NSW GOVERNMENT | Aboriginal Affairs

Co-designing recommendations to government:

A literature review and case studies from the *OCHRE* initiatives

An Aboriginal Affairs NSW Practice Paper

July 2021

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Cover image: Sea Cliff Bridge, Clifton, NSW. Courtesy of Destination NSW. Image, this page: Aboriginal wood carvings near the Menindee Tourist Information Centre, NSW. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

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Acknowledgements

Image: The Rock Nature Reserve – Kengal Aboriginal Place, NSW. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales (AANSW) and the author of this paper would like to acknowledge the generosity of the many individuals who participated in and supported the research that underpins this paper.

Specifically, we wish to thank members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and the Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation Local Decision Making initiatives, staff and community members associated with the Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest, the Tamworth Opportunity Hub and the Campbelltown Opportunity Hub. In addition, we appreciate the insights and advice of AANSW regional and central office staff. Valuable advice was also provided by the members of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA). The author also wishes to thank Richard Wentworth Ping of Wentworth People who gave generously of his time and ideas in formulating some tools to assist Aboriginal people in making recommendations to government. Finally, thank you to Tony Dreise, Professor of Indigenous Policy and Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at The Australian National University, who provided ongoing advice and support as the project's Aboriginal Expert Advisor. The views expressed in this paper may not reflect the views of AANSW or the NSW Government.

About the Author

Image: The Rock Nature Reserve – Kengal Aboriginal Place, NSW. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

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Recently retired as Director of The Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), Jerry has over 30 years' experience working with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities. While at CAEPR he was the principal researcher on Indigenous education and mentored and supervised some of Australia's most influential Indigenous education researchers. He is author of over 60 publications, over 40 unpublished papers and reports, was Chief Investigator on 5 Australian Research Council Grants and has acted as a consultant to many organisations including the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Independent Schools Council of Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation, the Central Land Council and the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation.

Introduction

Image: EORA: Broken Spear and City Sparkle light installations in The Rocks during Vivid Sydney 2019. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Background and context

Over the last two decades, governments have increasingly sought to include the public in the design and development of services to ensure they are meeting the needs of individuals and communities. Concepts such as 'co-design' and 'co-production' have emerged to describe this style of collaboration, and recommendations that emerge from the process are key to achieving sustainable change.

Yet successful recommendation making to government is, in and of itself, a complex enterprise requiring attention to a range of issues, including the construction and wording of recommendations, knowledge of public service structures, budget, and government priorities, and a willingness and the ability to change the status quo.

This paper, a contribution to the Aboriginal Affairs NSW (AANSW)[1] 'Practice Paper' series, aims to assist Aboriginal, government, research and policy communities in achieving more successful co-designed recommendations to government. It is intended to be a contribution to the ongoing conversation between NSW Aboriginal communities and the NSW Government, building upon the outcomes of the Stage 1 Evaluation of *OCHRE*.

OCHRE (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment) is the community-focused NSW Government plan to address priorities identified by Aboriginal people through a series of consultations in 2012 and 2013. The primary objective of *OCHRE* is to transform the NSW Government's relationship with Aboriginal communities in NSW, and to improve outcomes in education and employment and service delivery.

To that end, '*OCHRE* aims to support strong Aboriginal communities in which Aboriginal people actively influence and participate fully in social, economic and cultural life' (Aboriginal Affairs 2017b). *OCHRE* focuses on six key areas:

1. staying accountable
2. local languages, local cultures
3. supporting Aboriginal students to succeed
4. growing jobs and economic opportunities
5. local communities, local initiatives and
6. healing.

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1   A note on terminology: Given this report reviews international literature, it uses the term Indigenous peoples to refer to Indigenous peoples internationally. When referring to NSW research, the term Aboriginal is used, as this is the term adopted by the NSW Government. The term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is used by the Australian Government.

In their contributions to the Stage 1 evaluation of *OCHRE*, local Aboriginal representatives developed 166 recommendations to address issues related to the implementation of six initiatives:

- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA) Local Decision Making
- Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (IWAAC) Local Decision Making
- North West Wiradjuri Language Nest
- Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest
- Tamworth Opportunity Hub
- Campbelltown Opportunity Hub

A further eight recommendations were offered by the project evaluation team, based on the findings of the program evaluations (Katz et al. 2018).

In response to the first stage of the *OCHRE* evaluation, the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA) offered an additional seven recommendations (NCARA 2018). And in October 2019 the Ombudsman of NSW published an assessment of the first five years of *OCHRE* resulting in a further 68 recommendations (Ombudsman New South Wales 2019).

By any measure, 249 diverse recommendations are an overwhelming number and while the government welcomed the recommendations it will be an enormous challenge for the government to address them and to satisfy the various stakeholders who made or will be affected by the issues underlying these recommendations.

Aims and objectives

Given that there are already 249 recommendations to the NSW Government, the aim of this project is not to assess them, but rather to explore them and the context in which they arose with a goal of assisting Aboriginal research and policy communities in improving the quality of future recommendations to government.

Drawing on case studies of five *OCHRE* initiatives, this paper identifies key components of recommendation design within and across those *OCHRE* initiatives, including the process, principles and tools used. In addition, the paper identifies factors that enable and challenge the successful outcomes in co-design, and the features of success and failure as defined by different participants. Key among these are obstacles to communication, features of the Aboriginal and government political and operational domains that influence the acceptance or rejection of recommendations, differences in perceptions among Aboriginal and government stakeholders of what constitutes 'evidence' and variations in and between participants in terms of styles of interaction and capacity to identify, articulate, communicate and enact recommendations.

Drawing on the findings from the *OCHRE* evaluation reports, insights gained from interviews and examples of successful strategies from the research literature, this 'practice paper' provides advice on the effective formulation of recommendations to government through a co-design process.

Study Design –
sites, timelines and methodology

Image: Dreaming Poles located along the Kiama Coastal Walk, NSW. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

This paper examines the process of co-designing recommendations through case studies of five *OCHRE* initiatives. The five sites were selected to provide some geographic diversity and to illustrate the range of initiatives that have emerged from the *OCHRE* process:

- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA) Local Decision Making in Dubbo
- Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (IWAAC) Local Decision Making in Warilla
- Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest in the Coffs Harbour region
- Tamworth Opportunity Hub in Tamworth
- Campbelltown Opportunity Hub in Campbelltown

The case studies comprise five components:

- a desktop analysis of the structures and content of the five Stage 1 Evaluation reports and their recommendations[2]
- on-site and telephone interviews and focus groups with selected Aboriginal people involved in the design of recommendations for each report
- selected interviews and focus groups with AANSW regional staff from each of the five case study sites
- selected interviews with government officers in Sydney who received each report and who are responsible for enacting the recommendations

- an overview analysis and synthesis of the findings of the first four components.

In addition, in the early stages of the project, a presentation was made to and a focus group discussion held with the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA).

Though originally envisaged to be conducted over a few months in 2019, the project suffered a number of significant delays that ultimately required some reconfiguration of the field dates and methodology.

The project began by seeking ethics approval. Application was made by Dr Schwab, the Principal Consultant on the project, to the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW on 26 August 2019. Formal approval, without qualification, was provided on 21 October 2019 (HREC Reference number 1566/19).

This was followed by preliminary project meetings with AANSW staff in November to refine the methodology and identify the best potential field sites. The then Head of Aboriginal Affairs, Jason Ardler, wrote to the CEO's and key leaders in each of the five *OCHRE* sites to introduce the project and to ask for formal permission and support to undertake the research.

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2   Not all of the Stage 1 Evaluation reports for the five sites are publicly available. Though a copy of the Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (IWAAC) report was made available for the purposes of this project, that report remains confidential.

With support from key leaders in the five sites in hand, AANSW staff prepared contact lists of key individuals from the Aboriginal organisations who had been involved in the *OCHRE* evaluations and the development of the recommendations that emerged from them. In addition, names and contact details of public servants in those regions and in Central Office were provided by AANSW staff.

Individuals from each of the sites were then contacted to explain the research, identify potential times and places for interviews and focus group meetings, and to provide detail on the project process of informed consent and confidentiality. Though a field schedule was drawn up and preliminary dates and locations identified, it quickly became apparent that it would be difficult to undertake substantive work given the approach of the holiday period; it was agreed to postpone fieldwork until January 2020.

In January 2020 NSW and other parts of Australia were struck by unprecedented bushfires, many of which hugely affected Aboriginal lands and communities. Unfortunately, but understandably, this resulted in further disruption to the project schedule and additional delays, while Aboriginal groups and organisations tried to process and manage the devastation to their lands and communities. Formal fieldwork was able to begin in February 2020 with field visits to Warilla, Dubbo, Tamworth and Coffs Harbour.

By mid-March, Covid-19 was a serious health concern in Australia and the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a pandemic; very quickly travel and other restrictions were put into place. Consequently, field visits and the planned face to face interviews and focus groups for the fifth project site, Campbelltown, and to AANSW central office in Sydney, were suspended. Those interviews were eventually rescheduled and carried out by telephone.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

The key participants in the study included Aboriginal people and organisations involved in co-designing the recommendations, individuals facilitating the co-design, and public officials with responsibility for assessing and where possible for implementing the resulting recommendations.

All individuals who participated in focus groups or interviews were provided a project information sheet prior to the face-to-face or telephone meetings and all provided permission via an informed consent agreement. However, confidentiality was guaranteed in the sense that participants were assured that no individual would be named and specific comments that might identify a site would not be included in the paper.

As a result, the nature of these case studies is somewhat different than what is traditionally provided in that the findings appear in thematic and aggregate form. In addition, though this paper includes many direct quotes from Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal public servants, their names and locations remain confidential.

What does the literature say about co-design?

Image: Indigenous art adorning the pavement outside the The Wagga Wagga Civic Centre and the Museum of the Riverina. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

A working definition

There is some evidence to suggest that the concept of 'co-design' emerged in the 1970s as two distinct approaches to private sector product and technology design in Europe and the US began to merge. User-centred design emerged out of the US as designers engaged 'users' in testing, informing and conceptualising new technologies and products. In Europe, on the other hand, the emphasis was on a participatory approach in which future users were engaged as partners who brought their own expertise and insight into the design of products and services (Sanders and Strappers 2008).

Today these ideas have spread far and wide to influence design in an almost endless variety of contexts. Co-design today, in its great diversity, underpins design of the architecture of public spaces, teaching and learning, mental and other health services, palliative care, software and hardware design, social policy and on and on. A Google search for the term 'co-design' yielded about 15,940,000,000 results in 2020, while a keyword search of Google Scholar identified over 17,200 academic papers, books, and articles employing the phrase 'co-design' since 2019 [3].

Identifying a singular common thread in these varying usages is difficult, but most build upon a notion of a cooperative process where expertise and lived experience are both recognised and respected and the products of the process are seen to be of greater value than that of their constituent parts.

For the purposes of the paper, with its focus on making more effective recommendations to government, Emma Blomkamp's definition of co-design is appropriate: 'a methodology for policy making…a design-led process involving creative and participatory principles and tools to engage different kinds of people and knowledge in public problem solving' (Blomkamp 2018: 731).

When is co-design not appropriate?

Given how pervasive co-design has become, it is important to consider contexts where co-design might not be appropriate. Examples may include:

- an outcome and/or solution has already been pre-defined
- the objectives are in conflict with what consumers see as important
- a project that is time-critical

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3   The idea for this search comes from Sanders and Strappers (2008) who found 1,700,000 'hits' for the term 'co-design' in 2007 and 11,800 'hits' for the term in Google Scholar in 2007.

- the service is unable to obtain the lived experience expertise that is relevant to the project
- when there is no commitment to implementing and sustaining co-designed improvements
- when there is no 'buy in' from senior leadership.

(Agency for Clinical Innovation 2019: 7).

Principles, processes and methods of co-design with Aboriginal Peoples

Co-design in the context of Aboriginal policy requires a philosophical and practical shift away from practice as usual for both parties, and requires a great deal of trust in the initial stages. Co-design is in this sense a way of thinking, rather than an event, that requires a different mind-set and a new framework for working toward a solution.

From the perspective of government, co-design is not without risk, but when it works it enriches the search for, and development of, policy and program solutions by including the lived experience of the people—their motivations, dreams, fears and frustrations—who will be most affected by that policy.

From the perspective of Aboriginal peoples, co-design is action over words, a mechanism to build a foundation of trust, and a commitment to partnership and collaboration. As Dreise and Mazurski write, co-design 'reminds service providers and governments that they should do things with, and not to Aboriginal communities' (2018: 5). But it also challenges Aboriginal communities to advance action over words in working in partnership with government.

What does the literature say about co-design involving Aboriginal peoples?[4]

The desire by governments and Aboriginal peoples to work together raises some particular challenges for both parties. As such here are a set of principles to support co-design in this context [5].

Be clear about purpose and desired outcomes:
It's important to be clear from the start about what the co-design process aims to achieve, who needs to be involved, what's negotiable, and what time and resources are necessary and available to achieve the desired outcomes.

Don't assume agreement on key concepts:
'Taken for granted' concepts can't be taken for granted. They need careful examination and reflection. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal foundations of knowledge and experience can be very different and even in conflict. For example, co-design is often promoted as a means to achieve transformation, but for many Aboriginal people the notion of transformation raises red flags. It has roots in colonialism and assumes change is positive and on their side only.

Beware the shadow of colonialism:
Many examples of co-design aim for a merging of knowledge to achieve some common ground and build policies that serve both Aboriginal people and government. Yet the very process of co-design can also be seen to be one that originates in the 'Western world' which historically values 'development'. It is important to remember that co-design may be seen by many Aboriginal people as simply a continuation of colonialism where Aboriginal knowledge, practices and world views are acknowledged and then ignored.

Build an equal partnership:
This is perhaps the most challenging principle in that it assumes a sharing by both government and community of power and control in the process of policy making. The history of relationships between Aboriginal peoples and government is obviously fraught and government has almost always held the majority of power and control. Co-design involves a sincere attempt to work in partnership with a full understanding that in order to achieve change, both parties must be willing to concede some power and control. In addition, building a true partnership where both parties feel they can speak and be heard is not only productive in the process of co-design, but may contribute significantly to repairing relationships.

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4   The principles of co-design set out below have a great deal of resonance with good practice related to research with Aboriginal peoples (Dreise 2018).

5   Co-design is employed in a range of contexts and there is an increasingly robust literature on what co-design is as well as various sets of principles and processes that underpin it. The principles, processes and methods outlined here have been informed by several very useful sources: Akama, Hagen and Whaanga-Schollum (2019); Aboriginal Affairs NSW (2017a); Agency for Clinical Innovation (2019); Australian Centre for Innovation (2019); Blomkamp (2018); Dreise and Mazurski (2018); (Parsons, Fischer and Nalau 2016); (O'Brien, Fossey and Palmer 2020); and (Western Australian Council of Social Services 2017).

Operate transparently so as to build knowledge and trust:

In a process where both parties are being asked to give up some power, it's essential the relationship is based on transparency and trust. Clear and open lines of communication are essential and information sharing prior to, during and after the co-design process will facilitate a more trustful and productive relationship.

Respect and recognise various forms of expertise:

Fundamental to the process of co-design is a respectful relationship among the participating individuals and groups and recognition that expertise is wide-spread and comes in many forms. Public servants hold particular forms of knowledge about the machinery of government, the nature of budget cycles and political boundaries and opportunities, while representatives of Aboriginal peoples hold local knowledge and expertise on the lived experience of their communities and on working with government. The weaving together of these systems of knowledge is vital to successful co-design.

Provide adequate time and remain flexible:

It is often said that 'time is of the essence', in the sense that a quick outcome is a good outcome. But co-design as a process demands a greater investment in time than most public servants or Aboriginal organisations are experienced with. Not an event, like a consultation or a workshop, co-design requires a willingness by all parties to commit significant amounts of time and to remain flexible in realising that achieving the outcomes desired may stretch and shift timelines and diary dates. Numerous meetings, varying culturally appropriate approaches to gathering and sharing information, and a willingness to travel from place to place may be essential to achieving the best outcome.

Commit to inclusivity:

A successful co-design process requires the inclusion and active participation of the 'right' people – those who are recognised by their community as eligible to speak and who will be affected by the programs and policies to be co-designed. Equally important, this new way of doing things can create friction and frustration. All participants must be provided open, safe and respectful opportunities to speak and share information not just in initial discussions, but over much longer stretches of time. Expectations around the structures of learning and knowledge creation may differ among parties. For example, Aboriginal people may require input from

Elders who are not at the table when co-design is underway. Care needs to be taken in determining who needs to be included and how co-design is carried out.

Acknowledge the constancy of community and the churn of government

It's important to remember that while public servants come and go and government initiatives arrive and then often dissolve, Aboriginal community members remain. While public servants (who are salaried) often assume Aboriginal people will be grateful for the opportunity to provide input to consultations, it's worth remembering that any Aboriginal Elder will have seen countless public servants bearing new initiatives and promises; while it may be an exciting opportunity for public servants to 'get out in the field', it is for many community members just another in a series of exhausting meetings they can't refuse because this one just might end up making a difference.

Recognise differing Aboriginal interests, experiences and local histories:

One of the major challenges for all parties is to ensure Aboriginal participants are heard, that the various voices of local place, history and knowledge are included in the process of co-design. In any community there will be areas of both agreement and disagreement and in some cases, conflict. In addition, across the state, region or even local community there will be significantly different historical experiences and legacies of colonialism that need to be considered when building relationships and co-designing policy.

Invest in capacity development:

Co-design is ultimately an investment of time and scarce resources in both Aboriginal communities and government and building capacity among both is key. On the government side, cross-cultural training and cultural sensitivity is essential. To achieve the best outcomes both government and Aboriginal partners must build skills and knowledge and remain reflective, nimble and prepared to adapt and communicate.

Evaluate and adapt:

Carry the principles of co-design into the evaluation and monitoring of programs and policies. While an external evaluator may be appropriate, engagement of both government and Aboriginal community members will be essential. Effective co-design includes clear stages of evaluation and review and a mechanism to generate effective adaptation and recommendations.

Co-design and the relationship of governments and Aboriginal Peoples

Given the pervasive reach of the co-design approach across various policy contexts, it is not surprising that several governments have adopted co-design as fundamental to the framework for relationships between government and Aboriginal peoples. Indeed, Canada's full endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) signalled a commitment to co-design (often referred to in Canada as co-development) policies, programs and practices. As a nation, Canada has

'…committed to a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership, and rooted in the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People' (Government of Canada 2017).

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, co-design is cited as a feature of effective Māori-Crown engagement in support of the legal compliance requirements of the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Arawhiti: The Office for Māori Crown Relations 2018). In practice, co-design has emerged as a popular model for engagement of government with Māori peoples, and structures and mechanisms to support co-design have been put into place. The Auckland Co-Design Lab was established in 2015 as a collaborative effort of local and national government to address complex social issues such as family violence, rental tenure, driver's licensing, workforce readiness, early childhood education and the like. The Lab was established to 'use co-design principles and practice to work with, better understand and empower people closest to the issues' (Auckland Co-Design Lab n.d.).

The Australian Commonwealth Government has also commenced a high-profile co-design process to make sure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are empowered to have a say in the decisions that affect them (National Indigenous Australians Agency 2019). With oversight by a Senior Advisory Group, national and regional co-design groups are currently exploring ways to create local, regional and national elements of an Indigenous voice.

Co-design involving governments and Aboriginal peoples has led to a wide range of successful policy and program initiatives. For, example, Indigenous communities in Canada worked with government to create indicators to monitor and measure the health and wellbeing of their people (Fox 2018: 2), while Māori health researchers and the Aotearoa/New Zealand Government co-designed a mobile phone delivered (mHealth) healthy lifestyle app to support healthy lifestyles and weight management (Verbiest et al. 2019).

In the United States, a collaboration between academics from the University of California, Berkeley and the Pinoleville Pomo Nation, a small Native American tribal nation in northern California, involved the co-design of sustainable tribal housing informed by culturally inspired and culturally appropriate design principles. In this case, the tribal government steered the co-design process and engaged a range of stakeholders: elected officials of the tribal government; administrators, tribal citizens, engineers, architects, builders, energy scientists, students and the like (Edmunds et al. 2013).

Additional examples can be drawn from the fields of architecture (Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. 2016), services for urban Indigenous peoples (Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, Ontario 2019) water infrastructure (Bradford et al. 2018), fisheries (Government of Canada 2019) and many others.

Image: Aboriginal Tent Embassy established in front of Old Parliament House, Canberra. Image from Austock.

The *OCHRE* case studies

Image: Artwork by Badger Bates in Sculpture Park, Broken Hill, Outback NSW. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

An overview of the five Stage 1 Evaluation reports and their recommendations

The first stage of the evaluation of the *OCHRE* initiative was carried out by a team of researchers from the UNSW'S Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC). The team focused on six sites, exploring three of the *OCHRE* programs: the Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (IWAAC) and Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA) Local Decision Making sites, the Campbelltown and Tamworth Opportunity Hubs, and the Gumbaynggirr and North West Wiradjuri Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests[6]. For the purposes of this project, five sites were selected comprising all of the sites evaluated by SPRC with the exception of the North West Wiradjuri Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest.

The number of recommendations to emerge from the evaluations varied:

- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA) Local Decision Making – 27 recommendations
- Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (IWAAC) Local Decision Making[7]
- Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest – 30 recommendations
- Tamworth Opportunity Hub – 26 recommendations
- Campbelltown Opportunity Hub – 29 recommendations

An examination of these 112 recommendations show both some shared and unique concerns[8]. Not surprisingly, individual sites made recommendations that reflected their specific program and local context. This is a cornerstone of the co-design process – ensuring results meet the needs of, and are usable to, those stakeholders participating in the design development.

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6   The Northern Rivers Regional Assembly, a Local Decision Making site, was one of the original sites for the evaluation, but the Assembly withdrew before the evaluation commenced. While IWAAC participated in the evaluation, it chose not to make public the final report.

7   Because the evaluation report was never made public, details of the recommendations from IWAAC are not included in this analysis.

8   The full set of recommendations, organised by theme, appear in Appendix A. In a similar exercise Aboriginal Affairs NSW has been exploring a process of clustering recommendations by a small set of themes, but to this date those are for analytic purposes within the Department and have not been published.

For example, the Tamworth Opportunity Hub found that volunteers are important contributors to the success of the program and recommended that government needs to give official recognition to volunteers, including additional resources to support and train them.

The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly LDM has run a Young Leaders program for many years and recommended that the government provide resources and additional support to ensure they increase the size of the program and ensure the sustainability of the program.

Commonly shared recommendations included:

Resources

All of the sites made recommendations related to their desire for increased resources, variously framed around the need for additional funds to sustain and expand services and/or build capacity and capability. Uncertainty about future funding was common as was a desire to expand to meet the needs of other Aboriginal people in the area who were not being served by the programs. It's important to recognise that in any co-design process where funding is involved, there will understandably be a focus on funding. Government is always, and will always remain, a key source of funding, even if not in a consistent way.

Communication

Another common issue articulated in the recommendations was the view that government was not effective in clarifying and communicating program priorities and responsibilities across the local communities. In addition, there were concerns that communication among various stakeholders needed improvement.

Broad representation

A common concern that appears in the recommendations relates to the need for more Aboriginal people in the local area to have input into the programs, and for government to work with more people to ensure the initiatives meet their needs. This highlights the ever-present tension between 'time' and 'appropriate representation', and the costs and benefits for both government and community members in investing in consultation and co-design.

Staff training and professional development

While all programs provided recommendations that related to building and extending programs, there was recognition that for this to be achieved, program staff needed additional training and professional development opportunities.

Roles and responsibilities

Another common concern related to clarifying who is responsible for what. While some recommendations were relevant to government administrative or operational roles and responsibilities, others, it could be argued, would best be directed not at government, but at the *OCHRE* sites themselves.

The challenges of co-design

As previously highlighted, this 'practice paper' is framed around a number of key questions related to: the process of co-design broadly; the recommendations that arose from each of the five sites; the perceptions of community members who were involved in generating the recommendations from each site; and the perceptions of public servants who received and are ultimately responsible for addressing and implementing the recommendations.

The process of co-design and the development of recommendations to government involve a number of significant challenges for both Aboriginal communities and the government. First, for co-design to work, both groups need to recognise that co-design is a long, often difficult and sometimes uncomfortable process. It requires, in the terms used at the launch of *OCHRE*, a setting of a new relationship between Aboriginal people and the government. It requires a deeper listening to one another, a commitment to building trust, and the relinquishment of some degree of power. It requires both parties to commit to doing things differently.

In the case of this project, not everyone who has participated is optimistic that co-design has been achieved:

> I have an idea of co-design and I've stopped using that term and started saying co-design is aspirational. We're on a journey to get there but we are a long way from it. Looking at OCHRE I would say it is aspiration and not true co-design… I can't see how you can co-design anything unless you spend a great deal of time with people. It's a long process, and at its roots it's predicated on trust and that takes a long time to develop (non-Aboriginal public servant).

> What are we co-designing for if they (government) are not prepared to change anything? (Aboriginal community member).

Underlying the process of co-design are a number of practical, cultural and political tensions. First, the invitation to co-design does not arrive on neutral ground, outside the legacy of history. Since the arrival of Europeans, governments have held power over Aboriginal people. Governments legislate, fund and administer, but they also have power to punish and control.

In policy terms, and over the course of more than two hundred years, these actions in relation to Aboriginal people have shifted from acts of dispossession - to promises of reconciliation. Indeed, the impact of colonisation and the history of government policies on Aboriginal people is ever present and the disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in terms of health, education, employment, housing and engagement with the criminal justice system remain stark and stubborn. The disadvantage and inequality of Aboriginal peoples in Australia is the historical backdrop and contemporary context in which government policies and programs are designed and put into place.

For governments, co-design involves a requirement to give up some degree of power and control. Rather than holding the purse strings, making the 'final decision', setting timelines, and determining other requirements, governments need to negotiate these dimensions of the relationship. But most importantly, governments need to find new ways to reach a deeper understanding of the issues Aboriginal communities face:

> There is a need for government to have a cultural understanding of an issue, as well as an operational understanding. Co-design, however we might construct this, will come to solutions eventually but I'm not sure they come from a deep understanding (non-Aboriginal public servant).

While the idea of partnership is common in government policy and program documents and many relationships between government and citizens are described in these terms, it is unusual in practice. Partners in co-design need to operate on trust and share responsibility in decision making, and appropriate government structures are not always in place and public servants are not always skilled and capable of facilitating this new relationship. Generally, there is a tendency for government programs to be transactional rather than transformative and 'working differently' requires a major shift in thinking and working.

> I think we've missed the mark. Me, as an Aboriginal person, I can absolutely see the benefit of the OCHRE program. I think community understand the benefit of it and are embracing the intent of it more so than government are. How do we bring government into that space? To do things differently. It's about thinking and working differently but I can't see that playing out in a lot of the work I've been involved in (Aboriginal public servant).

From Aboriginal peoples' perspective, the acceptance of the invitation to co-design comes with costs. One Aboriginal community member, a senior leader of a well-known Aboriginal organisation, likened working with government to 'sleeping with the enemy'. While the rewards can be high, he said, so can the costs in terms of community perception, time and energy. In addition, a significant number of public servants in Aboriginal Affairs, especially in regional offices, are themselves Aboriginal and they are pulled in two directions as both public servants and local community members. The stress levels are high when things are not going well, and they are often the target of community frustration.

Aboriginal participants in co-design don't always understand or appreciate the political and economic constraints that government works under, and public servants are not always very good at explaining how the wheels of government and policy work. At the same time, this new way of working requires Aboriginal community members and organisations to shift from the traditional role of critic to that of partner and solution broker. That can be a challenge:

> I always say *** are a good opposition in government because they will always pick the faults but they never want to be part of the solution (Aboriginal public servant).

It is easier and safer, said an Aboriginal community member, to 'complain rather than contribute' and few have the knowledge and skill to operate effectively on this new terrain:

> I suppose they are reluctant because they have never been asked to be part of the decision making as part of the co-design of a solution. There is a sense of reluctance around 'if we put this forward does it get listened to?' They've been beaten over so many years but they are now at a stage where government is saying 'no, we want to talk to you, we want to be part of co-design'. Do we invest or sit back and be very critical of it? (Aboriginal public servant).

Image: Eddie Harris Indigenous mural on the wall of the Maari Ma Building on Argent Street, Broken Hill. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Were the recommendations co-designed?

This wasn't about co-design. Co-design is where you make a difference. They're not making a difference. It was just rubbish. They didn't give us enough money to do anything. …I'm frustrated because I feel the government is dragging their feet. (Aboriginal community member).

Was it co-design? No. At least not yet. Co-design is a process, a journey and we are still on that journey' (non-Aboriginal public servant).

The overall framework of *OCHRE* fits Blomkamp's definition of co-design as 'a methodology for policy making…a design-led process involving creative and participatory principles and tools to engage different kinds of people and knowledge in public problem solving'. Yet, the degree to which the process that yielded over 100 recommendations from the five sites can be characterised as co-design is debateable. Indeed, few Aboriginal community members volunteered the term and most public servants denied or were equivocal about it.

There was a degree of confusion and certainly scepticism about what co-design means among a significant number of Aboriginal community people spoken with at the five *OCHRE* sites. Some appeared to see it as just another form of consultation by government. Said an Aboriginal public servant:

Communities don't even know – like if you bring communities in, which you should, to talk about co-design and what could be better, how things could be better for their kids or their families or their old people or whatever, they don't know what co-design means. All they can do is tell you what's happening in their own little family space. It's a real nice theory, but I've never seen it happening well.

This lack of understanding certainly reflects in some cases an absence of clear explanation from government and the evaluation team, but it also relates to a lack of experience and the skill set required in the process. Said an Aboriginal public servant:

People may be highly respected Elders in the community who are designated to speak on behalf of the community, but not have the capacity and experience to negotiate with government: people can get confused around story telling rather than articulating the actual outcome they want.

This comment raises an important issue related to the way in which Aboriginal people and government perceive the process of information sharing. In many cases public servants are frustrated when discussions with Aboriginal community members appear to them to be unfocused and off the point. On the other hand, Aboriginal community members are often frustrated when meetings are rushed and government representatives don't seem to listen. In many cases the issue is fundamentally one of cross-cultural differences in styles of communicating. Story telling is for many Aboriginal people the most effective and comfortable way to articulate their views.

Why weren't the recommendations co-designed?

The problem from the start, the fatal flaw perhaps, was that public servants weren't included in the design of recommendations (non-Aboriginal public servant).

I think the evaluation team was very mindful of their ethics approval and I don't think they really pushed. Their questions were very generic and I suppose it was their interpretation of what they were getting back. I sat in on a few of those meetings and I thought 'why do you need to ask that question? Why aren't you drilling down and saying what specific example can you give to back that up? It could have been ten years ago and that would be the same recommendations they would have got out of a report. I hope to god in another five years we are not sitting with these recommendations but we are sitting with real challenges for both parties' (Aboriginal public servant).

The co-design of the recommendations was framed by the evaluation team as a process wherein Aboriginal community members in each of the *OCHRE* sites identified for the evaluation worked with the evaluation team to craft a series of recommendations to government. At least this was the aim. Several Aboriginal 'co-designers' reported they had in fact

had little input on specific recommendations and that recommendations were framed by the evaluation team; some people complained that they felt they had not been listened to.

While other community members voiced no complaint about the process, many said there was a fundamental problem with the design in that government officers were purposefully excluded. The intent behind this was to ensure independence from government and to use 'culturally acceptable methods' and facilitate 'community control of the evaluation' (Katz et al.2018:5).

While this was no doubt done with the best intention, the outcome was that the recommendations were not co-designed and therefore not informed or tempered by the political and economic context in which they were to be received and potentially implemented. One consequence of this was that public servants were left scratching their heads wondering how to handle 249 recommendations while Aboriginal community members were frustrated that the government was buried under a mountain of recommendations and slow to act.

In addition, the lengthy process of consultation around the recommendations was problematic. Community members from each of the *OCHRE* sites met with the evaluation team to discuss the evaluation findings and to provide input for recommendations. A few weeks later, the evaluation team returned with drafted recommendations and a meeting was arranged to review, adjust and confirm the recommendations.

In all the sites this second stage was characterized as rushed. In one site, individuals who had attended both meetings said that the second meeting was wedged into a busy meeting day and there was too little time to carefully consider the recommendations. In another site I was told the individuals who had been present in the first meeting were unavailable and there was not time to go over all the recommendations again with the new attendees. In a third site, individuals said the recommendations were just like every other set of recommendations to government and so little attention was given; a quick sign off was less painful and any real resulting change was unlikely.

Image: Brewarrina Fish Traps, Brewarrina. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

How useful were the recommendations?

After all these recommendations were made, nothing happened. Government talked about change and talked about actual decision making but in actual fact they weren't letting go (Aboriginal community member).

With any of these recommendations, what's the process? Where would I start? What are the actions we can look at as guidance? What's the weighting on these? What's the criteria around the weighting? (Aboriginal public servant).

The recommendations didn't come from us. We are assuming they came from government (Aboriginal community member).

It is fair to say government officers were overwhelmed by the number and content of the recommendations. From their perspective too many of the recommendations were unfocused and unworkable. Why this is the case is difficult to say. When asked about the process of prioritising or designating the most strategic among the

list of recommendations, not a single person said such a process had taken place.

There is also an evident lack of understanding of responsibility in some of the recommendations. Some suggest government responsibility where in actual fact *OCHRE* has provided funding to enable the sites to take over the task. For example, one recommendation urged the government to ensure the local *OCHRE* program improved relationships with other local Aboriginal organisations. In another example, three of the five sites submitted recommendations related to enhanced professional development of staff in their organisations. Public servants were puzzled and frustrated by such recommendations:

Some of the recommendations were about how we (government) support staff and came from a staff and capability development lens…but our expectation is that the providers who are employing people should absolutely be responsible. We're funding them well. They should be responsible for training and development of staff (non-Aboriginal public servant).

Some of the recommendations seem to confuse who is responsible. A lot are recommendations that should be responded to by the sector, not the organisation (Aboriginal public servant).

As a whole, the 249 recommendations are so broad and diverse that it is difficult to see the forest for the trees and the sheer number meant that what many would say were the most important recommendations were lost in the crowd:

Adequate resourcing was the most important recommendation but it gets one line. Adequate resourcing goes to how well they consult, what their comms look like. These are community people that are volunteering their time. One (government) person sitting across the table from them earns more than the entire organisation gets to deliver the program. That organisation has to do everything on that shoestring budget and yet we can say they need better communication, better things, better that. It's a shame that the things that are really going to enable haven't been highlighted in the recommendations (Aboriginal public servant).

There appeared to be no guidance through the process to ensure the recommendations were strategic and realistic. As one public servant said, 'communities saw an opportunity to put down everything they wanted'. This was explained as a result of 'consultation fatigue' where people are so used to being asked by government what they want and need they simply replay the same list of requests and recommendations assuming nothing will change. Consultation is not co-design and the difference in outcomes is stark — the strategic loss of opportunity is the cost. Many of the recommendations are just unworkable and as one public servant remarked, 'poor recommendations not only erode trust but set up the public service to fail'. The process of co-design can and perhaps should raise expectations, but there remains a significant challenge for all parties in designing recommendations that have a chance of being realised. Said another public servant, 'in this political climate a lot of these (recommendations) just won't fly'.

It needs to be emphasised, however, that while there were certainly problems with the process, and enormous challenges raised by the sheer number of recommendations, no one—neither public servant nor Aboriginal community member—suggested the recommendations that arose from the first evaluation were not important. On the contrary, the majority of people interviewed as part of this process believe

there are many critically important issues raised in the recommendations that must and will be acted on by government.

How could the recommendation process have been improved?

It is clear that the process of developing recommendations would have been enhanced if more care and guidance was provided as the recommendations were being crafted. There was a missed opportunity in not sifting and sorting the recommendations to ensure they had the maximum chance of making an impact and being accepted:

The recommendations are very generic. They could have been applied to any of the earlier programs before OCHRE. Really, they could have been applied to the Deaths in Custody report. They could be applied to any service delivery that's out there. They are very generic, very broad. But with any of those recommendations are there clear ways of going forward? There are only a very few of them that are quite strategic. It's still very operational, very transactional (Aboriginal public servant)

In addition, as should be obvious by now, having public servants at the table as recommendations are being drafted would have saved a great deal of time and energy and resulted in better outcomes. Not only did the process yield an inordinate number of generic and non-strategic recommendations, it also created or at least reinforced the perception held by some that the government was not sincere or interested in the process of co-design:

It has the potential to do some very great things but government needs to walk with us and come to the table prepared to actually do some changes (Aboriginal community member).

Some community members seem to have had a difficult time differentiating what was recommended in the evaluations from ongoing and other programs, and frustration in one area seeps into another. Clearly, allowing more time and local discussion to refine a set of recommendations would have resulted in a better outcome.

It would have been good for us to workshop the recommendations before they went to government. Not with the evaluators but workshop them with a local person to facilitate that. People would be more comfortable and speak up more (Aboriginal community member).

What does the literature say about making recommendations to government?

Image: Aboriginal murals painted by Indigenous artist Kym Freeman on the Cowra Bridge Pylons located beneath the Lachlan River Bridge. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Getting recommendations right actually serves everybody's interest. We really want this to work. Everybody is so familiar with this: oversight bodies are over it, researchers are over it, community are over it. Public servants just know, we game the system because we can't implement what's in front of us. We all know this doesn't work so there's a real incentive all around to get this right. So, the question is, how can we do this more effectively? (non-Aboriginal public servant).

There is a wealth of reasonable advice from around the world on how to make effective recommendations, some generic and some specific to working with government or shaping policy. Most of the literature addresses the interests of lobbyists and consultants, public servants and community organisations, but all of the suggestions below are potentially useful to Aboriginal groups who hope to influence government.

The World Health Organization states that effective recommendations:
- describe a suggested course of action to be taken to solve a particular problem
- are written as action statements without justification
- are stated in clear, specific language
- should be expressed in order of importance
- are based on the case built up in the body of the report
- are written in parallel structure

(World Health Organzation n.d.)

The Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland has published '10 Guidelines for Writing Policy Recommendations' (Breen 2015).
- Define the objective
- Decide on a target audience
- Set out the issue clearly
- Give options where possible
- Recognise the current economic climate
- Fit in with existing strategies or legislation
- Use international examples
- Remember the audience
- Show an impact in the real world
- Emphasise the importance of action

Eddie Copeland, Director of the London Office of Technology and Innovation, suggests effective recommendations (those that influence government) are those that have maximum impact. He uses '**IMPACTS**' as a mnemonic to help remember each characteristic:
- **I**ntelligent
- **M**essaged correctly
- **P**olitically feasible
- **A**ctionable
- **C**osted
- **T**imely
- **S**uccinct

(Copeland 2017).

The Overseas Development Institute, a UK think tank on international development and humanitarian issues, has published a very useful set of recommendations for influencing policy. While their focus is on how researchers can influence policy makers, the advice is applicable to the process of making recommendations to government:

- Know what you want to influence
- Know who you want to influence
- Know when to influence
- Build relationships and networks
- Policy development is not a linear process
- Policy-making is inherently political
- Plan your engagement
- Focus on ideas and be propositional
- It takes time, stick at it
- Monitor, learn and adjust along the way

(Tilley et al. 2017)

One of the key insights from these various groups is that in order for a recommendation to have the greatest chance of effecting change, it must be capable of being put into action – it must be 'actionable'.

An excellent overview of 'actionable' policy recommendations is provided by the Research to Action (R2A) Global Guide to Research Impact:

1. Ensure that you have identified your target audience beforehand. Understanding who your audience is and what their job entails is crucial. What is their sphere of influence and what change can they implement?

2. Be very clear about what the current policy you want to change is.

3. Set the scene: Identify the shortfalls of the current policy. Where is this policy failing, why and how can your recommendations improve the status quo?

4. Be aware of how policies are made: remember that government policy actors are interested in making decisions that are practical, cost-effective and socially acceptable.

5. If you are suggesting change ask yourself: What specifically needs to be changed? How will this change come about? What resources will be needed? Where will these resources come from? What is the overall benefit to both the policy maker and society in general? If your recommendations include these components, they are much more likely to garner the required change.

6. The word actionable suggests that your recommendations should be active. Try using language that is active rather than passive. Words such as use, engage, incorporate etc.

7. Keep your policy recommendations short. Identify 3 recommendations and elaborate on these. Pick the three that are most practical and relevant for your target audience then focus on presenting these in the most actionable way.

8. Make sure your research supports your recommendations. This may sound very obvious but policy makers will want to know that the evidence supports your assertions. Where you are providing an opinion, not supported by research, make this very clear.

9. Ask yourself, is my recommendation viable? Does the recommendation seem feasible?

(Musandu 2013)

Where to from here?

Image: Scenic outback landscapes at Mutawintji Historical Site, Mutawintji National Park. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Designing more effective recommendations to government

The relationship between Aboriginal communities and the government (whether federal, state, territory or local) is a fraught and fragile one with a long history of disappointment, frustration and distrust on both sides. Though the focus of this paper has been on improving the process of recommendation making to the New South Wales Government, the lessons and insights are applicable across all levels of government. Yet it is important to place this search for principles and strategies for making more effective recommendations to government in the context of the current broader relationship between Aboriginal people and the country. The Turnbull Government's rejection of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the continuing failures by numerous governments to 'close the gap' over the past 12 years, and recent frustrations articulated by Aboriginal leaders over the Morrison Government's decision to support a 'voice to government' rather than the recommended constitutionally enshrined 'voice to Parliament' are the backdrop against which Aboriginal Australians are being asked to work in partnership with governments at all levels.

Co-design is in many ways a strategy to bring together two world views: in this case that of the New South Wales Government and that of the Aboriginal stakeholders. As noted earlier, Aboriginal communities and government world views derive from different historical, political and cultural frameworks. But it is even more complicated than that. Each Aboriginal organisation will have a unique policy paradigm derived from local history, variations in leadership and experience with government. The history and ongoing influence of local Aboriginal politics will certainly shape the expectations and practices it carries into all relationships with governments. At the same time, differing political and representative structures will create challenges for both sides: Aboriginal organisations are relatively flat and broadly consultative while governments are hierarchical, conservative and risk-averse. This will inevitably give rise to tensions and confusion about who can speak and who can make decisions. Failure to bridge the two worlds, or at least recognise them, will defeat any promise of co-design and both parties will likely fall back into their customary roles: government holds all the power and the purse-string and because the rules of 'the game' remain the same, Aboriginal people are reduced to filing their traditional 'log of claims'. Achieving co-design will take time, commitment, and high-level support from those in government – and a leap of faith from Aboriginal people and organisations that this time, it will be different.

Some strategies, tools and principles for co-designing recommendations to government

It is important to emphasise, as this paper concludes, that while the co-design aspect of making recommendations regarding the *OCHRE* initiatives needs improvement, the actual recommendations that have been developed are still very important and speak to critical areas of policy making, resourcing, and data and service management that need attention.

As we have seen, there are many strategies and approaches available for making recommendations, all having relevance for the various levels of government. To summarise and conclude, here are some specific strategies, tools and principles derived from the findings of the case studies that may assist Aboriginal people in making more effective recommendations to government.

Build Trust:
Successful co-design stands or falls on a foundation of trust and the quality of the relationship between the Aboriginal community and government.

Allow time:
Co-design is a process and not an event; time must be allowed to create, review, change and confirm recommendations.

Agree on the process:
It's critical for all parties to agree on what the process actually is. Many public servants as well as many Aboriginal people do not, or poorly, understand 'co-design'.

Include the right people:
It is essential that all of the right people are at the table to develop effective recommendations – Aboriginal community members, public servants and all other key stakeholders. Effective recommendations arrive from 'collective intelligence' in the sense that a good recommendation is informed by the insight and experience of all parties.

Get help:
Developing effective recommendations is a process that requires particular skills. A skilled facilitator who understands the nature of government and communities would be extremely valuable in keeping the process focused and on track. A person with the appropriate skills might be already on hand within the community or among (current or former) public servants. If not, seek the assistance of an independent facilitator/consultant.

Bring a toolbox:
Even rudimentary tools can help to arrive at effective recommendations. There are many group decision-making tools available. See for example Appendix B with descriptions of graphic harvesting, the paired comparisons tool and the community priority / government support matrix.

Capture intent:
Be clear about what the group wants and needs and ensure the recommendations capture the intent behind the recommendations.

Target the correct audience:
Recommendations need to be legible for public servants who need to be able to explain to all stakeholders both the what and the why of recommendations.

Craft the 'message':
It is tactically and strategically important to think about how the recommendation will be heard/seen/received by both Aboriginal communities and government.

Consider the political and economic context:
A good recommendation is timely, relevant and viable in the current bureaucratic and political climate. It is also one that is economically feasible.

Draw on evidence:
A recommendation to government is most likely to succeed if it is based on evidence and arises from findings, is timely, economically feasible and politically viable.

Prioritise and focus:
Aim for a small set of prioritised, focused, achievable outcomes. Specific, concrete, measurable recommendations are more likely to be taken up by government than ones that are general, vague or aspirational.

Include solutions:
A recommendation may be more palatable to government if it is constructive, offering solutions and not just identifying problems.

Timing is everything:
Draft recommendations with a timeframe in mind: some might be urgent, while some might be achievable immediately because of some recent political opportunity (as a quick 'win'). Others will take more time.

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Image: View across the South Coast Hinterland from Illawarra Fly Treetop Adventures, NSW. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

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Appendix A.
Summary of Stage 1 Evaluation
Recommendations for NSW Government

Image: Food sources and medicinal plants shown on an Unkya Cultural Eco Tours at Gaagal Wanggaan (South Beach) National Park, Scotts Head. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly Local Decision Making

Theme	Recommendation
Accord Process – Accountability of service providers	• Ensure all service providers work with the Accord process and Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA), including engaging with Community Working Parties (CWPs) at the local level.
	• Put in place Local Accords or other forms of agreement to ensure that all agencies and service providers attend CWP meetings and to commit services to meeting the needs of local Aboriginal communities. Make attendance at CWPs a contractual requirement for all local service providers.
Communication	• Share Local Decision Making (LDM) process and outcomes more widely with local communities. Clarify the role of MPRA and CWPs in that process.
	• Communicate and promote LDM priorities and responsibilities under the Accord more widely to local communities.
	• Provide additional resources – for communication and secretariat support of volunteer members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.
	• Increase communications between the MPRA and local communities and organisations to provide information and feedback.
Continuing Professional Development in Cultural competency Aboriginal Cultural competence standards in government services	• NSW Government to continue to improve cultural competence across all departments and services. • All service providers (government and non-government) to continue to develop cultural competence, particularly at a local level.

Theme	Recommendation
Leadership – Young Leaders Program	● Provide more structural resources to increase the number of young people accessing the Aboriginal Young Leaders Program. ● Provide more resources to expand Young Leaders Coordinators and Project Officer positions to support the Young Leaders Program. ● Design and implement a succession plan for Young Leaders – as young leaders age, provide succession planning for the next generation of young leaders.
Representation and inclusion	● Fully engage other Aboriginal representative structures such as NSW AECG Inc., ACCHOs, etc. in the process of LDM.
Representation	● Increase resources and support for all 16 member communities to ensure local participation at the regional level through the MPRA and to enable members to feed back to CWPs. ● Provide greater transparency in processes for representation at MPRA. ● LDM is not 'local' but regional decision making. It is therefore important that the LDM label is changed to something more representative of the actual model.
Representation and inclusion of NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs)	● Improve relationships between CWPs, MPRA and LALCs. ● Better align roles, responsibilities and accountability structures of LDM and LALCs. ● Explore options for greater inclusion of LALCs in LDM and MPRA. ● Provide mechanisms for communication and representation for LALCs with Aboriginal Affairs NSW at the state level.
Representation and inclusion of local issues	● Provide more time, processes and resources for members to discuss issues with the CWPs and local communities prior to making decisions at the Regional Assembly.
Resources	● Provide better support (financial and administrative) to ensure MPRA LDM and Accords are discussed with all 16 member communities. ● Resource the LDM to match the size and diversity of the Murdi Paaki region and the Accord priorities.
Service System – capacity building connected services	● Link local services with local Aboriginal services; for example, train and employ local Aboriginal people to carry out repairs and maintenance on local housing. ● Ensure a commitment by all NSW Government services to work with the Assembly to ensure Aboriginal community priorities are addressed.
Service System – connected and responsive	● All levels of government and other service providers to plan and operate a more connected and responsive service system. ● All relevant agencies and service providers to attend and participate in CWP meetings as part of their working towards building a connected service system that is responsive to the self-determined needs of local Aboriginal peoples.
Service System – evaluation	● Ensure thorough monitoring and evaluation of services, including service needs and gaps, using local Aboriginal determined indicators

Tamworth Opportunity Hub

Theme	Recommendation
Sustainability	• Increase resource provision from NSW Government.
	• Resource sustainable and effective staffing levels for the Hub. Staff changes can be very disruptive to the program and to the progress and support of individual students at the Hub.
	• Identify corporate/business partnerships that could support expanded range of Hub programs.
Role and value of community volunteers to the Hub	• Volunteers are important to the success of Hub programs and their contribution needs to be specifically identified and reflected in the evaluation.
	• Give official recognition to volunteers and provide more resources to support and train them.
Professional career and training support	• Training Services NSW and NSW Department of Industry to increase training and professional development of Opportunity Hub employees.
	• Aboriginal Affairs NSW to provide more support and skill development for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal school staff.
Stakeholder engagement	• Government to engage and work more with Aboriginal people, communities and Aboriginal organisations to respond to their identified needs.
Engagement with NSW Government and NSW Government agencies	• Improve, expand and require engagement with the Hub from NSW Government departments other than Aboriginal Affairs NSW – for example, FACS, Juvenile Justice, Local Health Districts (LHDs), Primary Health providers and networks, NSW Department of Education – to support young Aboriginal people.
Access to Tamworth Opportunity Hub programs	• Involve the Regional Director of Education in the Steering Group to facilitate the engagement of more schools in the Tamworth Opportunity Hub.
	• Increase access to programs by including more schools in the area surrounding Tamworth.
	• Identify opportunities and mechanisms to increase the number of local schools involved in the program.
	• Expand the capacity of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub to work with more local schools.
	• Include young people who have left school and young people who are disengaged from school as eligible participants in Hub programs.
Range of activities conducted by the Hub	• Support increased staff numbers to provide more activities in the community, including one-to-one time with Hub staff.
Promotion of the Hub	• Share information about the Opportunity Hub more widely across the Tamworth region, and with services working with young people.

Theme	Recommendation
Data collection and reporting	● Improve data collection (without placing additional administrative burden on Opportunity Hub staff). ● Record peoples' stories in visual formats to present to others. ● Start capturing individual data earlier, not just from Year 9 but from Year 5 or the moment of first engagement. ● Track outcomes over the long-term. ● Capture wider Hub activity data and demonstrate student engagement, community involvement and connection to culture. ● Improve reporting mechanisms to capture the relationships and conversations. ● Improve the reporting and evaluation mechanisms to adequately and meaningfully describe what happens at the Hub and include individual and community capacity outcomes.
Community determined measures of success	● Change reporting to reflect community measures for the success of the Hub. ● Measure to include: ● Level and type of Aboriginal community involvement. ● Level and number of students engagements – identify cohorts. ● Connection to Culture. ● Specifically identify and include wellbeing indicator outcomes such as building self-esteem and cultural identity into reporting and evaluations.
Tendering process	● Change and improve the tendering process to provide long-term security to the Tamworth Opportunity Hub and Tamworth Aboriginal community members. ● Make tendering more collaborative between Government and Aboriginal community members and organisations, focusing on developmental and capacity support for Aboriginal inclusion.

Campbelltown Opportunity Hub

Theme	Recommendation
Tendering process for *OCHRE* program contracts	● Change the tendering process for *OCHRE* programs to a collaborative capacity building and co-design approach to program operation and commissioning rather than a competitive process.
Governance - Aboriginal ownership and determination of *OCHRE* Programs	● Explore and include options for greater Aboriginal participation and capacity in the operations of the Campbelltown Opportunity Hub and long-term sustainability of the Hub.
Capacity building of Aboriginal organisations	● Provide capacity building support and resources to local Aboriginal organisations.
Governance - clarity on Government lines of responsibility	● Improve clarity regarding government lines of responsibility and decision-making about the Opportunity Hub.
Sustainability of the Hub	● Ensure commitment to financial certainty of the Hub for long-term planning. ● Secure long-term funding arrangements.
Continuing Professional Development and career pathway support for Aboriginal staff	● Establish career pathways and continuing professional development for Aboriginal staff within the Hub.
Expand the access to the Hub	● Identify and activate strategies to ensure equitable access for all local Aboriginal young people to participate in Campbelltown Opportunity Hub programs and activities. ● Increase transport support and provision for students to attend Hub activities. ● The Hub would like to provide services to other nearby schools outside the Campbelltown areas where they have relationships and have identified a need. ● Hub area boundaries should respond to need and be flexible. ● Schools with identified needs outside the designated Campbelltown region should be able to access the Hub.
Need to address wider and systemic barriers of access	● Address the wider barriers to employment in the Campbelltown area, including providing transport options and support for young Aboriginal people in Campbelltown trying to access work and education. ● TAFE to establish more free trainee programs and short courses.
Transport	● Increase transport options and support for participants to attend Hub activities, education opportunities and connected services.
Training and education pathways for Aboriginal youth in Campbelltown	● Support local employers to work with young Aboriginal people and provide local opportunities. ● Establish, support and resource local employment, training and education pathways in the Campbelltown local areas.
Inclusion of Aboriginal Cultural and Wellbeing outcome indicators into HUB planning and reporting	● Increase programs and activities that focus and support Aboriginal wellbeing, culture and knowledge programs with Aboriginal Elders. ● Data should be expanded to address areas such as family relationships, peer relationships, self-esteem and connection to country.

Theme	Recommendation
Include long-term outcome indicators into Hub planning and reporting	● Follow up Hub participants in relation to long-term as well as short-term outcomes.
Expand access to the Hub	● Increase presence in schools, more programs, more often.
	● Provide weekend activities and programs for children and young people.
Expand range of support services provided by the Hub	● Maintain an understanding and recognition that for many Aboriginal students, many factors need to be addressed that effect their opportunities for education and employment.
	● Explore options and mechanisms for the Hub to either provide broader services that include counselling and wellbeing support or to develop MOU s or partnerships for referrals and outreach youth services with primary health providers such as the Aboriginal Medical Service, Primary Health Network, Local Health District and headspace.
	● Provide more Aboriginal social and cultural programs.
	● Provide more education and career pathways for local Aboriginal young people.
Include service co-ordination	● Need to include service and connected referral pathways development into Hub support for participants. Explore options as to best staff/site/organisation to provide this.
	● Most of the young people at the Hub have multiple issues and or needs including family, mental health and substance issues and these needs are integral to Hub support for participants.
Need to incorporate and follow local social and cultural Aboriginal protocols	● Develop a cultural competency framework for all organisations working with the Hub incorporate.

Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest

Theme	Recommendation
Implementation of the Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest (the Nest)	● Implementation should begin with developing relationships and learning from existing programs that teach Aboriginal Languages and Culture run by Aboriginal organisations. ● Aboriginal organisations should be funded to do Language and Culture work in the community and then go into schools. ● Schools and communities need information and support during the implementation of the Nest, including improved communications about how the Nest will operate and the governance structure of the Nest. ● Ensure staff consistency during the implementation stage. ● Policy decision-makers (in the Department of Education and Aboriginal Affairs NSW) come together to prioritise and support teaching Aboriginal Languages and Cultures in schools – and not rely on local Aboriginal peoples to fight for inclusion. ● Aboriginal Community members and school stakeholders would like more information about the Nest, how it is organised, how decisions are made and how the Nest operates in schools. Including opportunities for ongoing communication with and input from members of Aboriginal communities.
Aboriginal cultural conflicts with the appropriateness of locating a Nest in NSW School environment	● Include mechanisms to ensure that Gumbaynggirr peoples and community members should have more input into the design and management of the Nest. ● Aboriginal Language and Culture classes should be based on Aboriginal traditional ways of teaching and learning - focus on oral not a written language. ● Build cultural respect and cultural acceptability of Nest programs through greater inclusion of Gumbaynggirr Elders into content and teaching.
NSW Government support for existing Aboriginal organisations to provide activities and content for the Nest	● NSW Government to provide more resources and funding to existing Aboriginal organisations that include Muurrbay and Yarrawarra Cultural Centre.
Access to the Nest is not available for all Aboriginal people in the region	● Opportunities to learn Gumbaynggirr Language should be prioritised for young Aboriginal peoples in the region. ● The broader Gumbaynggirr community should be able to access resources and classes provided. Classes should be available across all schools and all years, not only for some children in some government schools. ● There need to be improved pathways for members of Aboriginal communities to learn Language and Culture and continue to build knowledge.
More Aboriginal community input into Nest programs and activities	● Gumbaynggirr communities would like more input into the classes including ensuring Aboriginal methods of learning and teaching are the priority and that Gumbaynggirr teachers should be approved by Gumbaynggirr communities. ● Reference group could include more community members, including those from different organisations and hold their meetings across the Nest region.

Theme	Recommendation
Adequate and sustainable resourcing of the Nest	● Nest is currently under-resourced and need an increased budget so that schools do not have to use their funding to ensure Nest classes operate. This would ensure secure teaching hours.
	● The Nest needs to be better resourced and funded including staff support, training and job security. This includes teacher training WITHIN the community and support for ongoing Gumbaynggirr Language development.
	● More learning and teaching resources, training and support for Gumbaynggirr teachers – including support for Gumbaynggirr Elders to be allowed into schools to teach.
	● Schools need to be able to access other Gumbaynggirr Tutors to ensure Gumbaynggirr Language classes have stability. Ideally Tutors would be on continuing contracts rather than being casual employees.
Number of Language classes available	● There needs to be an increased number of classes offered- The current class once a week is not enough to learn language.
	● Schools should be resourced to receive more than 3 hours of Aboriginal Language teaching each week.
	● Aboriginal Language teaching should be part of the core curriculum not an added extra.
	● Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture should be part of the pre-school curriculum.
Education and training of Nest Teachers and tutors	● There needs to be supported professional education and training to develop tutors and to increase the number of Gumbaynggirr Language teachers.
	● Increased funding and support for developing Gumbaynggirr Language teachers' knowledge and capacity, including professional development.
	● Nest Tutors and Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) should have a resource kit.
	● Nest Tutors should be encouraged to share their resources, experiences, and have access to peer support.
Need for improved communications	● Improve the communications between teachers, tutors and schools.
	● Improve communications between the Nest and Aboriginal communities.
Governance	● Clarify the governance structures, decision making processes and accountability mechanisms, and processes of the Nest including the roles of the Steering Group, NSW Department of Education, NSW AECG Inc. and Aboriginal Affairs NSW. There needs to be a program protocol which sets out in detail the structures and processes for governing the Nest.

Summary tables derived from (Katz et al. 2018)

Appendix B.
Some tools for making more effective recommendations to government.
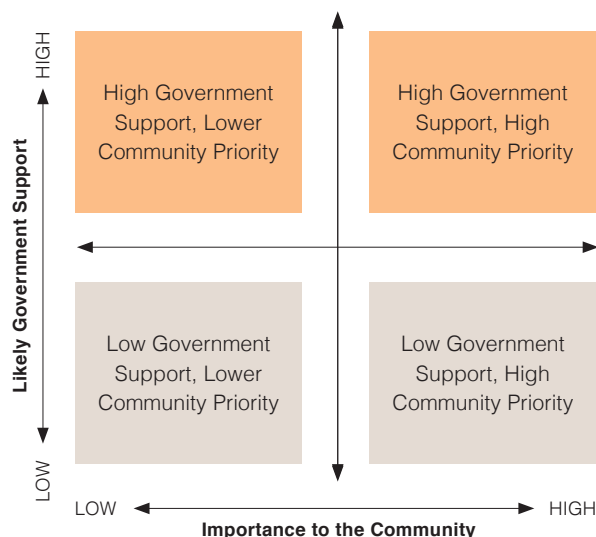
Image: Sun setting over the Shellharbour coastline, NSW. Courtesy of Destination NSW.

Graphic harvesting

Graphic harvesting (sometimes called graphic recording) is a technique where a large image, created in 'real time', attempts to capture ideas and insights in visual form. Though it requires an individual (specially trained facilitator or consultant) with the skills to listen, condense and draw ideas, this tool has enormous potential for working with Aboriginal communities who are exploring complex issues. The technique was used with great success in Queensland by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships were the Department brought together community members in the Local Thriving Communities Forum in 2019. Working in the context of a co-design process, graphic harvesting enabled greater engagement and messages to government about the design and delivery of services. In the context of making recommendations, it can be a powerful tool for identifying a set of the most important issues and ideas.

https://www.datsip.qld.gov.au/programs-initiatives/tracks-treaty/local-thriving-communities/community-co-design-journeys

Community Priority / Government Support Matrix[8]

This is a useful tool that can help groups and decision-making bodies involved in co-design of policies, programs or services take a wide range of ideas and recommendations and prioritise them according to two crucial factors:

1. How important to the community is the recommendation?
2. What is the likely level of government support for the recommendation?

Using this technique, it becomes clear which ideas are of the highest priority to the community and which are most and least likely to have government support. The matrix will surely spotlight some very real tensions and conflicts among the stakeholders but it may also be the most constructive way for all parties to understand and work with each to achieve meaningful change. It allows the group to make strategic decisions about where and how to invest energy to achieve desired priorities. For example, if the group determines that one of their highest priorities is likely to receive high levels of support, this might be an 'easy win' that's quickly achievable. On the other hand, if the group identifies a priority that is unlikely to be supported by the government, it can immediately begin to either reshape the priority or identify strategies to shift the government's level of support.

Brainstorming

To start the process, groups need to define the challenge and brainstorm ideas about potential recommendations. There is no limit to the number of recommendations at this stage.

Developing the matrix

Consider each quadrant of the matrix in turn and assign each of the recommendations to the appropriate quadrant:

● **Low Government Support, Lower Importance to the Community:** These recommendations are probably not worth investing in.

● **High Government Support, High Importance to the Community:** It is probably most strategic to consider these recommendations as the highest priority. Getting some 'runs on the board' with these recommendations would have the most immediate impact and may help convince stakeholders that the co-design process has worked.

● **High Government Support, Lower Importance to the Community:** It will be important to think strategically about recommendations in this quadrant. Is there value in achieving something that is low in terms of low community importance but highly likely the government will support? Is there a gain or a cost to the community or to government?

● **Low Government Support, High Importance to the Community:** Recommendations in this quadrant may be the most difficult to achieve yet may be of very high priority to the community. While some recommendations will be unpalatable to the government, that is no reason not to pursue them. But clear strategies to shift government perceptions will be necessary and more time and effort may be required.

Prioritise the recommendations

Once you have your recommendations mapped on the matrix, you naturally would prioritize recommendations that are of high importance to the community and are also highly likely to be supported by government. The next highest priorities might be those that are of high importance to the community but less likely to be supported by government.

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8   The author wishes to acknowledge the support and advice of Richard Wentworth-Ping of Wentworth People, Ltd. The Community Priority / Government Support Matrix is based on one of the tools Richard uses when working with groups. It has been adapted by the author as a tool to assist in making more effective recommendations to government. For information on Richard and his work see https://www.wentworthpeople.com.au.

Paired Comparison Analysis[9]

When you're choosing between many different recommendations, how do you decide which should have the highest priority? This is especially challenging if your recommendations are quite different from one another, if decision criteria are subjective, or if you don't have objective data to use for your decision.

This Paired Comparison Analysis tool helps you to work out the relative importance of a number of different recommendations – the classical case of "comparing apples with oranges."

This may help in choosing the most important recommendations. It may also help you set priorities.

How to Use the Tool

1. Use the worksheet and make a list of all of the recommendations that you want to compare. Assign each recommendation a letter (A, B, C, D, and so on) and note this down. Mark your recommendations as both the row and column headings on the worksheet. This is so that you can compare recommendations with one another.
2. Within each of the blank cells, compare the recommendation in the row with the option in the column. Decide which of the two options is most important, and write down the letter of the most important option in the cell.
3. Score the difference in importance between the options, running from zero (no difference / same importance) to, say, three (major difference / one much more important than the other.)
4. Finally, consolidate the results by adding up the values for each of the recommendations. You may want to convert these values into a percentage of the total score.
5. Use your common sense, and manually adjust the results if necessary.

Example

For example, a working group is attempting to choose among a collection of recommendations. To maximize impact, the group wants to prioritise the recommendations:

*   Increased resources
*   More effective communications
*   Broad representation
*   Staff Training
*   Cultural Competency

First, the working group draws up the Paired Comparison Analysis table in figure 1.

Figure1 – Example Paired Comparison Analysis Table (not filled in):

	A. Resources	B. Communications	C. Broad Representation	D. Staff Training	E. Cultural Competency
A. Resources					
B. Communications					
C. Broad Representation					
D. Staff Training					
E. Cultural Competency					

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9   The author wishes to acknowledge the support and advice of Richard Wentworth-Ping of Wentworth People, Ltd. Paired Comparison Analysis is based on one of the tools Richard uses when working with groups. It has been adapted by the author as a tool to assist in making more effective recommendations to government. For information on Richard and his work see https://www.wentworthpeople.com.au.

Then working group then compares recommendations, writes down the letter of the most important recommendation, and scores their difference in importance to them. Figure 2 illustrates this step of the process.

Figure 2 – Example Paired Comparison Analysis Table (filled in):

	A. Resources	B. Communications	C. Broad Representation	D. Staff Training	E. Cultural Competency
A. Resources		A3	A2	A2	E3
B. Communications			B2	B1	E2
C. Broad Representation				D1	E3
D. Staff Training					E3
E. Cultural Competency					

Finally, the group adds up the A, B, C, D and E values and converts each into a percentage of the total. These calculations yield the following totals:

- A = 7 (32 percent)
- B =3 (14 percent)
- C = 0 (0 percent)
- D = 1 (6 percent)
- E = 11 (50 percent)

The working group decides that the recommendation related to the need to increase cultural competency has the highest weighting (50 percent) and so is the first priority. Increased resources is the next highest with a weighting of 32 percent, while more effective communications is third highest at 14 percent. The working group decides it has the greatest chance of achieving desired change if it submits only high priority recommendations and submits to government those three in order of priority.

Summary

Paired Comparison Analysis is useful for weighing up the relative importance of different recommendations. It's particularly helpful where priorities aren't clear, where the options are completely different, where evaluation criteria are subjective, or where they're competing in importance.

The tool provides a framework for comparing each recommendation against all others and helps to show the difference in importance and priority.