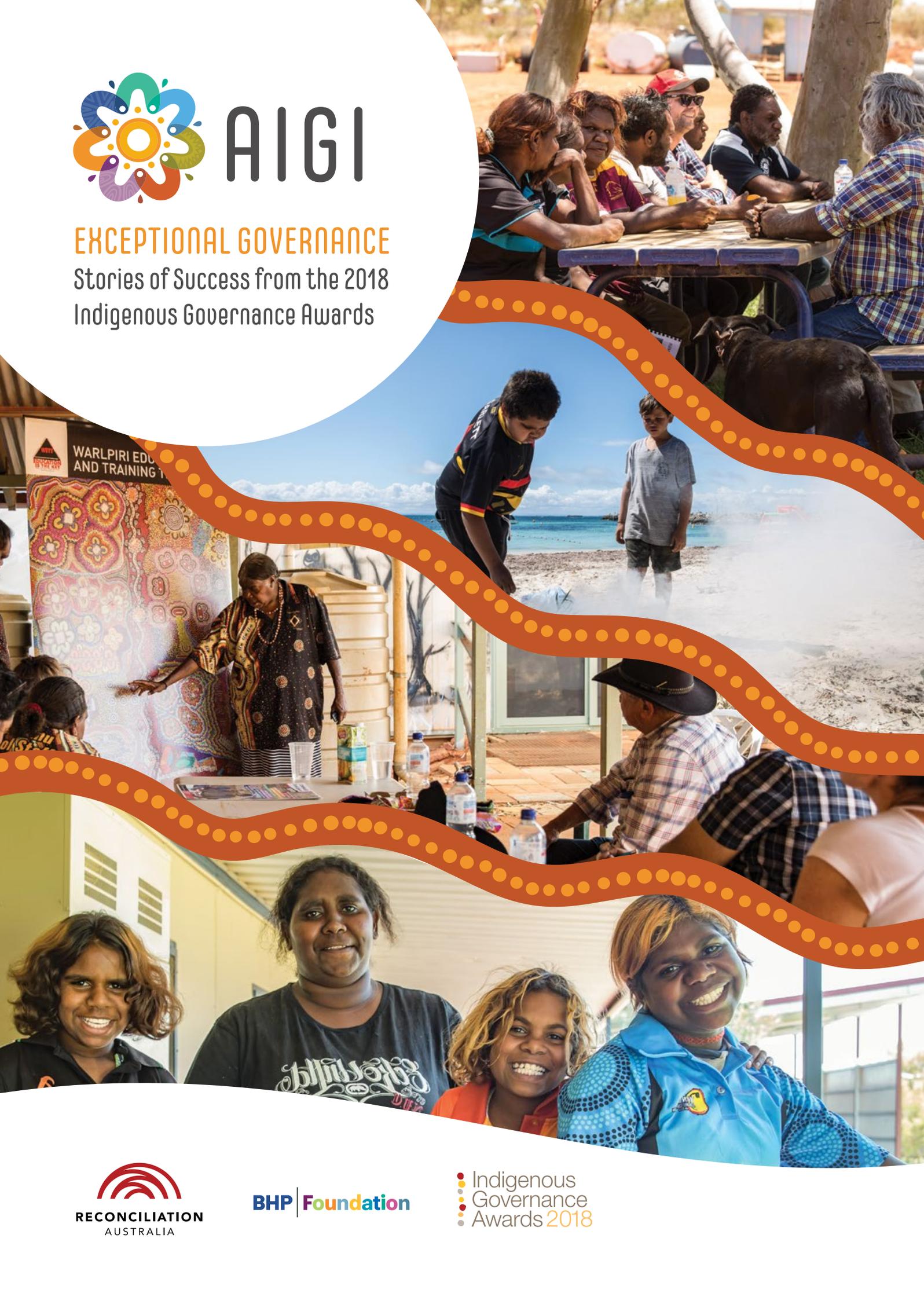




# AIGI

## EXCEPTIONAL GOVERNANCE

Stories of Success from the 2018  
Indigenous Governance Awards



The Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, Reconciliation Australia and the BHP Foundation acknowledge the Traditional Owners of all lands for which we live and work. We honour and celebrate their Elders past, present and emerging.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this document may contain names or images of people who have passed away.

## Australian Indigenous Governance Institute

The Australian Indigenous Governance Institute is a national Indigenous-led centre of governance excellence, connecting Indigenous Australians to world-class governance practice, providing accessible research, disseminating stories that celebrate outstanding success and solutions, and delivering professional development opportunities to meet the self-determined governance needs of Indigenous peoples.

## Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Australia is an independent, not-for-profit organisation. Our vision is for a just, equitable and reconciled Australia. Our purpose is to inspire and enable all Australians to contribute to the reconciliation of the nation.

## BHP Foundation

The BHP Foundation works to address some of the world's most critical sustainable development challenges. By working in partnership with others who share these ambitions we seek to raise the bar, find new solutions and set new standards for the future. These efforts are designed to enhance the contribution the global resources sector can make to the achievement of many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In Australia, one area of focus is Indigenous governance and our partnership with AIGI and Reconciliation Australia aims to support self-determined governance for Indigenous development outcomes.

Analysis and text produced by Lara Drieberg.  
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# INTRODUCTION

Indigenous governance is about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people making and implementing decisions about their communities, lives and futures.

The Indigenous Governance Awards were established to identify, celebrate and promote effective governance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and projects nation-wide.

Reconciliation Australia and the BHP Foundation have proudly partnered to deliver the Awards since 2005. The Australian Indigenous Governance Institute has been involved in the Awards since their inception and in 2016 were excited to become an official partner.

The 2018 Awards featured two categories:

Category A: Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led incorporated organisations

Category B: Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led unincorporated initiatives and projects

Nine finalists were selected through a rigorous judging process that evaluated applicants' governance across five criteria:



Why were these nine organisations and projects selected as outstanding examples of Indigenous governance? To find out, the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute reviewed the finalists' application forms and discovered what underpins their success. The findings are presented in two sections.

**Principles of Success** summarise the finalists' self-reflections on what works well about their governance. **Exceptional Governance** features a mini case study on each finalist, which illustrate the principles in practice. The principles often compliment and overlap each other, so you may spot multiple principles running through one case study narrative.

We hope this booklet will spark conversation that both celebrates your own governance success and identifies elements to grow and strengthen.



# FINALISTS



## Alekareng Community Development Working Group Highly Commended, Category B

Alekareng community is about 400km north of Alice Springs. The Alekareng Community Development Working Group plan and initiate projects for the benefit of the community using funds that belong to the Traditional Owners of Alekareng.

## Marr Mooditj Training Aboriginal Corporation Finalist, Category A

Marr Mooditj Training (MMT) is a Registered Training Organisation committed to providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with high-quality training and assessment services delivered in a culturally safe and secure environment. MMT views Aboriginal health in a holistic context that encompasses emotional, physical, cultural and spiritual health.



## Apmer akely-akely Finalist, Category B

Apmer akely-akely is the local community board for the Stronger Communities for Children program in the Utopia region, Northern Territory. Apmer akely-akely sets the program priorities, endorses a community plan and works with partner organisations to contract services and infrastructure for the benefit of young people and families in the region.



## Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation Finalist, Category A

The Quandamooka People are a First Nation of over 2000 Traditional Owners from Moreton Bay, South East Queensland, Australia. Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC) is the Prescribed Body Corporate responsible for managing the native title rights and interests of the Quandamooka People. QYAC is also the registered Cultural Heritage Body responsible for cultural heritage management across the Quandamooka estate.



## Institute for Urban Indigenous Health Joint Winners, Category A

The Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) leads the planning, development and delivery of comprehensive primary health care services to the Indigenous population of South East Queensland (SEQ). The IUIH was established in 2009 by the four Community Controlled Health Services in SEQ and has since expanded to a regional network of 20 multidisciplinary primary health clinics.

## Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation Finalist, Category A

Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation's (RRKAC) vision is to work together as a community to establish a solid foundation towards independence, community wellbeing and cultural identity now and for future generations. RRKAC is the registered native title body corporate for Robe River Kuruma (RRK) native title determined areas. The RRK people have traditional rights to an area covering nearly 16,000 square kilometres in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.





## PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESS



### Warlpiri Education and Training Trust Advisory Committee

Winner, Category B

The Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) vision is for Warlpiri children to be strong in their knowledge of culture, country and language, to be strong role models for future generations and to stand up for communities. The WETT Advisory Committee develop and plan programs, identify program partners and provide funding advice to the WETT trustees.

### Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation

Finalist, Category A

Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation (YMAC) is the native title representative body for the Traditional Owners of the Pilbara, Murchison and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia. YMAC represents 24 different Aboriginal Traditional Owner groups, each with their own distinct country, culture and identity. The representative area covers more than a third of Western Australia.



### Yawuru Corporate Group

Joint Winners, Category A

Yawuru native title was recognised by the Federal Court in 2006. The Yawuru Corporate Group (YCG) develops economic, cultural and social sustainability so that the Yawuru people can enjoy their land, values and culture in perpetuity, while enhancing their families and the community in which they live.



**Adaptability** The organisation adapts its governance to manage changing circumstances and remain relevant to all stakeholders.

**Collaboration** People from different families, language groups, regions or organisations come together around a common goal. Partnerships are formed to deliver projects and services.

**Community Control** The organisation is created and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who represent the community in which it operates. The organisation offers culturally appropriate projects or services designed by the community.

**Community Engagement** Ongoing opportunities are made for the community to learn about, connect with and give their input to the organisation.

**CQI Approach** Continuous Quality Improvement procedures form a part of the organisation's operational and strategic planning. Governance arrangements are reviewed cyclically.

**Cultural Integrity** Governance arrangements reflect the community's cultural values and traditional decision-making processes.

**Documentation** The organisation develops well-defined and accessible governance documents that guide behaviour, set expectations and provide consistency and fairness.

**Forward-thinking** The organisation prepares for the future by planning strategy, risk management and succession, as well as developing the capabilities of emerging leaders.

**Internal Communication** Open communication is encouraged across the organisational structure. Digital technology supports communication between staff at offices in different locations.

**Informed Decision-making** Sufficient time and information is available to make effective decisions.

**Local Context** Governance arrangements are tailored to the organisation's specific circumstances, designed to accommodate local realities and legitimate for the community.

**Support** A workplace environment is created where people feel safe in their identity, culture and community. Professional development is provided to support the board to perform their roles.

Exceptional Governance

# ALEKARENGE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP



## Facilitating Collaboration

The aspect most valued by Working Group members and community residents is that it is a collaborative effort with everyone working together as a team to achieve positive, tangible outcomes. The Working Group actively facilitates collaboration through representation and communication strategies.

There are four different language groups that most people in Alekarenge come from - Kaytetye, Alyawarr, Waramungu and Warlpiri. Sometimes keeping people working cohesively together can be a challenge. The Working Group made concerted efforts to have people from all language groups represented, and the opinions and perspectives of people equally valued regardless of which language group they belong to.

The Working Group also expanded representation over time. At commencement, the Working Group was comprised with only Traditional Owner representatives. After less than a year of operating in this way, non-Traditional Owner residents of Alekarenge brought their concerns about not being involved to a meeting. The Traditional Owners recognised the valuable contribution non-Traditional Owners had made to the community, and so Working Group membership was regenerated to include Alekarenge residents who are not Traditional Owners.

To encourage young people to become involved in planning and decision-making the Working Group invited them to attend meetings and appointed several young people to be Working Group members. To keep the wider community involved, Working Group meetings are made open for other community members to attend and contribute to. In addition, regular community meetings are held to report back on completed projects, seek feedback and discuss future projects. The working group also periodically distributes a newsletter.

### Tips

- Value the opinions of people from different groups equally
- Be responsive to feedback - make suggested changes if appropriate
- Create opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making
- Keep the wider community up to date with what you're doing

# APMER AKELY-AKELY



## Design for the Local Context

At the start of the program, consultations were conducted in local language with family groups across the region, at meetings of local organisations and through talking to staff of partner organisations. These informed development of the Apmmer akely-akely governance model and processes.

Consultations identified the biggest risk to the program was that already overstretched local community leaders, many of whom sit on multiple committees, would not be able or willing to engage in a new intensive governance process. Apmmer akely-akely was thus formed as a subcommittee of the School Council, with a portion of every School Council meeting dedicated to conducting Apmmer akely-akely business. This has worked well as community leaders don't have to attend multiple meetings.

Apmmer akely-akely includes representatives of the major outstations and family groups spread across several hundred square kilometres. The demands and logistics of living in small family homelands can make regular meeting attendance a challenge. The Apmmer akely-akely rules provide some flexibility about community members coming and going from the group. This allows a range of people to be included and to feel ownership of the program, whilst reflecting the realities of life in the region.

English is the third or fourth language of the majority of people in Utopia. Whilst it seems an obvious problem, much of the time interactions between residents, government and service agencies are not conducted in local languages. Translation of Apmmer akely-akely business into the local Alyawarr and Anmatjerre languages is a central part of the program. Every meeting of Apmmer akely-akely uses a translator to ensure there is no barrier to communication.

### Tips

- Be pragmatic about participation commitments
- Ask the people who you want to be involved if there are any barriers to their participation
- Talk to different stakeholders when setting up your governance arrangements
- Customise your governance arrangements, there isn't a one size fits all solution



# INSTITUTE FOR URBAN INDIGENOUS HEALTH

## Supporting Future Leaders

In response to rapid Indigenous population growth – expected to reach 130,000 in SEQ by 2031 – IUIH is exploring transformative models which have the potential to double its existing client population.

The development of a workforce for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health delivery is a key priority of IUIH. IUIH's Workforce Development Strategy aims to equip the existing primary health care workforce to roll out the IUIH model of care, and to build the workforce of the future through traineeships and student placements. IUIH works closely with member services to systematically map the roles and functions of current primary healthcare staff. This enables staff roles to be aligned to the IUIH model of care and clear direction for staff training needs.

All new staff participate in a 3-day orientation program, conducted monthly. Of note is that all existing staff also progressively attend the orientation as a way of fostering reinvigorated internal organisational culture across the IUIH Network. A key component is ensuring that all staff have an understanding of, and commitment to, the IUIH's Cultural Integrity Investment Framework. Having all staff operating from a common cultural reference point transforms how staff see, understand, do and belong.

The IUIH is committed to 'growing its own' leadership. Selected staff are invited to be observers at each Board and senior management meeting. The IUIH Emerging Indigenous Leaders Program is specifically designed to support young Indigenous employees on a pathway to management and leadership positions. The IUIH has engaged the majority of its management team in a peer-coaching program that supports small groups to reflect on their managerial and leadership practices around specific themes. This is complemented by targeted training courses for the middle and senior management teams.

### Tips

- Identify staffing and skills needs to meet anticipated organisational growth
- Provide student traineeships and placements to facilitate skills development
- Use the induction process to bring people into the organisational culture
- 'Grow your own' leadership from within the organisation



# MARR MOODITJ TRAINING ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



## Continual Improvement Approach

MMT's continual improvement system builds on both success and failure to develop best practice across governance and operational activities.

The organisation collects data from performance outcomes, satisfaction surveys, the complaints and appeals register, critical incidents, and internal and external audits (financial, quality assurance, accreditation and registration). At their bi-annual strategic planning workshops the Board of Directors utilise this information to review how well MMT met community expectations and the requirements of students, workplaces and funding bodies. They then identify opportunities for improvement and set the strategic direction. This provides a guideline for management and staff at their annual planning workshops where they develop operational plans including goals, timelines and KPIs based on the outcome of the strategic planning workshops.

Continual improvement is also integrated into the organisation's planning processes throughout the year. MMT monitor risk and review compliance requirements recurrently, which is documented in a register. This is discussed at fortnightly staff meeting and monthly Board meetings, at which continual improvement is a standing agenda item, and then policies and procedures or operational processes are put in place.

In addition, the CEO and Program Coordinator have an open-door policy where they can be accessed at any time (both on and off site). This is maintained as an important part of ensuring that staff are confident to bring any matter to their attention or seek clarification or information when needed. This flat organisational structure and ethos of open communication enables the CEO and senior management to keep informed of and respond to changing operational needs.

### Tips

- Integrate continual improvement into regular planning meetings
- Collect and review information about your organisation, people and programs to identify opportunities for improvement
- Promote communication and information sharing across the organisation
- Promote frequent adaptation and change as a norm

# QUANDAMOOKA YOOLOOBURRABEE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



## Cultural Integrity

The QYAC governance structure is based on a traditional decision-making process for Quandamooka People, which is underpinned by kinship and family centred decision-making.

The Board provides one Director position for each of the 12 families descended from the 12 apical ancestors. The Board is supported by a Council of Elders, composed of one female Elder and one male Elder from each of the 12 families.

The representative Elders and Board Directors consult with their families before and after meetings so that each family group can put their views forward. This allows each family under the native title determination to actively plan and make decisions for their land and sea country. Although participation is not mandatory for all members at group meetings, there is strong engagement from most families who appreciate the opportunity to have their values and priorities represented at a governance level.

Traditional decision-making processes are also embedded in the QYAC rule book, for example, how disputes are resolved. If an issue cannot be resolved informally at an individual family meeting or by the Board of Directors as outlined in the constitution, then matters are given to the Elders in Council who have the authority to make the final decision. This gives the organisation a cultural strength and validity, which in turn has resulted in a large membership of over 700 Quandamooka People.

### Tips

- Embed traditional decision-making processes in the organisational structure and rule book
- Establish an Elders Council to review issues and provide a final decision
- Allow time for representatives to speak with the people they represent before meetings and decision-making occurs

# ROBE RIVER KURUMA ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



## Risk Management

Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation's (RRKAC) primary source of funding is mining agreements. Mining royalty payments are held and managed by its subsidiary company, Kuruma Marthudunera Limited (KML). RRKAC and KML work closely together and have a cross-over of directors on their boards.

This governance structure facilitates communication between RRKAC and KML, which in turn allows for early risk identification and intervention. This occurred when KML identified a reliance on mining royalty payments as a significant risk to the longevity of the corporation. Payments are dependent on market factors, such as the price of minerals or cessation of mining activities. RRKAC took decisive action to improve financial sustainability and realigned direction under a new 3-year strategic plan informed by the community.

The plan focused on cost savings, expanding revenue sources and securing funds for future generations. To achieve cost savings, RRKAC and KML underwent a corporate amalgamation and restructure. This initiative saw both boards implement salary reductions and reduce the number of directors, employee redundancies, a decrease in funding to less critical member support programs and outsourcing some functions to external service providers. A full service provider review was also undertaken. To seek out business and investment opportunities RRKAC undertakes frequent macro and micro external environmental scanning. The corporation has been successful in obtaining government grant funding and increasing its Cultural Heritage Services. In addition, the RRK Future Fund was established to provide for future generations.

### Tips

- Act early to manage risk
- Have the courage to make difficult decisions in the short term to improve long-term sustainability



# WARLPIRI EDUCATION AND TRAINING TRUST ADVISORY COMMITTEE



## Prioritising Succession

A large proportion of the WETT Advisory Committee are members who founded the trust, some of whom have been on the committee for over 10 years.

This is a major strength - the collective corporate memory members share means the group is well informed to plan and make decisions. This also presents a vulnerability into the future however, as long serving committee members make plans for retirement or are no longer able to serve on the committee due to ill health.

The WETT Advisory Committee recognised that it was crucial for younger people to join and have the opportunity to be mentored into their role by experienced members. They developed and implemented a plan to ensure strong Yapa leadership continued into the future.

The WETT Advisory Committee had 19 members: 16 to represent the four Warlpiri communities of Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Willowra and Nyirpi (four committee members from each of the four Warlpiri communities) and three to represent stakeholder organisations. In 2018, four new committee positions were created and made available to young leaders. One young person from each community was nominated to join through an election process.

An induction program was developed to support new members joining the WETT Advisory Committee. The program prioritised experienced committee members inducting the new members and providing guidance through sharing their stories and experiences. The induction included an introduction to WETT [history and vision for the future, current programs, money story, governance structure] and an introduction to governance [two-way governance, rules and responsibilities, running a good meeting, making good decisions, leadership and succession planning].

### Tips

- Plan ahead for what will happen if the current governing members retire
- Stage director succession so not all the organisational knowledge and history leaves at the same time
- Existing members can support new members to 'learn the ropes'

# YAMATJI MARLPA ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



## Communication Across a Region

YMAC has several systems in place to facilitate effective internal communication between the staff and executive management team. YMAC's intranet provides a portal for operational-based announcements (e.g. new starters or proxies while staff are on extended leave).

Intranet announcements are automatically distributed to all staff, to ensure such information is not lost. The CEO regularly updates the organisation on YMAC milestones, achievements and awards through all staff emails. This messaging ensures that the positive outcomes are acknowledged, and staff who contribute to outcomes are recognised by the whole organisation. In addition, staff are provided access to published hard copy and online versions of the YMAC newsletters and annual reports.

A quarterly all staff meeting uses video conferencing facilities to link the South Hedland, Geraldton, Broome and Perth offices. It provides staff an opportunity to see their colleagues in other offices and collectively hear news from the CEO and EMT. It is a valuable team bonding opportunity, because staff from different teams (i.e. legal or heritage) and regions attend the meeting together. The annual staff conference brings all staff together to physically meet in one location. The staff attend skills development workshops, wellness activities and the annual dinner, at which the Directors and CEO award employees for their long service and present the Values Awards to staff who have been nominated by their peers for exceptional demonstration of YMAC's Values – Respect, Professionalism, Integrity, Collaboration.

An annual online employee survey collects anonymous feedback about the level of satisfaction amongst staff, highlights the positive aspects of the organisation and identifies opportunities to improve performance.

### Tips

- Collect feedback from staff about workplace satisfaction and opportunities for improvement
- Use digital telecommunications to connect multiple offices across a large regional area
- Hold team bonding events to facilitate positive relationships between staff in different locations
- Provide regular internal updates

# YAWURU CORPORATE GROUP



## Current board membership criteria are as follows:

The **Yawuru PBC** Board is comprised of 12 Yawuru Directors, six of whom are voted for by the Yawuru membership and six who are law bosses appointed by Yawuru cultural leaders. The law bosses ensure important cultural knowledge is carried on through succeeding generations and that connections with neighbouring cultural groups are maintained across the region in a traditional way.

The **MMY** Board is made up of four people from the Yawuru community.

The **NBY** Board has seven members in total. Five who are Yawuru community members, selected for their expertise in enterprise, law, community relations or other professional experience. Two Independent Directors who bring to the Board specific expertise in governance, networks or enterprise development and are selected through a rigorous nomination process.

The YCG has invested heavily in governance, with its Yawuru Governance Improvement Program delivered at both a board level and an executive and operational level across all three entities. The program familiarises new board members with expectations of their important role and helps to ensure that decisions and strategic planning is undertaken in a timely and effective way that delivers actual outcomes. It also ensures existing board members are able to confidently uphold their position within the community and carry through important decision-making to benefit the members and wider community.

## Tips

- Design board composition and membership requirements according to skillsets required
- Embed cultural knowledge and authority into the governance structure
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities through delegations
- Provide ongoing training and support for the governing body to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and confidence to perform their duties

## Fit for Purpose

The YCG includes three entities that work together to carry out the task of providing for the long-term benefit of Yawuru people.

**Yawuru PBC** represents the Yawuru native title holders as a communal group and is the parent entity of the YCG. The role of the PBC is to hold Native Title rights and interests in trust for Native Title holders and to hold special purpose land.

**Mura Malla Yawuru** (MMY) acts as a holding company for land-holding and commercial activity. MMY holds 100% of Nyamba Buru Yawuru (NBY) and its role is to appoint the Directors of NBY. MMY is accountable to the Yawuru PBC.

**NBY** is a not for profit development company created to undertake the day to day work of running community programs, managing land and sea and creating economic opportunities. NBY is delegated use of all assets and funds generated to fulfil the aims of the Yawuru corporate group. NBY also has a number of joint ventures and subsidiaries created to undertake specific economic development tasks. The PBC Board endorses the directions of NBY and ensures that NBY works with community approval and support for its activities.

This governance structure ensures that the business and cultural roles of the YCG are performed independently but hand in hand. Separating the Native Title and cultural responsibilities from commercial activities has two chief benefits. Firstly, with the Yawuru PBC as the ultimate holding entity of the YCG, it allows the Native Title holders to own and delegate whilst isolating them from risk. Secondly, with clear jurisdictional delineations and identifiable roles for each separate entity, each board can focus on its specific duties and the YCG can design the board membership criteria so that the most appropriate people are in place.

