making these more explicit and accountable.

- There was general interest and support for the idea of exploring further ideas around appropriate service provision models and the funding implications of these. DADHC in particular expressed an interest in receiving input on effective service provision models. For government, identifying effective service provision models was also a question of how to develop a better evidence base for Aboriginal services. A possible research project drawing on Aboriginal expertise was suggested.
- In terms of the evaluation of EOIs or funding proposals, it appears that the process is not generally understood and that it may be useful for the Departments to make this information more public. It was also suggested by a government representative that the support for Aboriginal NGOs in tendering processes is at an individual office level and that this needs to be translated into a policy commitment.

4.3 New projects and organisations

4.3.1 Issues

- **Establishing new organisations in response to 'one off' or short term funding**

Short term funding - including a number of recent program initiatives - has created disruption and difficulty for some Aboriginal NGOs in the region. The main impact has been on organisations whose sole source of funding is short term funding limited to 2-3 years. These organisations have no certainty of what will happen at the end of that period.

The following impacts of short term funding were reported:

- Organisations that were set up with short term funding were sometimes still in early stages of development at the time when they needed to seek alternative funds, and did not necessarily have the level of expertise or development to be successful.
- There were often limited, or no, sources of funding for similar purposes available and it has therefore been very difficult for organisations to find ongoing funding in funding bids.
- Staff retention has been difficult for these organisations, particularly in the final 6 – 9 month period.
- Services with ongoing clients have had to implement exit strategies with their client group as funding has come to an end, only to start up again when funding has been extended.

- The Aboriginal communities in these areas have come to distrust the service provision, seeing it as something that is likely to be taken away as easily as it was provided.

- **Supporting organisations and projects through the early development phase**

Organisations often struggle during the first couple of years of development, and are at their most vulnerable during this time. This is exacerbated if they are operating with inadequate funding and/or only have short term project funding.

4.3.2 Ideas

What community organisations could do	What government could do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a kit for new organisations or services which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - information about the steps involved in implementing new projects – particularly around assessing community needs, community engagement and managing community expectations of the service. - policy, procedure and reporting templates, tools and resources that can be tailored. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify the gap that will occur when a project finishes and develop exit strategies that include taking responsibility for managing community expectations when a project finishes. ▪ Provide a budget for some level of pick up on short term projects. ▪ Provide support for new services and organisations by funding an 'operations officer' for their first six months of operating, ensuring ongoing funds for training are included in the budget and enable Departmental program staff to provide more support in the early stages.

4.3.3 Discussion

The issue of short term funding is a central, rather than regional government policy issue, and regional levels of government have limited control or influence. Government representatives discussed the possibility of rolling projects through from short term program to short term program where the subsequent funding program has a similar focus as a way of ensuring continuity of funding and minimising the disruption otherwise caused.

Providing training to Aboriginal NGOs on managing a project based business model was also suggested.

4.4 Improving understanding around communication, culture and expectations

This area was considered to be less likely to generate ideas that required discussion with government representatives and so was not part of the dialogue session. The following report therefore does not have a 'discussion' section.

4.4.1 Issues

Throughout all aspects of this project the themes around culture, cultural difference and understanding between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people and organisations were constant.

- **The work context**

The work context for Aboriginal community services staff is defined by the close community context in which they work. The connections that an Aboriginal worker has with the community will mean that the emotional context will be more immediate and intense than for most non-Aboriginal workers. This was captured by one person's comment that 'you may run into your clients in the local supermarket – I run into them at my cousin's wedding'.

This immediacy, and the need to acknowledge and address the personal aspect of the work context requires discussion and work both within Aboriginal organisations, and between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal workers within non Aboriginal organisations, to develop agreed values, work practices and boundary setting, principles and processes.

- **Aboriginal expertise and service delivery models**

As noted above in the discussion on funding, Aboriginal community services representatives argue that the particular needs of Aboriginal clients and communities require different approaches to service delivery. The exact nature of these differences is not well understood by non Aboriginal people or documented, and there is a need for Aboriginal community services to identify and define work practices that are needed in order to inform service delivery for Aboriginal services, negotiate work practices within organisations and negotiate funding expectations with Government.

- **Cultural awareness and respect**

There was a general sense amongst Aboriginal participants of Aboriginal issues - particularly as they affect work practices and service delivery - still not being well understood by non Aboriginal people. People also expressed concerns about:

- a lack of appropriate respect occurring in some instances in work places and in meetings (citing 'knowing exchanges' between government officers and representatives of auspicing bodies in particular)
- non Aboriginal people speaking publicly about particular Aboriginal services without involving the Aboriginal people from those services
- the appropriateness of some cultural awareness training that has been provided.

4.4.2 Ideas

- **Develop knowledge and understanding** about appropriate service delivery and work practices through research and forums on practice for Aboriginal services.
- **Provide cultural awareness training** for all staff.
- **Promote accurate information** within existing agency networks, clients and community.

4.5 Managing community expectations and impact on organisations

This area was also considered to be unlikely to generate ideas that required discussion with government representatives and was not included in the dialogue session. The following report therefore does not have a 'discussion' section.

4.5.1 Issues

- **Managing and negotiating client and community expectations**
One of the most commonly reported pressures on Aboriginal service staff was the high level of expectations of clients and community members and the demands made on them for assistance or services beyond their work role. Unlike non Aboriginal services, there are community expectations and cultural obligations on Aboriginal workers at a personal level that exacerbate this pressure.
- **Negativity within the Aboriginal community**
Aboriginal NGOs report that the community is sometimes quick to criticise them, often based on rumour or gossip (particularly where the service has not been able or willing to meet expectations).

4.5.2 Ideas

- **Set clear ground rules with clients** through:
 - developing a *Charter of Rights and Responsibilities* for clients that outlines the relationship and the scope of the services that can be provided
 - making clear the role of Aboriginal staff
 - promote mutual trust and respect between staff and clients.
- **Develop service network and partnerships** so that there are seamless referrals of clients to other services.
- **Support staff in understanding and maintaining boundaries** through:
 - clear job descriptions and expectations
 - ensuring they understand funding contracts, guidelines and the degree of allowable 'flexibility'
 - ensure time is set aside to discuss ways of managing client expectations and community pressures
 - developing a guide to staff discussions on managing client and community expectations
 - maintaining a workplace climate that promotes staff sharing information.
- **Promote clear messages about the role and limitations of services** to the community:
 - ask service users to help promote an accurate understanding of services within the community.
 - develop community awareness of the difference between the community's wants and needs and the limited resources in community organisations.
 - hold community meetings where local communities can access up to date information from service providers about what services are available.
 - make better use of formal complaints policies so that concerns can be raised in ways that allow for fair processes and focus on better outcomes.
- **Develop relationships between organisations** to:
 - build trust, understanding and professional relationships
 - minimise gossip and actively promote positive aspects of other services.
 - map services and maximise resources.
- **Ask government to also play a role** in helping to stop damaging gossip.

4.6 Administrative support

4.6.1 Issues

For small to medium sized organisations, administration is often disproportionately time consuming. Many of the participating organisations work with partly manual systems for data collection and collation, have people in manager positions responsible for administrative tasks such as bookkeeping, and rarely have staff with advanced expertise in administrative systems.

4.6.2 Ideas

What community organisations could do	What government could do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve planning for administration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensure that administration is adequately costed in budgets - ensure that administration is reflected in staff work plans and the service agreement. ▪ Make use of traineeships to increase staffing for administration. ▪ Collaborate with other organisations to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - develop partnerships and share skills - access mentoring or advice from organisations with experience - explore co-location options and costs - form partnerships with larger agencies providing administration support (suggested as possible criteria for larger agencies receiving Aboriginal services funding). ▪ Investigate bulk purchase of computer software, using bulk licensing. ▪ Check the roles of peak bodies in providing relevant resources that might assist. ▪ Develop a reporting template that is tailored for different funding body requirements. ▪ Employ a 'floating' administrator/bookkeeper across a number of organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acknowledge administration as a legitimate cost in service budgets, including administration for short term projects. ▪ Acknowledge the workload administration as part of Service Specifications. ▪ Provide support for the employment of trainees. ▪ Implement consistent reporting requirements across Departments and funding programs.

4.6.3 Discussion

In discussion with government representatives, there was general support for the above ideas, and a further suggestion of looking at web based administration systems.

4.7 Governance development

4.7.1 Issues

The stronger governance is within an organisation, the more robust the organisation will be in the longer term. Although governance in most of the participating organisations

was assessed as generally sound, this will always be a vulnerable area for an organisation.

Natural turnover on boards and management committees also means that there will be an ongoing need for governance orientation and training.

4.7.2 Ideas

What community organisations could do	What government could do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide orientation and support to management committee members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide prospective, new and existing management committee members with clear information on the principles and practice of good governance - consider using a mentoring model or buddy system to support new committee members (i.e. match a new member with an experienced one). ▪ Support skill development in governance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - allow time for paid staff and volunteers to attend training on governance issues and look at the barriers to the participation of volunteers - provide in-house training and/or supporting people to complete the TAFE Certificate IV Business Governance - use the internet for governance training. - use the skills from other organisations (e.g. Butucarbin) - use a coaching or mentoring model (in house sessions at management committee meetings with a governance expert). ▪ Skill up the Public Officer in each organisation with expertise on governance issues as a point of reference for the rest of the management committee and for organisations that do not have in-house expertise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Release Aboriginal public servants who also sit on NGO management committees to attend approved community sector governance training. ▪ Improve the training of Departmental programme officers in their understanding of community sector organisations (for example, by arranging placements for workers in community organisations or formal training in community sector issues). ▪ Help to identify and source solutions when organisations are in difficulty, and step in where there are breaches of accountability in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations. ▪ Improve governance by ensuring long term sustainable funding.

4.7.3 Discussion

- There was some concern expressed that the TAFE Certificate IV Business Governance was too abstract and suggestions that it needed to be redesigned to be more applied and to include more practical examples and problem solving skills.

- Training for public servants:
 - A DoCS representative pointed out that Service Agreements preclude DOCS staff serving on the management committees of DOCS funded organisations and that any training would be subject to DOCS study leave provisions for staff (i.e. either linked to the job or to career development).
 - There was general agreement that Departmental program staff working with Aboriginal organisations need to develop mutual trust and good working relationships, but that a balance between formal processes and informal personal relationships was needed. Government representatives talked about the need for government workers to be invited to visit services or attend informal forums as a way of building relationships and understanding. Reference was also made to some non Aboriginal Departmental officers being fearful of 'doing the wrong thing'.
- Providing assistance to NGOs: Government representatives stated that funding bodies do not want to see organisations fail and will do what they can to support an organisation in difficulty. There was general agreement that organisations are fearful of admitting their problems to government workers, concerned that they will lose their funding. It was pointed out it is rare for established organisations to have their funding terminated, and that most 'defunding' comes from short term projects not being continued.

4.8 Senior manager support and development

4.8.1 Issues

Senior managers are the most critical resource in an organisation. Currently, there are no formal systems or networks that support the professional development of Aboriginal managers in the region, and most of the participating organisations had no ongoing professional development plans for senior staff nor succession plans for their retirement. Aboriginal NGOs are at a disadvantage competing with the public sector for a relatively small number of highly skilled people as salaries are significantly lower in the NGO sector.

4.8.2 Ideas

What community organisations could do	What government could do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure that managers are clear about their role in terms of the day to day management and the role of the management committee in terms of the governance of their organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support training and professional development for senior managers in NGOs by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - offering paid participation on the 'Management Development Programme for

What community organisations could do	What government could do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conduct a skills audit of staff and senior managers to identify skills and deficits. ▪ Organise training utilising the skills of colleagues. ▪ Increase networking, sharing of skills and resources across organisations. ▪ Consider establishing a 'Koori Managers Network' based on the 'Murri Managers' group in Rockhampton. ▪ Hold more staff development days, including time for team building. 	<p>Individuals – Aboriginal' (available to Aboriginal public servants) (note some aspects might need to be redesigned to accommodate community sector environment).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - providing access to the staff training calendar for public servants to those in the not for profit sector. - employing a training and resource officer to work with NGOs and assist organisations to source training. - assisting the establishment of a 'Koori Managers Network'. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase funding for salaries so that NGOs can compete for qualified staff.

4.8.3 Discussion

The general discussion on training needs covered the following:

- The importance of organisations being sufficiently funded to purchase training that they need.
- The need to conduct training audits or needs analyses to establish training needs.
- The need to identify gaps in available training and to assess the appropriateness of training delivery models for Aboriginal managers.

Government representatives commented that there is interest at state and federal levels of government in addressing the issue of Aboriginal leadership and potential funding at state level for training to support funded organisations.

It was also suggested that experienced Public Service managers may be prepared to volunteer time to provide mentoring to Aboriginal NGO managers.

5. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

5.1 Aboriginal NGOs in the Metro West region

The results of the assessments conducted with Aboriginal organisations receiving community services funding in the Metro West region indicate that most are strong, well run and well managed, with only two of the 11 participating organisations appearing to be in need of significant development work.

Many organisations have developed processes and practices that are of a high standard and/or that address particular issues in creative ways.

This is not to say that these organisations would not benefit from development support, particularly if funding departments are wanting to increase the overall capacity of the sector to take on new initiatives and to maximise potential for service delivery excellence.

The areas that were most commonly underdeveloped in participating organisations were:

- service planning, work planning and the use of client and other feedback systems
- evaluation and performance management of services and activities
- filing, document and record management
- documented policies and procedures
- formal risk management processes.

Each participating organisation now has an achievable action plan which identifies the changes that would assist them to improve their governance, management and operations.

What is important to note is that there are no apparent differences in the overall management and governance of Aboriginal organisations in this project to generalist organisations of similar size and service type – the types of underdeveloped areas that have been identified in organisations participating in this project are common for small to medium sized organisations⁴.

When general concerns about Aboriginal NGOs were identified in the Western Sydney Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Plan 2003 – 2006, it was also acknowledged at that time that these were not unique to Aboriginal organisations:

⁴ Bradfield Nyland Group: *On the Front Foot: An action plan for small NGOs (The SNOW Report)*, 2004

The issues facing Aboriginal NGOs are not dissimilar to those facing the wider NGO sector. In the last 5 years, some 10-15 DoCS funded projects (across all program areas) in Mt Druitt have been identified as being in crisis, generally relating to financial viability and or organisational management issues. A high percentage have "recovered" with intensive intervention from DoCS and local Peak agencies, providing training, support, service reshaping, and some additional funding (rare occasions and generally one off).(p6)

However, there are several factors that are specific to Aboriginal organisations which do make a difference to how they operate and the pressures they have to deal with:

- Aboriginal organisations have a higher profile and are more noticeable when problems occur – particularly with the collapses of small project based organisations in their beginning stages or cases of fraud or corruption. Non Aboriginal organisations having similar difficulties can collapse or be auspiced by other agencies without much community interest or concern, but Aboriginal organisations are likely to attract greater attention.
- Aboriginal organisations are more vulnerable to the Aboriginal community and its politics, and this can have significant negative effects on some organisations. Community level 'grapevines' will influence how a service is regarded, the reputation and standing of individuals associated with a service, and affect whether potential clients will use the service or not.
- Trust, and the need to develop trust in relationships between service providers and clients, and between services, is a critical and overt factor affecting approaches to service delivery and the capacity of the service to achieve outcomes for clients. Time is needed to build trust with the community in order for people to be prepared to use the service and for effective service delivery to occur with individual clients.
- The level of personal interrelationships can affect a number of aspects of an organisation – most noticeably by introducing continual conflicts of interest situations and making some organisations potentially more vulnerable to nepotism or corruption. This potential is well recognised within Aboriginal organisations, and most now have procedures for addressing this.
- There is a relatively small pool of skilled staff – particularly at manager level – and Aboriginal NGOs often lose skilled staff to government agencies, who can generally offer higher salaries.

The combination of the generic 'small NGO' issues and these additional factors indicates that Aboriginal services and organisations do have a need for specific tailored development programs and for additional development assistance.

5.2 The strategic issues

The primary aim of the Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project has been to identify the factors that limit the ability of funded Aboriginal community services to do their job well and to develop a plan to address these.

The term 'capacity building' implies amount and output – how much an organisation can do or how much it can learn or take in. In talking about how to support and assist organisations to do their job effectively, it may be more appropriate to talk in terms of ability and 'capability building', which implies competence, knowledge and intelligence.

A capable organisation is one that can:

- attract adequate long term resources
- recruit members and sustain a viable management committee
- understand and work effectively with its funding environment
- efficiently manage projects and activities
- deliver effective services or activities
- recruit and manage staff
- manage limited resources
- comply with legal and contractual obligations
- work productively with other organisations in its network.

This project has identified five sets of factors – strategic issues – which affect the ability of Aboriginal NGOs in the region to work to their optimum:

□ Funding

The main issues with funding for Aboriginal services are:

- Aboriginal NGOs report finding it difficult to compete effectively for funding due to the time consuming nature of the process, the challenge of forming collaborative relationships in a competitive tendering environment and their preferred service delivery models not being competitive in terms of output or cost.
- The way in which funds for Aboriginal services are allocated to non Aboriginal organisations and the role of Aboriginal NGOs in providing advice or assistance to non Aboriginal organisations.
- The need to explore alternative approaches to service delivery models, and negotiate service targets and time frames that accommodate the different needs of Aboriginal clients and communities.

- The impact of short term funding which includes:
 - organisations or projects being unable to find ongoing funding
 - resources and effort being put into setting up organisations that have limited life spans
 - loss of staff particularly in the final 6 – 9 month period.
 - services with ongoing clients implementing exit strategies with their client group as funding has come to an end, only to start up again when funding has been extended
 - Aboriginal communities becoming increasingly disillusioned and distrustful as services appear and then disappear.
- The ongoing need for open communication to maintain positive relationships between Aboriginal organisations, the Aboriginal communities and funding bodies, particularly around consultation on service needs and information about funding programs and directions.

❑ **New projects and organisations**

Establishing new organisations in response to 'one off' or short term funding is a high risk approach, and makes the need for a speedy start up of service delivery and operating longer term very difficult for these organisations. Service delivery and longer term viability would both be enhanced if new organisations and projects had specific additional support through their early development phase.

❑ **Culture, communication and relationships**

There are several aspects of cultural issues, communication and relationships at the individual workplace level, between Aboriginal services and other organisations, and between Aboriginal services and their local Aboriginal communities, that can impact on Aboriginal services and workers. These include:

- The work context for Aboriginal community services staff - this is defined by the close community context in which Aboriginal staff work and there is a need to develop agreed values, work practices and boundaries, principles and processes that acknowledge this context.
- Service delivery practices - the specific needs of Aboriginal clients and communities require particular approaches to service delivery and there is a need for Aboriginal community services to identify these, negotiate work practices within organisations and negotiate funding expectations with Government.
- Cultural awareness and respect - there was a general sense amongst Aboriginal participants of Aboriginal issues still not being well understood by non Aboriginal people (particularly as they affect work practices and service delivery). On the other hand, 'cultural awareness' can become a point of contention between Aboriginal staff and non Aboriginal colleagues or managers in generalist

organisations managing Aboriginal services when there is a performance management issue concerning an Aboriginal worker.

- Aboriginal clients and Aboriginal community expectations - community expectations and cultural obligations for workers at a personal level create pressure and Aboriginal NGOs report that the community is sometimes quick to criticise them.

❑ **Administration**

Administration currently takes a disproportionate amount of time and effort in most organisations. This could be better supported and made more efficient for small to medium sized organisations, freeing up resources and skilled staff currently used in administrative functions.

❑ **Development and leadership**

The two critical points within an organisation for sound operation are the management committee and the senior manager. Ongoing availability of governance training and support and support for the professional development of Aboriginal managers in the region are vital for the further development of Aboriginal services.

The extension of this professional development into building a pool of local expertise would ensure a sustainable strategy. Members of this group could perform an important role in the provision of leadership to individual organisations, assisting one another with problem solving and providing a focus for peer mentoring.

5.3 The strategic framework

In response to the findings from the Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project and the work of the participants at the Findings and Planning forum, it is recommended that the Department of Community Services and the Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Advisory Group (ACBAG) adopt a 3 – 5 year development plan for Aboriginal services in the region, organised into three stages⁵:

❑ **Stage 1: A viable Aboriginal services sector**

The aims of this stage would be to:

- ensure that all existing services reach basic compliance with critical elements of good governance, sound operations and the Good Practice Guidelines

⁵ It is vital that any further assessments for individual organisations are conducted in a developmental manner, with adequate resourcing for the organisations involved, and that the implementation of any regional development plan does not deteriorate into an additional compliance process.

- ensure that no Aboriginal NGO in the region is operating in the 'Starting out' or lower end of the 'Under way' ranges in assessments of practice, process and systems
- develop practical tools and processes that support the ability of Aboriginal NGOs to compete effectively for funding
- develop practical tools and processes that support the ability of non Aboriginal organisations to work productively with Aboriginal organisations
- address the impacts of short term funding.

❑ **Stage 2: A healthy and vital Aboriginal services sector**

The aims of this stage would be to:

- ensure all Aboriginal NGOs in the region reach full compliance with the Good Practice Guidelines and an overall rating in the 'Got it together' range in assessments of practice, process and systems.
- implement activities that support management committees and senior managers in making time available and accessing professional development opportunities
- address administration issues for Aboriginal NGOs
- develop resources for non Aboriginal organisations managing Aboriginal services
- support Aboriginal NGOs in improving service promotion, communication and relationships with their communities
- develop processes and resources for supporting new organisations and services in their early stages of development.

❑ **Stage 3: An Aboriginal services sector of excellence**

The aims of this stage would be to build on the outcomes of Stage 1 and 2 to:

- take the majority of Aboriginal NGOs into the 'Showing the way' range in assessments of practice, process and systems
- develop and document evidence based approaches to service delivery models for Aboriginal clients and communities, and adjust funding models to accommodate these approaches
- develop ongoing activities and processes to maintain skills and knowledge levels as new personnel join services
- provide a lead example of excellence in the delivery of Aboriginal services.

The plan would operate across five Key Result Areas (KRAs) reflecting the strategic issues outlined above:

1. Maximising the ability of Aboriginal NGOs to access adequate funding and develop long term resource bases.
2. Providing adequate support for the development and incubation of new services and organisations.

3. Building a positive, supportive and respectful environment for Aboriginal NGOs and workers.
4. Reducing the impact of administration.
5. Developing leadership and expertise in governance and organisational management.

5.4 Implementation

The Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project has allowed for a holistic approach in investigating and developing a strategic response to ensuring the viability of Aboriginal services in the region.

It has done this by:

- Working at an individual service level to assess the current capability of Aboriginal organisations and identify factors of vulnerability to be addressed through individual action plans.
- Engaging with Aboriginal community members and those working in government, exploring broader issues that impact on the capability and effective functioning of services.
- Bringing together members of Aboriginal services, community members and government representatives to discuss, debate and resolve future actions and responsibilities.

The project also consciously worked to identify and promote the strengths, achievements and 'good news' about Aboriginal services in the region, fostering a positive environment for the future growth and development of the Aboriginal services sector.

The next step for the project is the development of a coherent and practical set of actions that will progress the work to date.

It is recommended that a detailed implementation plan and costings be developed with the ACBAG, in consultation with the Department, and that the ACBAG have the responsibility of overseeing implementation.

This process will generate options and provide an opportunity for both the ACBAG and the Department to ascertain whether funds are available for aspects of the plan requiring resources, and to allocate time frames and priorities accordingly.

In terms of resources, it is expected that a significant proportion of the plan will be able to be implemented with modest resources. The details of the plan will be based on the ideas generated at the Findings and Planning forum, most of which do not require any significant resources to implement.

ATTACHMENT 1: Participating services

- Blue Mountains Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre
- Butucarbin
- Gilgai
- Indigenous Disability Advocacy Service
- Junaya for Families
- Link Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation (Metro West)
- Merana Aboriginal Community Association for the Hawkesbury
- Miimali Aboriginal Community Association
- Mirang Din Aboriginal Women's Resource
- Norwest Aboriginal Development Association
- Riverstone Aboriginal Community Association
- Wundunarrkoo Aboriginal Multipurpose Centre

Projects or services in mainstream organisations:

- Jessie Street Domestic Violence Service: Aboriginal outreach workers
- Marist Youth Centre - Hebersham Aboriginal Youth Service (HAYS)
- Parramatta City Council – Aboriginal identified positions
- SPYNS – Several Aboriginal services and projects
- Ted Noffs Foundation – Getting It Together (GITS) funded project

ATTACHMENT 2: Staff and management committee surveys

- Staff survey



**Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity
Building Project**

Build • Strengthen • Sustain

CONFIDENTIAL: STAFF BACKGROUND AND TRAINING NEEDS**Organisation name:**

Title of your job:

How many hours a week
are you employed?

How long have you
been in this job?

What age group are you in:

Under 25 26 – 35 36 – 45 46 – 55 56 – 65 66 – 75 Over 75

Have you worked in any of the following before this job? (Tick ✓ for 'yes' and write how many years you worked in these types of jobs)

Community based/Non government
organisation:

Aboriginal health or community services -

How many years?:

Generalist health or community services-

How many years?:

Public sector/Government organisation:

Aboriginal health or community services -

How many years?:

Generalist health or community services-

How many years?:

Any other types of work experience (describe the types of work):

Have you done any courses or attended any training since leaving school?

Certificate or award courses Title of certificate or award:

Other training topic or content areas:

Have you ever been mentored by a more experienced person? Yes No

Have you ever provided mentoring to someone else: Yes No

What do you think are your strongest skills in your work in Aboriginal community services?

What training would help you in your work in Aboriginal community services?

What other support or personal development assistance would help you in your work?

- Management committee survey



Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project

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CONFIDENTIAL: ISSUES FOR THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Organisation name:

How long have you been on the board/management committee of this organisation?

Have you been on the board/management committee of any other organisations?

Yes No

Please tell us whether your board or management committee finds each of the following relatively easy ('Strength') or difficult ('Challenge') by ticking the relevant column.

Issues	Strength	Challenge
Membership and skills		
Getting members to join the organisation or getting organisation members to be involved		
Getting people to join the board or committee		
Replacing board or committee members when they resign		
Finding people with the right skills to join the board or committee		
Getting people to come to meetings or arrive on time		
Knowing what our job is as board or committee members		
Board or committee members understanding the issues being discussed		
Board or committee members taking an active role in discussion in meetings		
Leadership		
The board or committee having a clear picture for the future of how the organisation is going to develop over time		
Setting broad directions or doing planning for the organisation		
Board or committee members being clear about their role and the role of staff		
Getting through business in meetings on time		
Making good, informed decisions		
Following through and implementing decisions		

Issues	Strength	Challenge
Care for the organisation		
The board or committee reviewing its own operation and performance and making improvements		
Board or committee members behaving ethically and responsibly		
Understanding and looking after the finances		
Understanding and looking after the legal requirements for the organisation		
Making sure that risks are looked at and risk management planned		
Employing good staff		
Making sure that the organisation is managed well		
Making sure that services and activities are high quality		
Making sure that the organisation is viewed positively by others		
Control and accountability		
Knowing that the organisation and its services are performing well		
Getting useful reports on the organisation and its finances		
Board or committee members understanding reports and other information given to them		
Taking effective action when something is not going well		
Other issues (list any other issues or concerns)		

ATTACHMENT 3: Confidential report pro forma

ORGANISATION NAME

ABOUT THE SERVICE VISITS

Overview

This feedback report tells your service about the findings from the assessment visits to your service as part of your participation in the Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project. During these visits a member of the consultant team talked with representatives from your organisation about how the service currently does its work and how it could be better supported in its work.

The service visits involved:

- **A review of systems and processes:** The consultant team member worked with your nominated staff person and looked at the types of systems used in the administration of the organisation (including accounting, financial management, record keeping, equipment, reporting, planning, risk management and staff development).
- **A meeting with staff:** This meeting may have been with your senior staff or your whole staff team, depending on what was most appropriate for your organisation. This meeting looked at what supports or limits staff in their work and what could be done to support the work of the organisation more adequately.
- **Staff survey:** Staff were also asked to fill out a short survey to provide some information on work experience and training.
- **A meeting with the management committee** (for Aboriginal organisations) **or the line manager** (Aboriginal services within mainstream organisations): This meeting looked at the challenges and issues involved in the management of the organisation or service.
- **Management committee survey:** Management committee members were also asked to fill out a short survey about the strengths and challenges for the management committee.

The purpose of these assessment visits was to provide your organisation with a confidential report on its strengths and its vulnerable areas. This was then presented as part of a planning session with your organisation or service on strengthening your service in the future.

Participation

The following table shows how your organisation participated in each aspect of the service visits.

Project stage	Service participation
Meeting with staff	6 staff (1 absent)
Meeting with management committee	5 management committee members (5 absent)
Staff survey	4 completed
Management committee survey	5 completed
Systems review	Completed
Feedback session	2 staff and 3 management committee members attended

Comment: All aspects of the assessment were completed.

FINDINGS

(general comments)

Management committee

(summary of points)

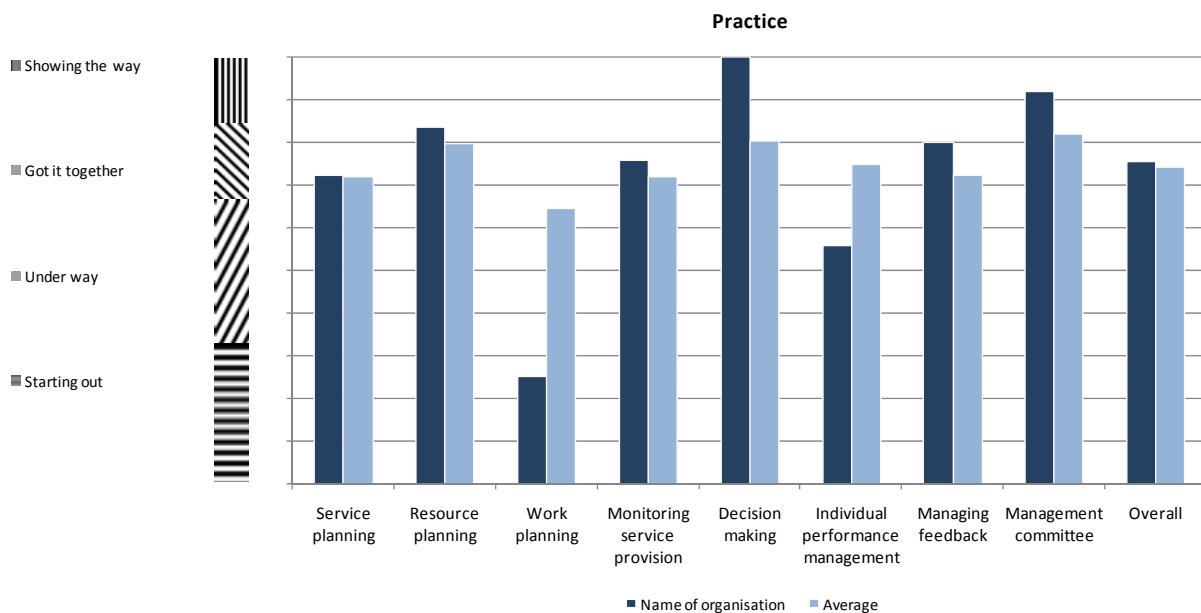
Results of management committee survey

Aspect of governance	Strength	Mainly 'strength'	Split	Mainly 'challenge'
Membership and skills				
Getting members to join the organisation or getting organisation members to be involved				
Getting people to join the board or committee				
Replacing board or committee members when they resign				
Finding people with the right skills to join the board or committee				
Getting people to come to meetings or arrive on time				
Knowing what our job is as board or committee members				
Board or committee members understanding the issues being discussed				
Board or committee members taking an active role in discussion in meetings				
Leadership				
The board or committee having a clear picture for the future of how the organisation is going to develop over time				
Setting broad directions or doing planning for the organisation				
Board or committee members being clear about their role and the role of staff				
Getting through business in meetings on time				
Making good, informed decisions				

Aspect of governance	Strength	Mainly 'strength'	Split	Mainly 'challenge'
Following through and implementing decisions				
Care for the organisation				
The board or committee reviewing its own operation and performance and making improvements				
Board or committee members behaving ethically and responsibly				
Understanding and looking after the finances				
Understanding and looking after the legal requirements for the organisation				
Making sure that risks are looked at and risk management planned				
Employing good staff				
Making sure that the organisation is managed well				
Making sure that services and activities are high quality				
Making sure that the organisation is viewed positively				
Control and accountability				
Knowing that the organisation and its services are performing well				
Getting useful reports on the organisation and its finances				
Board or committee members understanding reports and other information given to them				
Taking effective action when something is not going well				

Staff and practice within the organisation

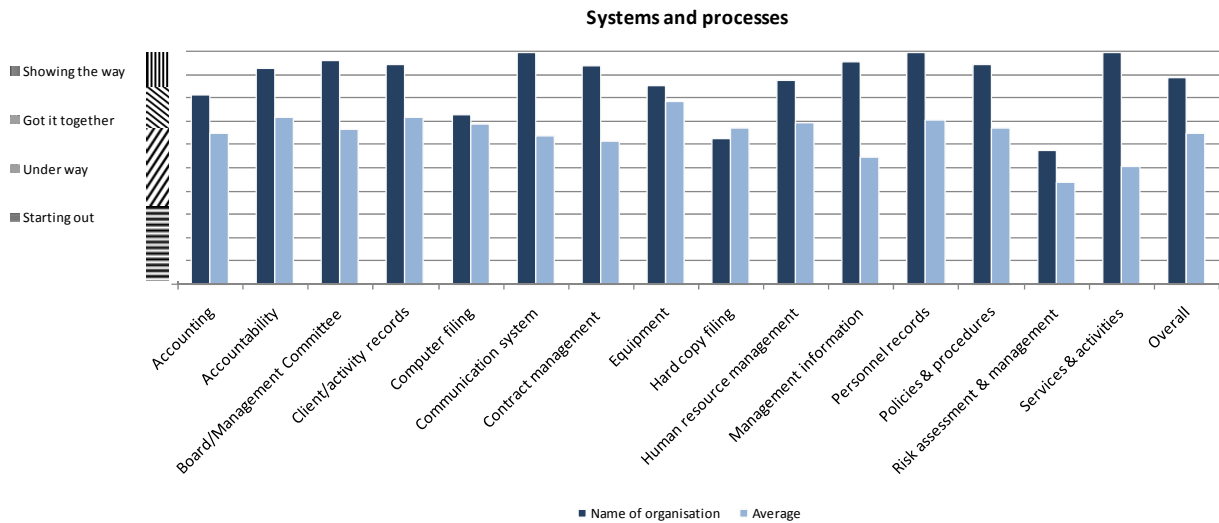
(summary of points).



Systems and processes

(summary of points)

This graph is based on the review of systems conducted on the site visit.



Strong areas

(list)

Vulnerable areas

(list)

Training and support identified by staff

(list)

CONCLUSIONS

(summary and recommendation future action)

ATTACHMENT 4: Example Action Plan

Name of organisation

ABOUT THE ACTION PLAN

This action plan is based on the assessment and follow up discussions conducted as part of the Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project. The assessment of your organisation identified the aspects of your organisation that are working well and those areas where the organisation may be vulnerable or where improvements could be made.

This plan outlines the action that could now be taken to follow up on those findings.

Overall assessment	<p>Overall, your organisation was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between the 'Got it together' and 'Showing the way' ranges, which means that systems and practices are comprehensive and robust, with many indicating excellence. • Significantly above average for the services and organisations in this particular project.
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Areas for further work	About this area	Priority for action	Action to take	Resources that could help
Future development	Feasibility study needed for development opportunities	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Look for seeding funds and/or pro bono assistance to conduct feasibility study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Indigenous Coordination Centres: http://www.icc.gov.au/icc/funding_08-09.html ▪ Indigenous Community Volunteers: http://www.icv.com.au/ ▪ Other pro bono matching services: MSO Contact Directory: Pro bono services and volunteer matching
Management information	Financial and service reporting complex and	1	Review and streamline data collection on services,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contract consultant or pro bono assistance (see above for resources)

Areas for further work	About this area	Priority for action	Action to take	Resources that could help
and financial reporting	time consuming		contract/service agreement compliance and financial management information systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSO Search: Information system MSO: Getting Assistance for further advice
Management committee understanding of financial reports	Lack of confidence for some management committee members	2	Review financial report format and conduct training session for management committee	<p>MSO Search: Financial management particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Info sheet: Financial reports Skill Building program: Resource management
Succession planning	The organisation needs to be able to recruit to the Manager position quickly and effectively	2	Management committee to discuss and develop simple succession plan or recruitment strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MSO Tool: Staff succession plan (for internal planning) MSO Search: Recruitment (for external recruitment)

ATTACHMENT 5: Forum program



Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project

Build • Strengthen • Sustain

PROJECT FINDINGS AND PLANNING FORUM

DAY 1

9.30 – 9.45: Welcome to country – Aunty Edna Watson

9.45 – 11.00: Presentation of findings and discussion

11.00 – 11.30: Morning Tea

11.30 – 12.45: Showcase for Aboriginal services

12.45 – 1.30: Lunch

1.30 – 4pm: Strategy development session 1

Note: session for Aboriginal community, organisations and services only

Topic 1: Incubation of new projects

Topic 2: Infrastructure support

Topic 3: Governance development

Topic 4: Senior manager support and development

DAY 2

9.30 – 10.00: Morning Tea

10.00 – 11.45: Strategy development session 2

Note: session for Aboriginal community, organisations and services only

Topic 5: Managing community expectations and impact on organisations

Topic 6: Improving understanding around communication, culture and expectations

11.45 – 12.15: Dialogue preparation session

Aboriginal participants will prepare for the afternoon session

Note: session for Aboriginal community, organisations and services only

12.15 – 1.00: Lunch

1.00 – 3.30: Dialogue session:

This session will focus on the topic areas 1 – 4 (above), and will take the form of a structured discussion between representatives of government agencies and representatives of Aboriginal services, working in small groups. Each group will examine the ideas developed in the strategy development sessions, looking at what the possibilities and impediments might be from either side (government and Aboriginal services) and what is needed to make each strategy feasible and achievable. The aim of this session is to develop a detailed mutual understanding of the situation for government and Aboriginal services and reach common ground where possible on future action for the Regional strategic framework.

3.00 – 3.30: Session will conclude with a summary report back and general discussion.