



# Exceptional Governance

Stories of Success from the 2022  
Indigenous Governance Awards

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of all lands where we live, work and collaborate.

We honour and celebrate their Elders, past, present and emerging, and acknowledge their right to self-determine their future, celebrate culture and their ongoing connection to land, seas and waterways.

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**

Australian Indigenous Governance Institute (AIGI) is an independent, Indigenous-led centre for governance knowledge and excellence. We connect Indigenous Australians to world-class governance practice, resources and professional development to meet their self-determined governance needs. We envision a future Australia where Indigenous peoples, communities and nations experience self-determination, and enjoy political, social, cultural and economic development through strong self-governance.

### **Reconciliation Australia**

Reconciliation Australia is an independent not-for-profit organisation whose vision is for an equitable, just 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.

Institute and Reconciliation Australia, in partnership with the BHP Foundation.

We would like to thank the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, leaders and organisations who have generously shared their knowledge and insights.

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Publication images feature the 2022 Indigenous Governance Awards finalists. All photographs are courtesy of Wirrim Media.

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# Introduction: Indigenous Governance Awards

The Indigenous Governance Awards were established to identify, celebrate and promote outstanding governance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and projects across the nation and their ability to organise, govern and self-determine their communities' futures.

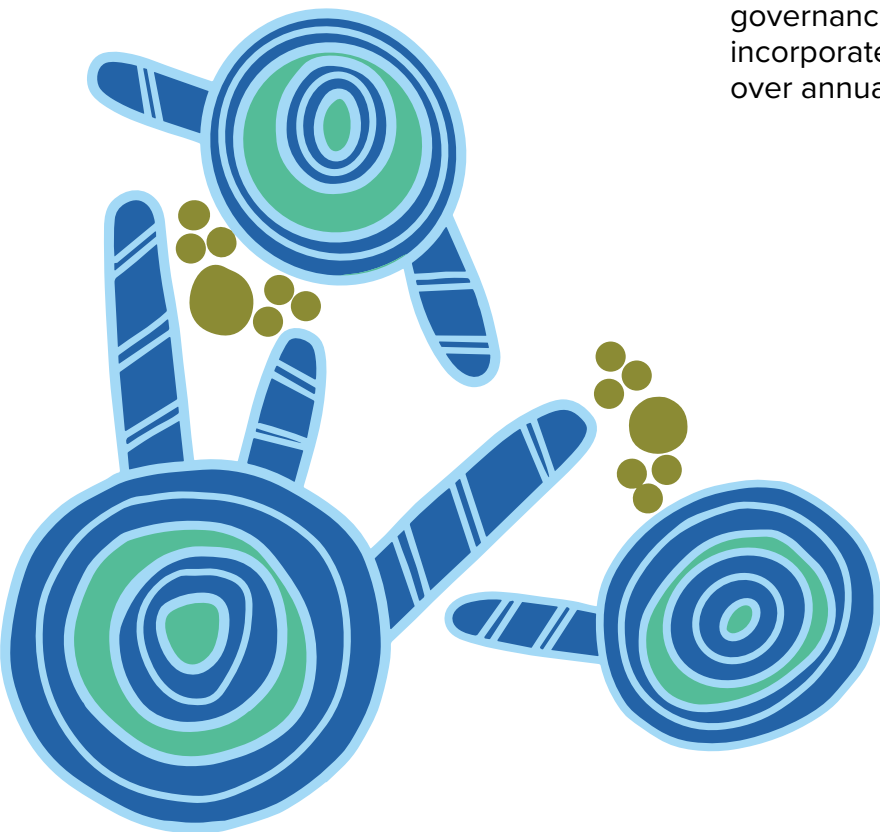
We know that effective Indigenous governance successfully combines traditional practices based on culture and kinship while working within the requirements of mainstream systems. Our finalists are shining examples of how two-way governance works in practice.

The Awards are also an excellent opportunity for us to showcase our finalists and their governance practices by providing our readers with practical insights into what makes their governance so exceptional.

The Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, Reconciliation Australia, and the BHP Foundation proudly partner to deliver the Indigenous Governance Awards, which have been running biennially since 2005.

The 2022 Awards include three categories, they are:

- Category 1: Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led non-incorporated initiatives or projects.
- Category 2: Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led small to medium-incorporated organisations (under \$1 million annual revenue)
- Category 3: Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led large, incorporated organisations (\$1 million and over annual revenue)



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# Acronyms

ACNC	Australian Charities & Not-for-profits Commission
AIGI	Australian Indigenous Governance Institute
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
AH&MRC	Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council
AH&MRC HREC	Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council Human Research Ethics Committee
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
IGA	Indigenous Governance Awards
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council
ORIC	Office of the Register of Indigenous Corporations
RRKAC	Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation
SAWCAN	South Australian West Coast ACCHO Network

# Foreword

The 2022 Indigenous Governance Awards are unlike any others that have come before. Initially scheduled for 2020, these Awards were beset by almost two years of postponements, false starts and last-minute pivots due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

These delays aren't the only thing that makes the 2022 Awards unique. This year, we introduced a new category for small to medium-incorporated organisations. Our incorporated category received a wide range of applications from small to large operations in previous years. This effectively meant small organisations were competing with large ones. In the spirit of fairness, the decision was made to split the incorporated category into two streams: small to medium organisations and large. We are excited about what this means for our future awards, and we hope this change encourages more Indigenous organisations and projects to get involved.

We are thoroughly impressed by the incredible work being done by Indigenous communities across the country. Our nine finalists are great examples of this vital work and Indigenous communities' strength, resilience, and capability across a diverse range of locations, sectors, and sizes. Their innovation, ingenuity, skill, and excellence are a testament to their hard work and drive. We are thrilled to be sharing their stories with you.

As we showcase each of our finalists' governance practices, we hope these stories encourage and get you thinking differently about your governance practices or how you might adapt or implement some of these practices in your own contexts. We will do this by giving you a brief overview of our nine finalist organisations, then deep-diving into aspects of their governance practices and providing helpful insights.

As Indigenous peoples, we have always had the strength and vision to lead our communities. The contemporary challenge is in two-way governance - holding true to the culture, laws, and forms of accountability of the communities we serve while responding effectively to the wider governance environment. Our finalists demonstrate that real change happens when practical, effective, and culturally legitimate governance is in place.

We hope you find these stories inspiring and insightful.

Australian Indigenous Governance Institute





# Indigenous Governance Awards 2022

## Overview

The Indigenous Governance Awards are held biennially and are open to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led communities, organisations and projects.

Below is an overview of the Indigenous Governance Awards process:

### Step 1 – Application

Applicants complete the application form and submit the required supporting documents.

### Step 2 – Application review and shortlisting

A Review Committee assesses all applications and supporting documents based on the selection criteria. Once all applications are reviewed, we create a shortlist of the applicants for each category.

### Step 3 – Judging

An independent panel of judges then reviews all the shortlisted applications along with their supporting documents, selecting twelve finalists across the three categories.

### Step 4 – Site visits

Each finalist organisation receives a site visit from members of the judging panel. If appropriate, we may also capture photography and filming during the site visits, which may result in possible media coverage for the finalist.

### Step 5 – Final selection

Following site visits, the judging panel will reconvene to review the site visit reports and decide the Winner and Highly Commended organisations in each category.

### Step 6 – Winners announced

Winners are announced at an Awards presentation.

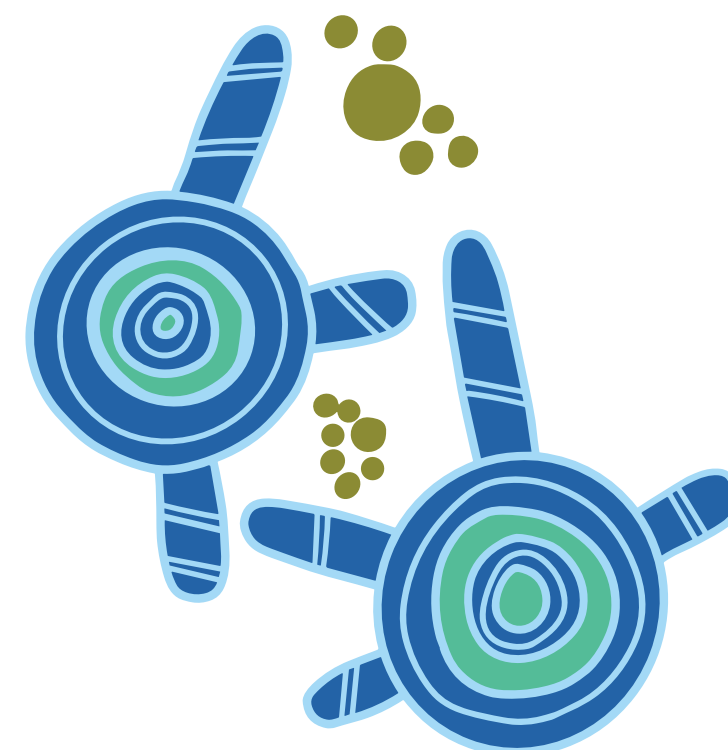
# The 2022 Indigenous Governance Awards

The 2022 Awards celebrate exceptional Indigenous governance practices throughout 2019 & 2020, with nominations for this round opening in November 2020. Once applications were received and shortlisting was completed, delays were made to the judging process by the COVID-19 pandemic, travel restrictions and state-wide lockdowns.

Finally, after almost 12 months of delays, our nine Finalists were announced in November 2021. They were selected through a rigorous judging process that evaluated applicants' governance across five criteria. These criteria are:

1. **Innovation** - Does the organisation or initiative/project demonstrate innovation and ingenuity in its governance development and response to local conditions and circumstances?
2. **Self-determination** - Does the organisation or initiative/project strengthen self-governance and leadership for its members/ community? community/region?
3. **Sustainability** - Does the organisation or initiative/project plan for the future and adapt to changing circumstances?
4. **Effectiveness** - Can the organisation's or initiative's/project's governance effectively make and carry out decisions, solve problems, deal with disputes and achieve positive and measurable results in addressing a key concern, problem, or challenge facing its community/region?
5. **Cultural legitimacy** - Does the organisation or initiative/project fit, reflect, and strengthen the community's or region's culture?

Under normal circumstances, the panel would assess written applications and then visit each finalist to see their governance practices in action. However, during this round, our judging panel could not make face-to-face visits to finalist organisations. Instead, our judging process was undertaken virtually throughout February – May 2022. Finally, after much delay, we came together to celebrate the Awards ceremony in June 2022.



# Our Judging Panel

For the 2022 Indigenous Governance Awards, we welcomed seven new judges to the panel of eight, all experts in their respective fields. Their expertise and perspectives are drawn from health, justice, academia, economic development, business, and governance, bringing an invaluable lens to the awards' decisions.



## Janine Mohamed, Co-Chair

Janine Mohamed is a proud Narrunga Kurna woman from Point Pearce in South Australia. Over the last two decades, she has dedicated her career to the Indigenous health sector through nursing, management, and policy roles. Many of these years have been spent in the Aboriginal Changes to Household Contacts-Students Community Controlled Health sector at state, national and international levels. Most recently, she was the CEO of the Lowitja Institute and, prior to this, was the CEO of the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM). Janine was awarded an Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity Fellowship in 2019, in January 2020, was awarded a Doctorate of Nursing honoris causa by Edith Cowan University, and in 2021, was awarded a Distinguished Fellowship by the George Institute of Global Health Australia.



## Eddie Cubillo, Co-Chair

Eddie Cubillo is a proud Aboriginal man of Larrakia, Wadjigan and Central Arrernte descent. He obtained a Bachelor of Laws Degree and was admitted to the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory. In 2002 he was elected to the ATSIC Yilli Rreung Regional Council, and subsequently became the Chair. Cubillo has also been a former Chair of both the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) and the Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee. In 2010, Eddie was appointed the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner of the Northern Territory and following his term, Eddie took on the role of Executive Officer with National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS). In 2015, Eddie was named the National Indigenous Legal Professional of the Year and in 2016 attended Geneva on a UN Indigenous fellowship. Eddie worked for Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council until 2017 where he then took up an opportunity to work on the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory as the Director of Community Engagement. In 2022, Cubillo completed his PhD with the University of Technology of Sydney and was awarded the UTS Chancellors award for outstanding thesis. He is currently the Director of the Indigenous Law and Justice Hub at the University of Melbourne.



## Romlie Mokak

Romlie Mokak is a Djugun man and a member of the Yawuru people and has been a Commissioner with the Productivity Commission since 2019. Previously he has been the CEO of the Lowitja Institute and the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, the latter of which he was CEO for almost a decade. Prior to these roles, Romlie held policy and program management roles in the Australian and New South Wales governments. Responsibilities spanning a range of areas, including substance use, eye health, ageing and disability. Additionally, Romlie has been the chair or member of a variety of policy, research and evaluation bodies, notably past chair of the National Health Leadership Forum, a forum that brings together national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing organisations. Romlie is also a Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services patron and a member of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Board.



## Nadine Highfield

Nadine Highfield is a proud Wangkatha woman from the Eastern-Goldfield's region of Western Australia. She descends from the Waljen clan with strong cultural ties to Kalgoorlie, Leonora and Laverton. Nadine is a qualified lawyer and is admitted to both the High Court of Australia and the ACT Supreme Court. In 2013, Nadine graduated from the Australian National University with a Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice and the University of Western Australia with a Bachelor of Laws. Nadine worked for the Commonwealth Government at the Commonwealth Department of Treasury as a financial analyst and the Australian Government Solicitor as a commercial solicitor. She has also worked at Edith Cowan University as a policy analyst. Nadine is currently the Principal Advisor, for Rio Tinto's Everyday Respect Taskforce.





### Donna Murray

Donna Murray is a proud descendant of the Wiradjuri and Wonnarua peoples with kinship and family connections around the Murrumbidgee River and the Hunter Valley, NSW, respectively. Donna is currently the CEO and Company Secretary of Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health peak organisation. Donna provides strong strategic leadership across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs and the wider health sector. Donna brings over 25 years of experience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and governance, Indigenous health, community development and engagement. Donna is also a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Donna is actively involved in the education sector as an Adjunct Senior Lecturer position with the Centre for Rural and Remote Health, James Cook University and an honorary position with the University of Technology Sydney, Faculty of Health. Donna is also actively engaged on several Australian University Advisory and Governance Committees. Donna works closely with key stakeholders and community, participating in several national and state allied health and Indigenous health committees focused on workforce development, cultural safety and policy development. She is currently the Chairperson of the National Health Leadership Forum and Co-Chair of the Implementation Plan Advisory Group for the review of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-23. She has a genuine commitment to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through supporting cultural priorities and aspirations for families and communities. Donna is also actively engaged in nation-building and strengthening Indigenous governance.



### Kenny Bedford

Kenny Bedford is a Traditional Owner of the Meuram Tribe of Erub (Darnley Island) Torres Strait. Kenny has served his community and region as the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Member for Erub and held the Fisheries Portfolio on the TSRA Executive for almost a decade. Kenny was also a Councillor and Deputy Mayor of the inaugural Torres Strait Island Regional Council. As President of the Erub Fisheries Management Association (EFMA), Kenny followed in his Father's footsteps to re-establish the only community-owned and managed commercial fishing operation in the Torres Strait. Kenny runs his own business while also being a Director of the My Pathway Group, a Board Member of Reconciliation Australia, and a Member of the National NAIDOC Committee.



### Val Price-Beck

Val Price-Beck is a Kamilaroi woman from the Liverpool Plains of New South Wales with over 20 years of experience in Indigenous economic development. Val also has extensive experience in corporate services and governance, having worked in both the private and public sectors. This has included being the CEO of the Indigenous Business Council of Australia and a member of Indigenous Business Australia's executive management team. Currently, Val is the Chair of the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, as well as a Director at the National Health Funding Body, a body that supports the obligations and responsibilities of the Administrator through best practice administration of public hospital funding.



### Sarah Brown

Sarah Brown AM is the CEO of Purple House and has been helping the Indigenous Directors to run the organisation since its inception more than eighteen years ago. As well as being a judge this year, Sarah and Purple House were the winners of the Indigenous Governance Award Category A (incorporated organisations) in 2016, helping her to provide a unique perspective to this year's judging panel. Sarah holds a Master of Nursing, a Graduate Diploma in Aboriginal Education, and a Graduate Diploma in Health Service Management. Prior to joining Purple House, she was a remote area nurse and university lecturer. Sarah has been recognised in many ways for the work she does, being named Hesta's Australia's Nurse of the Year in 2017, being listed as one of BOSS magazine's 'True Leaders' in 2018, and in 2020 Sarah received an Order of Australia Medal for "her significant service to community health, remote nursing and Indigenous communities".

# Our 2022 Indigenous Governance Awards Finalists

Each finalist has found a distinct and culturally-legitimate way of working with and for their community, providing a voice and vehicle for self-determination and independence.

## Category 1: Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led non-incorporated initiatives or projects

### Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) Human Research Ethics Committee

AH&MRC Human Research Ethics Committee's self-determination and innovation ensure health research with and about Aboriginal people is conducted ethically and safely. They have advocated tirelessly for over three decades to ensure Indigenous communities and voices are centred throughout the health research process, shifting focus from a top-down investigator-driven process to community-controlled and led research.

### South Australian West Coast ACCHO Network (SAWCAN)

The South Australian West Coast ACCHO Network (SAWCAN) combines the strength of five community-controlled health organisations to optimise their position in funding, advocacy and service delivery to maximise health outcomes for their communities and overcome their collective challenges in providing quality primary health

care to their communities. They are shifting the way primary healthcare is delivered to communities in South Australia, ensuring resources are used efficiently and community needs are met across the region.

### Koling wada-ngal Committee

The Koling wada-ngal Committee runs out of Wyndham in southwestern Melbourne, an area that is rapidly growing and now hosts the largest population of Aboriginal people living in metropolitan Melbourne. Forming in 2014, after identifying the need for a space where the community could gather and connect, the Committee's determination has resulted in the building of the Wunggurrwill Dhurrung Centre and the growth of their committee into the Koling wada-ngal Aboriginal Corporation. The Committee's commitment and determination ensure the local Indigenous community has a safe place to nurture and pass on culture for generations to come.

## Category 2: Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led small to medium-incorporated organisations (under \$1 million annual revenue)

### Mudjar Aboriginal Corporation

The Mudjar Aboriginal Corporation in Esperance, WA, involves its whole community in their cultural and environmental preservation work while creating beautiful spaces for people to come together. After a shift in the organisation's direction, the Board focuses on its growth and ensures its longevity through succession planning.

### Naru Goori Groms

Naru Goori Groms has helped over 200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people make healthy choices through their culturally safe and fun surf program on Gumbaynggirr Country in NSW.

### Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council

The Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council's vision is to empower its community by supporting positive change, self-determining its future, and asserting its rights to culture and land. They have pulled themselves out of administration, no longer renting but now owning a space to increase their community engagement by running community events and programs and growing from one staff member to seven, all while providing regional advocacy and championing economic development.

## Category 3: Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led large, incorporated organisations (\$1 million and over annual revenue)

### Wungening Aboriginal Corporation

Wungening Aboriginal Corporation in Perth is a progressive and culturally legitimate service providing holistic support for community and families in housing, health, and justice.

### Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation (RRKAC)

Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation (RRKAC) is part of an intricate governance structure engaging Robe River Kuruma people in environment management services to keep culture strong and in the hands of the community.



# Finalists Deep-dive

How each finalist applies the Principles of Success to their governance practices.

## Overview

The following stories showcase our finalists and their governance practices. Each story is split into two sections: an overview of the organisation or committee followed by a short case study that draws out aspects of their governance practices.

As our finalists are judged based on the same criteria, there are lots of similarities and crossovers with many of our finalists' practices. This means instead of sharing every detail of our finalist's governance practices, we are focusing on showcasing elements from each that are innovative or unique.

We hope you find the stories insightful and inspiring.

## Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council's Human Research Ethics Committee

**Since 1985, the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) of New South Wales have been advocating and advising for better provision through community-controlled health services at both state and federal levels. While working closely with Aboriginal Medical Services across the state, they noticed a lack of Aboriginal governance over Aboriginal health research. After identifying this need, they established the AH&MRC Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) in 1996 to guide this work, ensuring health research is for and with the community.**

The HREC provides a platform for a range of representatives from communities across NSW to come together and consider the appropriateness and ethical acceptability of new research proposals. This committee is made up of 18 members consisting of community representatives as well as legal and medical professionals. They ensure research puts the community first, is done in a culturally legitimate way, and involves and considers the people that it affects.

The HREC is a driving force in health and medical research, with researchers looking

to them for standards of best practice. They have developed a suite of educational resources to guide academics and institutions to ensure these much-needed industry changes are sustainable into the future. A key example of their work is the AH&MRC Guidelines for Aboriginal Health Research, which encourages researchers to engage the Aboriginal community in Health Research from the project's inception, ensuring community needs are met and research is undertaken for the benefit of the community.



## Case Study: Diversity and Succession Planning

A strength of the AH&MRC HREC is its diversity. The Committee consists of Elders, health researchers, professional care practitioners, community members, and legal representatives. This mixture of committee members ensures there is a balance between professional skills, industry experience and community voice. The Committee has recently enhanced its succession planning capability through the inclusion of dedicated youth positions. They demonstrate their dedication to sustainability by investing in and growing the capacity of their younger members through mentorship, preparing them to one day lead the Committee.

The Committee's priority is to centre community needs and voice in their decision-making. One way they ensure this is through its Aboriginal Medical Services member network. Through this network,

they seek feedback on the community's research priorities. With their innovative approach, the Committee are shifting the model from top-down investigator-driven to community-controlled and led research. With an emphasis on prioritising the community, the HREC seeks ongoing feedback from its 40+ AH&MRC Aboriginal Medical Service members and other community members across NSW. This ensures its services are customised and meet the needs of its members.

**Tip:** AH&MRC's Human Research Ethics Committee strikes a balance between professional skills and community voice through its diverse membership. They leverage this expertise to challenge existing external power structures and ensure health and medical research is culturally legitimate and what's best for the community.



# South Australian West Coast ACCHO Network (SAWCAN)

The South Australian West Coast ACCHO Network (SAWCAN) combines the resources, knowledge, and passion of five Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs). Under the SAWCAN banner, the five-member ACCHOs work together to provide comprehensive primary health care to their communities, which includes approximately 5,500 Aboriginal People.

After a long history of working collaboratively, the community-led decision to formalise their partnership was made in 2018. Their goal was to optimise their position in grant funding, advocacy and service delivery to maximise health outcomes for their communities. They started out their formal partnership with an innovative consortium approach to deliver their Aboriginal Disability Alliance project,

which addresses a particular area where the National Disability Insurance Scheme roll-out has fallen short for their vulnerable community members. They also shared staff across the network, working together with a shared vision and strategy, which reduces duplication and provides a more seamless model of delivery while strengthening their regional voice.



## Case Study: Innovation and Collaboration

For decades, the five ACCHOs have been informally collaborating. The communities they collectively serve are interconnected through family ties, and due to this, move between the health networks. The directors of SAWCAN are made up of the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) (or equivalent positions) of each ACCHO. Meeting quarterly, the CEOs and Senior Managers from each ACCHO discuss and problem-solve common challenges and gaps across the region. The decision to formalise this work under a regional body model was organic, which built on the strengths of collective effort and economies of scale approaches in regional and remote locations. Each CEO or Director on the SAWCAN Committee is also responsible for updating, informing, and providing reports about the SAWCAN collaboration

to their own ACCHO boards, which are 100% local Aboriginal community members. This means they have a wide reach and are informed by the broader regional community.

**Tip:** SAWCAN's unique governance structure, innovative approach, and self-determinative thinking enable them to use resources effectively, reduce duplication, and provide the best possible primary healthcare to their communities. Instead of achieving small wins for a single community, the SAWCAN can tackle bigger challenges by working together and sharing the work and the benefits. A consortium is a great way to pool resources and leverage effort as well as economies of scale.



## Koling wada-ngal Committee

The Koling wada-ngal Committee is an impressive example of self-determination and community persistence. Koling wada-ngal in Wadawurrung means walking together, and with this spirit, the committee has been able to achieve its goals. Forming in 2014, after identifying the need for a space where the community could gather and connect, their determination has resulted in the building of the Wunggurrwil Dhurrung Centre and the growth of their committee into the Koling wada-ngal Aboriginal Corporation.

“The Aboriginal community in the west of Melbourne has been one of the fastest growing Aboriginal communities in metropolitan Melbourne,” says Karen Jackson, Co-Chair of the Koling wada-ngal Committee. Due to this growth, community members in 2013 identified a need for an inclusive community space where celebration, connection and improved coordination and delivery of services could occur. Described as ‘a landscape with a building in it’, the award-winning Wunggurrwil Dhurrung Centre is now

home to the Aboriginal Community Centre envisioned back in 2013. From this space, the community can run programs and activities aimed at bringing people together through culture. These programs and activities include arts and culture programs, entrepreneur & small business support activities, counselling and wellbeing programs, and regular sporting activities. They also run specific Elders, Family, and Youth activities and host several other local community organisations on the premises.

### Case Study: Self-determination and Cultural Legitimacy

The initial idea to establish an Aboriginal community centre in Wyndham came from the Werribee and Hobson Bay Local Aboriginal Network. Those members who were particularly interested in seeing the establishment of a community centre then formed a small working group, which built momentum over time and eventually led to a formal partnership with the local council. Originally named the Wyndham Aboriginal Community Centre Committee, the Koling wada-ngal Committee consists of seven local community members who represent the First Nations communities of metro-west Melbourne. Founding members of the committee were volunteers in the first instance. Later down the track, some members of the Committee represented key local Aboriginal organisations. Their participation proved crucial when the Committee collaborated with Wyndham City Council and architects to finalise the design and usage implications of the Wunggurrwil Dhurrung Centre.

The Committee invested significant time and energy into developing robust cultural protocols. Having these strong protocols enables them to make culturally legitimate decisions in the best interest of the Aboriginal community they serve.

The Koling wada-ngal Committee is made up entirely of local Aboriginal community members. “The majority of the board live around here, so they know what

it’s like.... having that strong identity and story brings a lot to the Board,” remarks Debbie Evans, Co-Chair of Koling wada-ngal Committee. Through the composition of the Committee, they can stay closely connected with and accountable to the local community. They also focus on fostering transparency and safety, enabling community members to provide thoughtful feedback, which steers their decision-making.

“We answer to each other as board members, but more importantly, we answer to the community. We really want them to steer us so that we can be a strong voice to local government and others. We want them to tell us if we’re doing something wrong... just sit down and have those yarns with us. We answer to them,” explains Debbie Evans, Co-Chair, Koling wada-ngal Committee.

**Tip:** Communities can achieve a lot through strategic collaboration and determination. The Koling wada-ngal Committee started out as a working group, eventually growing into its own entity. The Committee developed robust cultural protocols to guide their decision-making and ensure they were culturally legitimate. They also made sure to foster strong ties to the local community, ensuring feedback and accountability processes could effectively occur between themselves and the community they serve.



# Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council

Brewarrina is a remote town 787km northwest of Sydney on the lands of the Muruwari, Ngemba, Weilwan and Yuwaalaraay peoples. Brewarrina, or ‘Bre’, has long been a meeting place for Indigenous people and is known for Baiame’s Ngunnhu: an extensive system of stone fish traps believed to be one of the world’s oldest man-made constructions. Grounded in this ongoing cultural legacy is the Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council (Bre LALC), which supports the local Aboriginal community in creating positive change, self-determining their future, and asserting their rights to culture and land.

The growth of this organisation has been exponential over the last few years, going from one full-time staff member to now a team of seven. They’ve also moved from a rented office space into a home they can call their own. This new home enables them to increase their community engagement by providing a space to run community programs such as men’s and women’s groups, arts and culture activities and youth programs. There are plans to transform and upgrade the land

next to the LALC into a vibrant community space. One program Bre LALC is particularly proud of is the Tomorrow’s CEO Program. Through this Program, the LALC hosts five school students over ten weeks, providing them with job-ready skills and experience. Growing the next generation of leaders and embedding succession planning into their operations is imperative for the long-term sustainability of their organisation.

## Case Study: Cultural Legitimacy and Transparency

In 2016, after five years under administration, the Board refocused the organisation’s strategic goals, committing to a new governance model. The Board’s approach was to ensure absolute transparency and a model of ground-up accountability. Implemented into this accountability model were multiple reporting avenues, ensuring the Board, members, and community were aware of what was happening within the organisation. The CEO reports to the Board every 3-4 weeks and to members quarterly via a detailed CEO Report. This report digs into the details of the organisation’s financials, making it easy for readers to understand precisely what is happening, where income is coming from and where expenses are going out. The report also contains information on all operational aspects of the organisation, highlighting issues without secrecy in a matter-of-fact way.

As CEO John Reidy explains: “We run towards accountability. We want to know our shortcomings so we can figure out how to address them quickly.” In addition to the Board and member reports, Bre LALC is part of a regional group of LALCs that work together to keep each other accountable and ensure they are collectively meeting their compliance obligations under the Land Rights Act. While not required to complete full audits, they still complete them to ensure transparency and accountability. The benefit of regularly reporting also ensures issues are identified quickly, which means they can be dealt with effectively.

**Tip:** Bre LALC wants to ensure complete transparency and accountability. They do this through regular communication, plain financial reporting, and full audits, even when they aren’t legislatively required.





# Mudjar Aboriginal Corporation

Based out of the idyllic setting of Esperance, WA, approximately 720 kilometres southeast of Perth, is Mudjar Aboriginal Corporation (Mudjar). Mudjar is a community-controlled organisation led by a Board of Directors representing Nyungar and Ngadju people from this region. The Mudjar Boorn (Tree), which the corporation is named after, is a very special, sacred and powerful spiritual carrier of Wirn or Spiritual Power. Just like its namesake, they guide and support their community. Every one of Mudjar’s roles centres on bringing people together and strengthening their community. It does this through cultural education and preservation, with popular programs immersing people in Nyungar art, language, stories and Country.

Mudjar Aboriginal Corporation started life as the Esperance Nyungar Aboriginal Corporation in 2002, changing names in 2020 to reflect the change in the local community’s needs and, subsequently, the organisation’s direction. Now focusing on

sharing and preserving culture through its suite of programs and activities, Mudjar aims to create positive change for its community by promoting learning and wellness while also connecting people, ideas and resources.



## Case Study: Sustainability and Sharing Culture

Mudjar’s Board engages people from different mobs: both traditional custodians and Aboriginal People living in the area who have family connections to the area.

They prioritise engaging local people and ensuring their voices are embedded into this organisation’s decision-making process. This ensures the direction of the organisation and the decisions they make are culturally legitimate and a reflection of the desires of the community. There is regular communication between the Board, members, and management. Lurlene Graham explains: “We meet once a month, and in everything that we do, everybody knows, and everybody has input. We bring it to the table, we discuss it and then we make that final decision there and then.”

Mudjar’s membership comprises 50-55 Aboriginal community members who represent families and cultural groups living in the local area. Mudjar is focused

on the growth and sustainability of this organisation. One way they plan for the future and ensure the organisation’s longevity is by engaging local young people through their programs, employment, or on the Board. A practical way the Board ensures accountability and transparency is through the development of a Board of Directors Governance Plan. This Plan outlines who is responsible for what, how communication will occur, how activities will be recorded, and how accountability will be ensured.

**Tip:** Each year, Mudjar’s Board develop a Governance Plan outlining responsibilities, processes, and accountability measures. Governance Plans, like yearly work or project plans, help focus your efforts, guide your activities, and outline processes. If you desire clarity or focus, try implementing a Governance Plan into your governance operations.



## Naru Goori Groms

Coffs Harbour is situated in the heart of Gumbaynggirr Country on NSW's Mid-North Coast. For the Gumbaynggirr community, the gaagal (ocean) plays a significant role in their daily lives and is totemic to their people.

Siblings Amber Hamer and James Mercy have a lifelong affinity with the ocean, instilled in them by their late father, Eric Mercy, a well-known surfer and beloved local community member. Culture, connection and community are at the heart of this organisation's success. Naru has been running surf-based events and gatherings to help promote well-being and celebrate culture since 2018.

The organisation's name, 'Naru', derives from the Gumbaynggirr word for water, 'Ngaarlu', which represents healing. "We believe in the power the ocean has and the healing it can bring", explains Amber Hamer, Co-founder of Naru Aboriginal Corporation. Naru Indigenous Corporation (Naru) launched Goori Groms in 2020 to celebrate saltwater and connect the community through surfing and culture.

### Case Study: Two-way Governance and Customised Communication

The Naru Board is made up of five dedicated community members with a passion for surfing and wellbeing, 80% of whom are Indigenous. This ensures community voice is at the centre of their decision-making. In 2020, the Board decided to shift focus, adapting to local community needs and building more customised programs. Naru Goorie Groms is a direct result of this shift, addressing the need for local Goorie kids to connect with Country while learning how they can care for themselves and others in a culturally safe space. A big focus of this program is water safety and well-being, crucial life skills for young people to develop.

As Amber Hamer explains, "We are accountable to ORIC, and the AC[N]C now that we are a registered charity, we must meet all their reporting schedules, but,... I know for me my accountability...is to this community."

Two-way governance and cultural legitimacy are crucial for this organisation's success. One way they stay accountable to their community is through adaptive communication. Naru uses diverse communication methods, including social media, surveys, phone calls, emails and face-to-face meetings, to ensure different parts of the community can provide input or pass on feedback. They are also implementing succession planning into their activities by mentoring and earmarking younger mob to take on leadership roles in the future.

**Tip:** Being culturally legitimate and centring community voice is the cornerstone of this organisation. Naru adapts the way they communicate with their stakeholders, using diverse methods to stay in touch and collect feedback. By doing this, they ensure the feedback provided is a true reflection of the desires of their community.





# Wungening Aboriginal Corporation

**Wungening Aboriginal Corporation (Wungening) in Perth is a progressive and culturally safe service providing holistic support for the community and families in housing, health, and justice.**

The organisation started in 1988 with a passionate group of Aboriginal people who were concerned that mainstream services were not responding effectively to the needs of the Aboriginal community, specifically around alcohol and other drugs. They came up with a plan: to create a centre of support services tailored to Aboriginal people. This began what is now the Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, growing over the last 34 years from two unfunded staff to now over 200, operating from ten locations.

In 2018, they became known as the Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, with “Wungening”, the Noongar word for “healing”, reflecting the broadening of the organisation’s overall purpose. This broadening of service delivery recognises that issues with alcohol and other drugs do not appear in isolation but are linked to a range of other significant social issues, including intergenerational trauma and the need for holistic healing. They have since incorporated support services for reintegration (prison to community), in-home support for families at risk in the child protection sector, and homelessness.

## Case Study: Cultural Legitimacy and Collaboration

Although the largest Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCHO) in Perth, Wungening still has a strong focus on collaborating with other Aboriginal and mainstream organisations. These partnerships have enabled the expansion of their funding base and the implementation of culturally responsive services.

Wungening keeps abreast of local community concerns and trends through several means, including Elders forums, community advisory groups, and service statistics. They also lead two consortia made up of four agencies, each with diverse experience in delivering services to the community, supporting a truly integrated and culturally secure model of service delivery that sees the client as a whole with interrelated needs rather than separate parts. Board Directors serve for a three-year term, which provides stability and consistency to their organisation. They have also developed a Cultural Framework that outlines and guides the cultural values underpinning every aspect of their service delivery. This is called the “Wungening Way”.

In addition, comprehensive reporting and the preparation of clear budgets, monthly financial reporting and annual accounts auditing by an independent accounting firm further support the Directors in understanding how the organisation is positioned. This reporting and auditing ensures the Board make the best decisions for their community.

**Tips:** The Wungening Way Cultural Framework is the foundation of this organisation’s suite of policies, procedures, strategies and codes of conduct. This means that this organisation is centred on Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing. They also leverage strategic partnerships to advocate for change on multiple levels. If you’re looking to embed cultural legitimacy into your organisation’s governance and operations, develop a cultural framework reflective of your community to ensure it underpins every aspect of your organisation and service delivery.





## Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation (RRKAC)

Robe River Kuruma people have native title rights covering nearly 16,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the Pilbara region in WA, including the complete Robe River system. Based in Karratha, Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation (RRKAC) plays an important role in advocating and progressing the interests of the Robe River Kuruma people they represent. As their registered native title body, RRKAC helps to protect and preserve cultural heritage while monitoring and implementing various participation agreements and delivering community projects, programs, and services for the Robe River Kuruma people.

### Case Study: Cultural Legitimacy and Succession Planning

RRKAC's governance model is predominantly a Traditional Owner-based Board of Directors with representatives from each family line, ensuring the organisation's cultural legitimacy. Their succession planning takes place in a structured manner by having capped terms for its directors. This prevents stagnation, ensures knowledge continuity, and allows diverse community members to participate in the organisation's leadership. To prevent the potential loss of corporate knowledge when directors' terms have ended, they have established a Director Advisory Panel made up of former directors, who guide and provide information to current Board Members.

As part of their succession planning, RRKAC has developed a mentor program, ensuring their young people have the skills and knowledge required to one day lead their community. They also have an additional layer of governance to ensure community voice is at the heart of their decision-

making. These are specialised advisory committees led by a designated board member who takes feedback back to the other directors. Together, these practices set a strong framework for the organisation, ensuring its cultural legitimacy and longevity. RRKAC are on track to establish a solid foundation for their people, Country, and culture for generations to come.

**Tip:** Succession planning is important for the longevity and sustainability of your organisation. RRKAC's succession planning is multi-faceted. They invest in growing their young people's capacity, ensuring they are equipped to lead in the future. They also cap their director terms, allowing new ideas and views into the organisation's leadership. Additionally, they transition former directors onto the Directors Advisory Panel to ensure corporate knowledge is retained and new directors can be mentored.



### Culture, Resilience and Celebration by Emma Bamblett

**Emma Bamblett is a proud Wemba Wemba, Gunditjmara, Ngadjonji, and Taungurung woman and First Nations artist working in Naarm.**

Her art is a vibrant tapestry of color and culture, reflecting her deep-rooted cultural ties through the depictions of animals, totems, and landscapes from her Country. Her work spans various mediums from canvases, murals to digital art and homewares.

Her work has been showcased at notable events like the Koorie Night Market, Koorie Heritage Trust, and Craft Victoria, establishing herself as a dedicated custodian of First Nations art and culture. This artwork embodies AIGI's role as an independent, Indigenous-led centre for governance knowledge and excellence, reflecting themes of celebration, resilience, and culture.

The blue stream flowing throughout the middle of the artwork and outwards represents self-determination. There are arrow formations and lines to represent going forward, voice, strength and resilience. In the ochre center of the artwork are circles connected by straight lines to represent innovation.

The burnt red orange section around the outside of the artwork represents cultural legitimacy. There are figures within those sections to represent Aboriginal governance and Elders. The lighter curved lines and circles represent conversations and voices. The smaller sections with the line work represent respect.

There are teal sections on both the left and right side of the artwork with circles connected by curved lines. Within the circles is line work and dots to highlight experience and effectiveness. The light green section with the blue circles and lines reaching out represents sharing knowledge of sustainability.



