

Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project

SUMMARY REPORT and IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Build ■ Strengthen ■ Sustain

BRADFIELD NYLAND GROUP
November, 2008



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the Reference Group for their ideas, support and direction during the project:

- Ross Beaton, NSW Department of Community Services
- Claire Crook, NSW Department of Community Services
- Lisa Foster, St Marys Area Community Development Project
- Jack Gibson, Butucarbin
- Sigrid Herring, Junaya for Families
- Mary Kerr, NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care
- Cheryl McCoy, NSW Department of Community Services
- Brad Moore, Blue Mountains Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre
- Rose Nean, NSW Department of Community Services
- Gae Parmenter, NSW Department of Community Services
- Janice Perrett, NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care
- Glendra Stubbs, Link Up
- Belinda Trikilas, Miimali

Particular thanks go to all the individuals and organisations who took part in the Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building project, and who gave their time and information to the project.

Project team

- Julie Nyland, Project Manager
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This project was funded by the NSW Department of Community Services.

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3. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1 OVERVIEW

1.1 The Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project

The Metro West Aboriginal Services Capacity Building Project was an initiative of the Aboriginal Capacity Building Advisory Group (ACBAG) of the Metro West region of the Department of Community Services in partnership with the Department and other government agencies.

The project was designed to respond to Aboriginal services' requests for further support to build their capacity to deliver better outcomes for their communities in the Metro West Region.

The 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.

The project involved:

- **Consultation and community input:** Consultations and interviews were conducted with participating organisations and services, Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal public servants to research general issues and perspectives. Findings from these consultations are reported in the main report of the project.
- **Work with individual organisations and services:** 16 Aboriginal services participated in individual assessments and planning processes. These were designed to combine the research components of the project with practical assistance to individual services by working with these 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 them to address areas of vulnerability
 - provide individual organisations or services with an action plan, as an immediate starting point for their own capacity building, and direct access to online tools and ongoing advice for a further year through Management Support Online (MSO).

- **The findings and planning forum:** Over 60 people attended the two day forum which involved:
 - a presentation of the findings from the project and an overview of the main factors that were found to be impacting on Aboriginal services (outlined in Section 2.1 of this report).
 - a 'showcase' of good practice and problem solving from local Aboriginal services
 - strategy development sessions on the main issue areas
 - a 'dialogue' session for senior government representatives and representatives from participating organisations to talk through possible strategies together.

This report provides a brief overview of the project and the general findings, and an outline of the proposed strategic directions for further development of Aboriginal service capacity at the Regional level. Further detail is available in the main report of the project.

1.2 Results of the assessments

The results of the assessments conducted with participating Aboriginal organisations 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.

A four part scale¹ 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.

¹ Adapted by Bradfield Nyland Group & Spall Watters Group from the Queensland Government Performance Management Review Framework for Governance, 2007. In terms of the Good Practice Guidelines (GPG):

- **'Starting out':** Would not meet the GPG.
- **'Under way':** Would partially meet the GPG.
- **'Got it together':** Would meet the basic requirements of the GPG.
- **'Showing the way':** Would meet all the requirements of the GPG.

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.

Chart 1: Practice within the organisation

n = 11 organisations

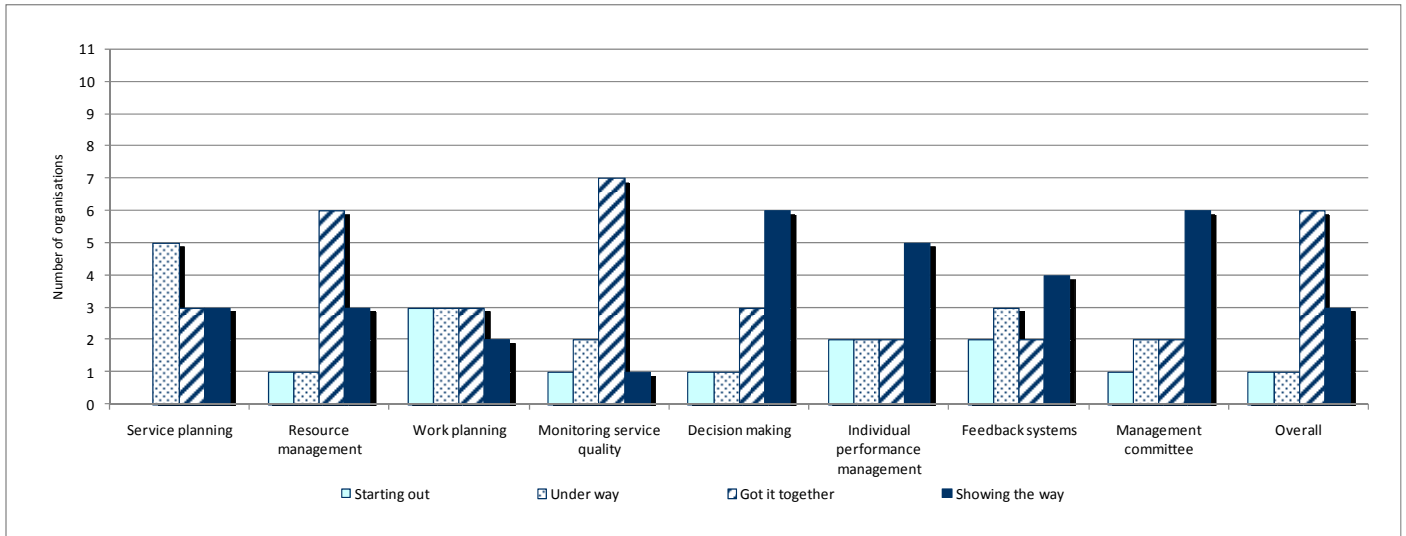


Chart 2: Systems and processes (part 1)

n = 10 organisations

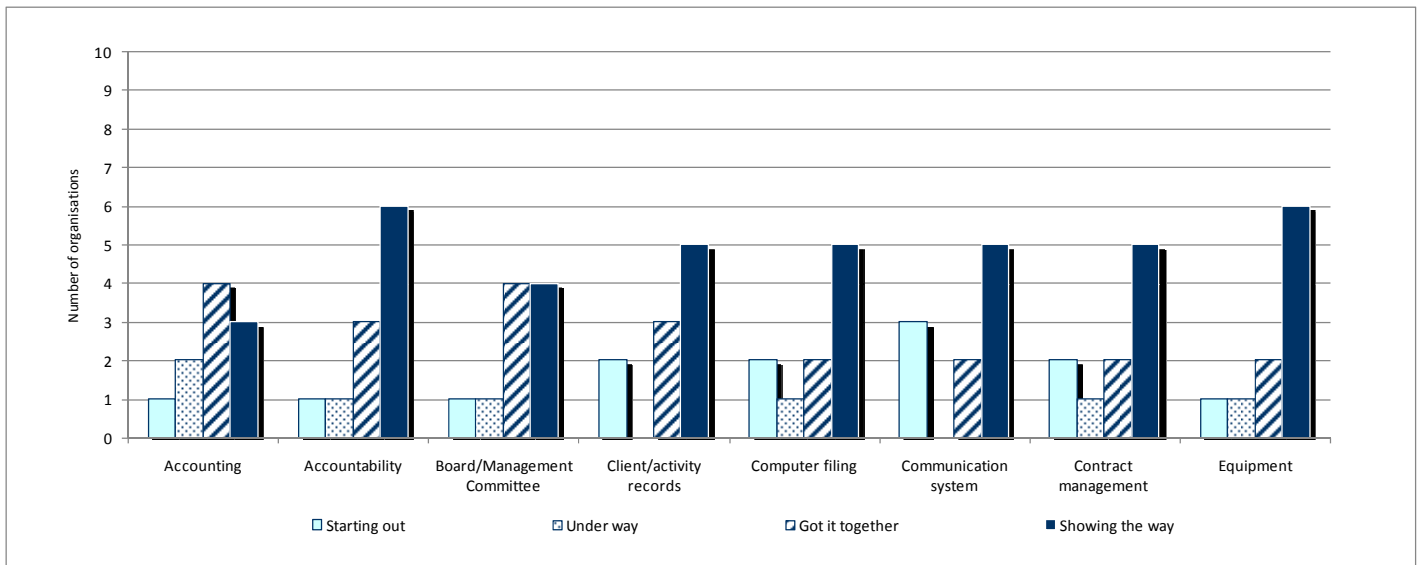
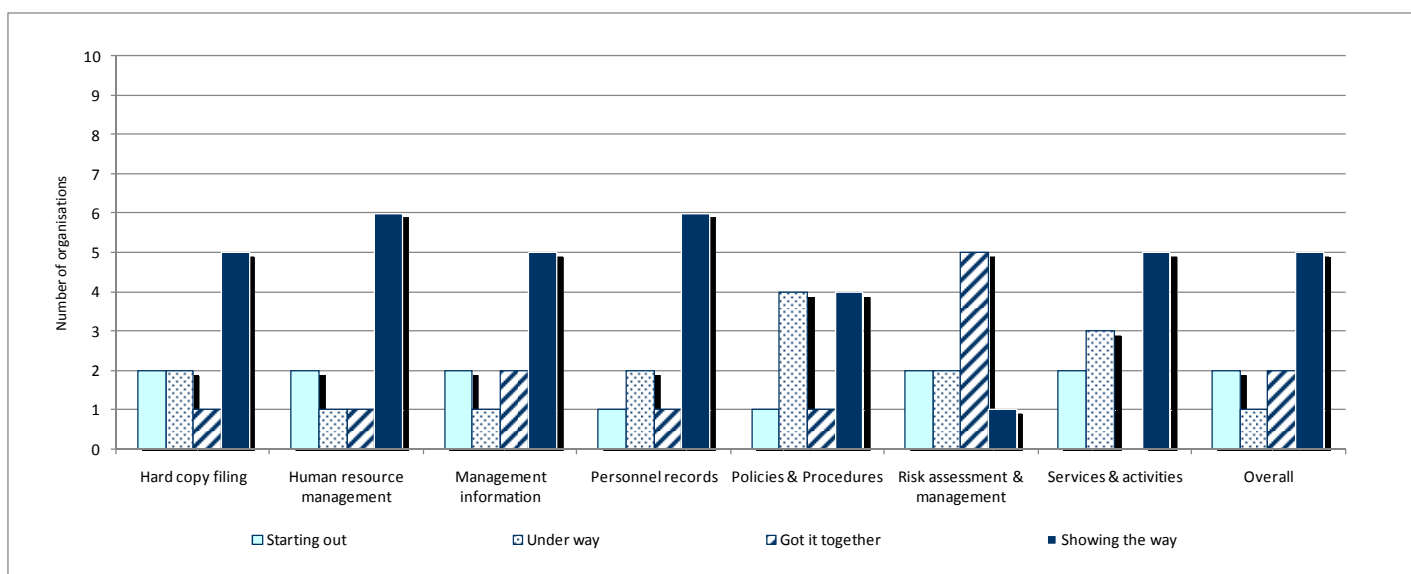


Chart 3: Systems and processes (part 2)

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. 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

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.

1.3 Aboriginal NGOs in the Metro West region

It is important to note that there were 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 organisations².

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.

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.

² Bradfield Nyland Group: *On the Front Foot: An action plan for small NGOs (The SNOW Report)*, 2004

- 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.

2. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

2.1 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.

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.

2.2 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 was 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 stages³:

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

The aims of this stage will be to:

- ensure that all existing services reach basic compliance with critical elements of good governance, sound operations and funding body standards of operation and practice
- 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.

³ 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.

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

The aims of this stage will be to:

- ensure all Aboriginal NGOs in the region reach full compliance with funding body standards of operation and practice 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 will 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 stages will overlap rather than one stage needing to be completed prior to the next stage commencing.

The plan will 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.

2.3 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 implementation of the detailed plan outlined in the next section. This process will be overseen by the Aboriginal Capacity Building Advisory Group, which will expand its membership to include representatives from the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) and organisations funded by DADHC.

The final report and plan will also be presented to the Senior Officers Group for the Metro West Region for their endorsement.

3. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1. Supporting the service provider network

This group of activities involves the coordination of discussions across service providers and between service providers and funding bodies, the development of general agreements on ways of working and the documentation of these in the form of short guides.

Time frame: *To be determined by the ACBAG at the commencement of implementation.*

What	How	Stage of Strategic Framework
Collaboration on funding submissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACBAG to coordinate discussion and document: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - areas of expertise across organisations and people with specific skills in relation to funding - how to develop partnerships and collaborate on submissions - potential sources of brokerage funds to pay for specific assistance with issues, including drafting funding submissions 	Stage 1
Developmental approach to service definition and funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACBAG to coordinate discussion and document how service development and funding for new projects and services could be improved, considering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - community input to service design - how to work with program guidelines that do not fit the needs or approach required for Aboriginal clients or communities - guidelines for adequate lead times and implementation plans for new projects - negotiation of the service delivery model with service deliverer - balancing unit costing or service target considerations with potential effectiveness of a service delivery approach - resourcing service models that cross traditional funding programs 	Stage 2
Development of a policy on providing Aboriginal expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACBAG to coordinate discussion and document guidelines for Aboriginal workers and organisations responding to requests to help non Aboriginal organisations or projects with accessing Aboriginal communities, developing their services or applying for funding for Aboriginal services, including suggested fee scales. 	Stage 1

Supporting the service provider network con'td

What	How	Stage of Strategic Framework
Building the service network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACBAG to coordinate discussion and document ways to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - develop relationships between organisations to build trust, understanding and professional relationships - promote positive aspects of services - develop service network and partnerships so that referring clients is seamless. 	Stage 2
Collaboration on resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACBAG to coordinate discussion and identify ways of Aboriginal organisations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing partnerships and sharing skills - accessing mentoring or advice from organisations with experience - co-locating - forming partnerships with larger agencies providing administration support. ▪ ACBAG to oversee investigation of the possibility of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - bulk purchase of computer software, using bulk licensing - employment of a 'floating' administrator/bookkeeper across a number of organisations. 	Stage 2
Communication and managing community expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACBAG to coordinate discussion and the development of an information strategy to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promote accurate information within existing agency networks, clients and community - provide clear messages about the role and limitations of services to the community - develop community awareness of limited resources - include using community meetings to provide up to date information from service providers - encourage better use of formal complaints systems. 	Stage 2
Research and practice development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACBAG to coordinate research and practice development forums to develop knowledge and understanding about service delivery and work practices. 	Stage 3

2. Production of specific resources

This group of activities involves the development of specific written resource materials.

Time frame: To be determined by the ACBAG at the commencement of implementation.

What	How	Stage of Strategic Framework
Development of submission writing skills and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of a pro forma funding submission kit (working across funding programs) ▪ Workshops on submission writing skills and using the pro forma kit 	Stage 1
Resources for working with non Aboriginal NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACBAG to coordinate discussion and development of agreements or memoranda of understanding (MOUs) for use between Aboriginal services and non Aboriginal organisations that include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - specific mentoring and organisational development assistance for an Aboriginal NGO partner or project - (where relevant) the provision of resources, systems and tools to support the project becoming independently incorporated - ensuring accountability to both government and the Aboriginal community for progress and implementation of any agreed plan of action with a non Aboriginal organisation. 	Stage 1
New organisation or service kit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of a kit for new organisations or services (including steps involved in implementing new projects, assessing community needs, community engagement and managing community expectations). 	Stage 2
Guide to negotiating service expectations between organisation and client	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of a guide and pro forma to assist organisations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - set clear ground rules with clients and promote mutual trust and respect - clarify the role of staff with clients - support staff in understanding and maintaining boundaries by providing clear job descriptions, understanding funding guidelines, and conducting staff discussions on ways of managing client expectations and community pressures. 	Stage 2
Administration resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a guide to planning for administration (including adequately costing administration in budgets, reflecting in staff work plans and service agreements) - a guide to using traineeships to increase staffing for administration - a reporting template that works across funding bodies. 	Stage 2

3. Organisational development program

This group of activities involves an ongoing program of resourcing individual services to assess themselves, identify and address areas for improvement.

Time frame: *To be determined by the ACBAG at the commencement of implementation.*

What	How	Stage of Strategic Framework
Stage 1 level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ compliance with critical elements of practice standards ▪ all Aboriginal NGOs in upper end of 'Under way' range or better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organisational development program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - encouragement of participation in assessment and improvement planning by NGOs who did not take part in project - provision of resources to individual organisations for implementation - provision of cross organisation activities or resources for common areas. 	Stage 1
Stage 2 level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ compliance with all elements of practice standards ▪ all Aboriginal NGOs in 'Got it together' range or better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organisational development program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - encouragement of participation in ongoing assessment and improvement planning - provision of resources to individual organisations for implementation - provision of cross organisation activities or resources for common areas. 	Stage 2

4. Governance and management development programs

This group of activities involves the development of skills and knowledge of management committee members and senior managers, and of potential management committee members and senior managers.

Time frame: *To be determined by the ACBAG at the commencement of implementation.*

What	How	Stage of Strategic Framework
Orientation for management committee members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACBAG to encourage organisations to provide orientation and support to management committee members 	Stage 2
Training for management committee members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of a short guide to accessing and supporting skill development in governance ▪ ACBAG to investigate resources for the provision of in house sessions at management committee meetings with a governance expert. ▪ Specific training program for Public Officers in each organisation to enable them to act as resources in governance. 	Stage 2
Development of senior manager skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACBAG to develop guide for organisations to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensure managers are clear about respective roles of manager and management committee - conduct a skills audit for senior staff - increase networking and sharing of skills and resources across organisations. 	Stage 2
Koori Managers Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a 'Koori Managers Network' for development of applied skills for existing managers ▪ Provide training for future managers. 	Stage 2
Development of a pool of local expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specific training program to train individuals in aspects of organisational support and development. 	Stage 2

Government policy consideration cont'd

What	Recommendation	Stage of Strategic Framework
Support for new services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ That funding bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fund an 'operations officer' for the equivalent of six months in the first year of operation - ensure ongoing funds for training are included in the budget - enable Departmental program staff to provide support in the early stages 	Stage 2
Support for administration costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ That funding bodies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - acknowledge administration as legitimate part of service budgets, including short term projects, and acknowledge the workload in Service Specifications - provide support for the use of trainees - implement consistent reporting requirements across Departments and funding programs 	Stage 2
Support for governance development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ That funding bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - encourage other Departments to release Aboriginal public servants on NGO management committees to attend approved community sector governance training - improve the training of front line staff working with funded NGOs in community sector organisations issues - review the timing and procedures for identifying and sourcing solutions when organisations are in difficulty, and intervene in breaches of accountability (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations) 	Stage 2
Support for senior manager development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ That funding bodies support training and professional development for senior managers in NGOs by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - providing paid participation on the 'Management Development Programme for Individuals – Aboriginal' (available to Aboriginal public servants) - providing access to the staff training calendar for public servants to those in the NGO sector - employing a training and resource officer to work with NGOs and assist organisations to source training ▪ That funding bodies ensure funding for salaries enables Aboriginal NGOs to compete adequately for qualified staff. 	Stage 2