

# agency

31 January 2020

Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on  
Indigenous Affairs  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

To Whom It May Concern:

We are a new not-for-profit organisation that supports Indigenous communities to celebrate and preserve cultural knowledge, and promotes global recognition and appreciation of Indigenous Australian art and culture. We welcome news of the House Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs' Inquiry into the pathways and participation opportunities for Indigenous Australians in employment and business, and would like to take this opportunity to introduce the Committee to our organisation, and respond to the following Term of Reference:

*Identifying gaps and opportunities in the workforce and future growth sectors that could result in employment and enterprise options for Indigenous Australians.*

Developed in response to an identified need in the sector, Agency's mission is to create a new model of organisation that will initiate and facilitate new streams of investment in the promotion and maintenance of Indigenous art and culture in Australia and beyond, through strategic partnerships in government, corporate and private sectors.

Through our extensive work in remote Indigenous communities, we have witnessed first-hand that Indigenous knowledge, and the economic potential of cultural maintenance is undervalued. Cultural leaders want an advocate who can align and promote a portfolio of arts and cultural projects to supporters. Equally funders from the public and private sector want to know how they can support but currently feel uncertain about how to help and the ethical expenditure of their funds.

Agency responds to this need. Our role is two-fold - to support Indigenous social enterprise and entrepreneurship to thrive and to mitigate risk for funders by guaranteeing that our projects are Indigenous-led, built on trust and mutual respect and delivered to budget in a timely and effective manner.

We achieve this by partnering with Indigenous Arts Centres, Communities and Individuals to help identify and develop ethical projects that celebrate and preserve Indigenous knowledge, language, culture and tradition, generate skills development and new employment pathways for Indigenous Australians, and

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connect these initiatives with social investment to create measurable benefits for Indigenous communities on a national and international scale.

An important aspect of our role will be to ensure that projects are provided with end-to-end support and that we grow innovative employment opportunities in the cultural knowledge sector by building skills, training and development opportunities into each project.

By providing this key link between Indigenous enterprise and private and public investment, we believe that we can achieve a number of social impacts for Indigenous Australians, including:

- Increased funding for contemporary works, experience platforms, cultural practices, cultural maintenance and cultural tourism
- New employment opportunities for individuals
- Ongoing economic benefits for communities
- Strengthened capacity building for Indigenous Australians, including access to learning and professional development opportunities, and support for Aboriginal Corporations to become DGR registered

Research shows that there are a number of Indigenous culture-related activities which have the potential to generate income, however, people are not earning income through these activities, despite having the skills and experience to do so.<sup>1</sup> Agency exists to rectify this. By way of example, we recently supported Durrmu Arts in Peppimenarti NT to achieve multi-year funding from the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation for a project titled Harvesting Traditional Knowledge. This timely project will bring together Arts Centre, Ranger Program and School in a whole community approach to re-engage in traditional harvesting processes for the purpose of art, ceremonial practice, food, health and environment – safeguarding this knowledge for the future. Importantly, this project supports Aboriginal enterprise and includes clear skills development and employment opportunities for Cultural Leaders and other Indigenous people, including early school leavers.

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<sup>1</sup> Throsby, D., & Petetskaya, E. (2019). *Integrating art production and economic development in North West NT and the Tiwi Islands*. North Ryde, NSW: Macquarie University.

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Another key aspect of Agency's business will be to promote the global recognition and appreciation of Indigenous Australian art and culture, with a particular focus on the export of Indigenous art and artists to the US. We have recently been approached by the Board of the Kluge Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection in Charlottesville, Virginia – the largest and most significant Aboriginal Art Collection outside Australia - to partner in the promotion of current and future benefits for social investment and international opportunities, including the upcoming exhibition Madayin – which will feature over 35 newly commissioned barks, and over 80 works from institutional collections, which highlights the Yolngu tribe's entrepreneurship and enterprise in curating and commenting on their own art and culture for an increasingly engaged US market. We believe this offering provides very real and attractive reciprocal opportunities for commercial and private sector investment in Indigenous Australia.

In summary, we strongly feel that the cultural sector – including but not limited to art production and promotion, cultural practice, cultural maintenance and cultural tourism - offers unparalleled employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians. We are uniquely positioned to work with Indigenous Leaders, Arts Centres and Communities to develop these concepts to create and fund timely and dynamic programs that will result in new employment and enterprise options for Indigenous Australians. We believe that the return on investment for Indigenous Australians and the Australian Government would be significant if the government supported us in our mission to generate and leverage private investment for this purpose in this space.

We wish the Committee all the best for the Inquiry and would be happy to be contacted for further comment should you require.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Richard England.

Richard England  
Chair, Agency Projects Ltd.

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