Funding for this project provided by the Australian Government’s Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme.

DISCLAIMER

This document reports on the Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative and includes information about internal evaluation findings. A separate evaluation report has been written for each of the six participating WCE communities. These Community Evaluation Reports are included as appendices to this report and are available at https://remotengagetoedu.com.au/resources/. The information presented in this report and in each WCE Community Evaluation Report was written by the stated authors and does not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the WCE initiative as a whole or of the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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- Yambirra Schools Council (Yirrkala)
- Nyinkka Nyunyu Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre (Tennant Creek)
- Yuendumu School (Yuendumu)
- Yuendumu Mediation Centre (Yuendumu)
- PAW Media and Communications (Yuendumu)
- Aboriginal Research Practitioners Network (ARPNet - Territory wide)
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• Simon Fisher (Yuendumu Community Research Leader, 2015 - 2016)
• Prof. Steven Larkin (Former Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership, 2014 – mid 2016)
• Dr. Terry Moore (Community Teacher’s Liaison Leader, 2016)
• Valda Shannon (Tennant Creek Community Researcher, 2015 - 2016)
• Wendy Ludwig (Acting Pro-Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership, mid 2016 - 2017)
• Yalmay Yunupingu (Yirrkala Community Co-researcher, 2015 - 2016)
• Yananymul Mununggur (Yirrkala Community Co-researcher, 2015 - 2016)
Executive summary

The WCE initiative was implemented in response to recommendations made by the *Review of Higher Education Access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt et al., 2012). It aimed to ‘inspire six remote and very remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory (NT) to include higher education as a normal expectation and milestone along the life journey’. The WCE initiative adopted a participatory action research approach and worked in partnership with remote Indigenous communities in efforts to ‘establish strong and sustainable educational pathways into higher education’.

Implementation in participating remote communities of this new initiative occurred over two and a half years; negligible time within the remote Northern Territory (NT) context when considering the complex issues affecting education and education pathways that are at hand. It cannot be emphasised enough that in this setting, short-term funding timeframes work against efforts to facilitate community understanding, ownership and control over programs, projects, research and, critically, outcomes. Even though several project staff had pre-existing relationships within communities, substantial time and investment was required to develop respectful and trusting relationships and build understanding about the initiative itself amongst the team and within communities before things could get going. The short timeframe placed significant pressure on the project to move things forward, and this caused a sense of ‘rushing’ to some extent throughout. Time constraints impacted on the planning and design phase, implementation of activities, the developmental learning process, on dissemination efforts and on the overall aim of establishing ‘sustainable pathways’. After approximately one year of building trust and understanding, momentum for a variety of community-led and owned initiatives was established. Despite the challenges described above, this report reinforces the fact that with adequate time and the use of flexible, culturally informed approaches, initiatives such as this can be owned and led by remote Indigenous communities.

A flexible participatory action research approach was adopted. Participatory action research was attempted in combination with a developmental evaluation approach to facilitate group collaboration and reflection, and involvement and leadership of Indigenous community-based staff throughout the research and evaluation process. Adhering to the key principles that underpin these approaches did support local project ownership and assisted in embedding remote Indigenous voices in the data collected that focused on exploring perspectives around higher education. The trialling of this approach together within this project design with a combination of other factors, described within this report, however, led to some significant shortfalls in the internal evaluation process, which ultimately had consequences for the project overall.

Through the WCE initiative, strong relationships were formed between a number of key stakeholders in education institutions and members of partner communities. There is also evidence to suggest that some inter-community relationships between community-based organisations and local level networks were strengthened. The WCE initiative’s valuing of Indigenous knowledges and cultural practices was seen as significant by remote Indigenous community stakeholders. This approach, in contrast to the often seen ‘one size fits all’ approach that often overlays mainstream education policy and programs in the remote Indigenous setting, generated strong levels in interest and engagement in community projects. Some of the Indigenous community-based staff employed through the initiative were inspired to continue on with further study and engage in ongoing education and research, which of course, is also indicative of their commitment to supporting the educational aspirations of themselves, their families and communities. By the end of operations, conversations held in local settings stimulated thought and debate around

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1 The aims of the WCE initiative as outlined in the WCE initiative funding application developed by OPVC-IL at CDU (Larkin, 2013).
pathways into higher education; a concept that was compared to ‘finding your way through a jungle’ for remote Indigenous community members.

All staff employed through the initiative experienced the challenges of operating in complex intercultural settings and supported each other to overcome these tensions. This applied to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. A key theoretical concept supported by data obtained through the WCE initiative was ‘interculturality’. This report contends that interculturality should be a priority area for further research in this context.

At both community and ‘systems’ levels, some positive developments began to emerge during the final year of the initiative. The WCE initiative has contributed to the Indigenous higher education evidence base; particularly in relation to establishing a deeper understanding about the perspectives of remote Indigenous communities about higher education, and enablers and barriers to access, participation and outcomes in higher education. Through much reflection and activity, there are some indications that highlight the influence of the WCE initiative on community dispositions towards higher education. Much groundwork has been done to research and catalyse action for improving Indigenous adult English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) policy and services in the NT. Collaborative efforts have strengthened support for a Territory-wide Indigenous adult English LLN policy framework or strategy. A network of interested LLN practitioners, educators, researchers, academics, and individuals from government and non-government bodies has been established and, at the time of writing, work involving this network was ongoing.

There are two sets of recommendations within this report. A set of recommendations are included that relate to program implementation, which will be useful for policymakers and programmers to consider in future design and delivery of similar projects in remote Indigenous settings. A second set of recommendations from the six participating remote communities were developed through an exploratory research process that saw a deep level of engagement of remote Indigenous community leaders and stakeholders. These recommendations include suggestions for schools, higher education institutions, other education providers, governments, and researchers and are framed around the higher education needs and aspirations of remote Indigenous communities in the NT.

This initiative found that common themes emerged across all partner WCE communities in relation to community perspectives about higher education. These themes were around the importance of, for example, cultural education as a foundation for all learning, culturally safe institutions, quality community engagement processes, accessible information about education and higher education pathways and support, Indigenous involvement in school and community governance, family engagement, academic and cultural mentoring, youth leadership development, and English language literacy and numeracy. These themes have emerged from research conducted in partnership with experienced remote Indigenous community leaders. Literature regarding the need for Indigenous community-driven research agendas to inform action for change substantiates the significance of these identified themes. These are clearly outlined in this report and it is hoped that they will be used to inform and support decision making for policies, programs and services in the Indigenous higher education space.
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List of acronyms

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<tr>
<td>ABA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Benefits Account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACIKE</td>
<td>Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges &amp; Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSIHEAC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIITE</td>
<td>Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education</td>
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<td>CDU</td>
<td>Charles Darwin University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Australian Government Department of Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPMC</td>
<td>Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEPPP</td>
<td>Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISSP</td>
<td>Indigenous Student Success Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>ITMS</td>
<td>Information Technology Management Services (CDU Department)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LLN</td>
<td>(English) Language, Literacy and Numeracy</td>
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<td>MoU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<td>NAILSMA</td>
<td>North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPP</td>
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<td>NT</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTCET</td>
<td>Northern Territory Certificate of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>NT DoE</td>
<td>Northern Territory Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPVC-IL</td>
<td>Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAR</td>
<td>Participatory action research</td>
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<td>RCHW</td>
<td>Research Centre for Health and Wellbeing (CDU)</td>
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<td>RIEL</td>
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<td>RTO</td>
<td>Registered Training Organisation</td>
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<td>SLA</td>
<td>Service Level Agreement</td>
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<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
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<td>WCE</td>
<td>Whole of Community Engagement (initiative)</td>
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### Definitions

| **Aspiration** | ‘A hope or ambition of achieving something.’ – The Oxford Dictionary. |
| **Balanda** | A term used by Yolŋu people in East Arnhem region of the Northern Territory for ‘non-Indigenous person/people’. |
| **Both-ways philosophy** | ‘Both ways learning’ refers to an approach in which learning together occurs through the sharing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges (Bat & Shore, 2013; Boyukarri et al. 1994; Christie, 1987; Harris, 1980; Marika, 1999). |
| **Campus-based WCE staff** | WCE initiative team members based in Darwin or Alice Springs; campus-based staff regularly travelled to partner remote Indigenous communities to work with community-based WCE team members. The original campus-based team were employed between July 2014 and January 2015. |
| **Community-based WCE staff** | WCE initiative team members based in partner remote Indigenous communities. These team members were local Indigenous leaders with significant experience in education, health, community development, research, governance and other fields. Community-based staff were employed between January 2015 and early 2016. |
| **Complexity** | In the context of complex adaptive systems, this refers to the notion that there are a large number of elements (for example, individuals, groups, organisations) that interact in many diverse and unpredictable ways. Complexity and systems thinking theories can be used to guide innovation for social development in situations in which solutions are not straightforward (Cleveland, 1994; Williams & Van’t Hoft, 2016). |
| **Critical pedagogy** | A philosophy of education that is concerned with transforming power relations that are oppressive and lead to the oppression of people through awakening of the critical consciousness (Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011). This approach is most commonly associated with Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Friere and is underpinned by principles of critical theory of the Frankfurt school (Freire, 1970; Guess, 1981). |
| **Developmental evaluation** | Developmental evaluation is an evaluation approach that can assist social innovators develop social change initiatives in complex or uncertain environments. It facilitates real-time, or close to real-time, feedback to program staff thus facilitating a continuous development loop. According to Patton (1994; 2011), developmental evaluation is particularly suited to innovation, radical program re-design, replication and complex issues. Developmental evaluation supports innovation development to guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments. Innovations can take the form of new projects, programs, products, organisational changes, policy reforms, and system interventions. |
| **Education** | ‘The process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university.’ – The Oxford Dictionary. The WCE initiative recognised intercultural forms of education within this definition, that is, diverse educational practices that were relevant to people living in remote Indigenous communities and were inclusive of traditional Indigenous ways of knowing. |
| **Further education** | Education beyond schooling that includes higher education and post-school education that does not include acquisition of a degree, such as Vocational Education and Training (VET) and adult learning. |
| **Higher education** | Formal post-secondary school education in which degrees are obtained; often delivered at universities, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, academies and colleges. |
**Indigenous**
For the purposes of this report ‘Indigenous’ refers to Aboriginal, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and/or Australian first nations people.

**Indigenous knowledge**
Indigenous knowledge in the WCE initiative referred to the knowledges acquired by individuals through the lived experience of being Indigenous, but not by being Indigenous alone. That is, Indigenous standpoints are also informed by other aspects of individual and collective identities (Nakata, 2007). Such knowledge can include understanding about, for example, traditional Indigenous kinship and lore.

**Interculturality**
Interculturality refers to the intersection of multiple and partly discrete cultures, to individuals’ interaction across these intersections, and to the resultant evolution of culture (Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 2016).

**Knowledge**
‘Facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject.’ – The Oxford Dictionary.

**Participatory action research (PAR)**
A research approach that involves a cyclical process of critical reflection, knowledge construction and action. Generally PAR is underpinned by the following common principles:
- A collective commitment to investigate a ‘thematic concern’ (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988).
- A desire to engage in self- and collective reflection to gain clarity about the issue under investigation.
- A joint decision to engage in individual and/or collective action that leads to a useful solution that benefits the people involved.
- Power sharing throughout the research process so that participants have control over the research process, including over how the research is used (McIntyre, 2008; McTaggart, 1997; Tandon, 1988).

**Vocational Education and Training (VET)**
Education and training for the acquisition of qualifications in job-related and technical skills, in industries such as trade, office work, retail, hospitality and technology.

**Warlpiri**
This term refers to Indigenous people and languages of the Tanami region of the Northern Territory.

**Yolŋu**
This term refers to Indigenous people and languages of the East Arnhem region of the Northern Territory.
1. Introduction

This is the final evaluation report for the Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative, a participatory action research project led by the Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership (OPVC-IL) at Charles Darwin University (CDU). The WCE initiative aimed ‘to inspire six remote and very remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory (NT) to include higher education as a normal expectation and milestone along the life journey’ (Larkin, 2013).

The implementation period of the majority of this initiative was from July 2014 until December 2016, with remote community operational components happening from September 2014 through to December 2016. In addition, a Strategic Priority Projects (SPP) component was implemented from December 2015 through to September 2017.

The WCE partnered with six remote and very remote communities:

- Galiwin’ku
- Gunbalanya
- Maningrida
- Tennant Creek
- Yirrkala
- Yuendumu

Additional documentation included as Appendices to this report includes evaluation reports for each WCE initiative community, a timeline for the WCE initiative, reflections on the internal evaluator’s role and a discussion around different models of participatory action research utilised in the WCE initiative (see page 8 for list of Appendices).

These documents are also available at:

www.remotengagetoedu.com.au

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2 The original project aim was outlined in the WCE initiative funding application developed by OPVC-IL at CDU (Larkin, 2013). A more detailed discussion around project aims is included in Chapter 4.

3 Communities were defined as remote and very remote based on the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure (ABS, 2014).
**WCE initiative objectives**

The objectives of the WCE initiative were:

‘Using whole-of-community engagement strategies, inspire six targeted remote and very remote Indigenous communities to include higher education among their normal expectations, by:

- exploring current community perspectives of higher education, and linking these with existing strategies for achieving quality of life aspirations;
- co-creating ongoing opportunities for community, research, academic and public policy leaders to engage in mutually beneficial and critical relationships; and
- identifying means for making education relevant and culturally and physically accessible;

with a view to establishing strong and sustainable educational pathways from early childhood to lifelong post-secondary education.’

**Aim of this report**

The purpose of this evaluation report is to provide an overview of the design and implementation of the WCE initiative and a summary of internal evaluation findings. The report provides some findings drawn from the six partner remote Indigenous communities (see Figure 2). It is to be noted that this is report is based on the findings of an internal developmental evaluation process.

**Outline of this report**

*Chapter 1* describes the WCE initiative objectives and the purpose of this report.

*Chapter 2* provides an overview of the WCE initiative, its design, establishment and implementation phases.

*Chapter 3* outlines the WCE initiative evaluation design, approach, methods and process.

*Chapter 4* summarises key learnings relating to WCE initiative design, approaches, methods and processes.

*Chapter 5* reflects on achievements of the WCE initiative.

*Chapter 6* outlines some positive developments and opportunities that emerged as a result of WCE implementation.

*Chapter 7* describes the limitations of this evaluation.

*Chapter 8* puts forward recommendations for future research, policy and programs in relation to higher education for remote Indigenous communities.

*Chapter 9* provides a conclusion to this evaluation report.

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4 The WCE initiative ‘developmental’ evaluation process was not a true ‘developmental evaluation’ as outlined by Patton (2011). Refer to Chapter 4 regarding the WCE initiative’s attempt to implement a developmental evaluation.
2. The WCE initiative

This chapter will provide a description of the WCE initiative. This includes a brief background relevant to the initiative and a summary of its establishment, design and processes.

Background

In terms of higher education participation, access and outcomes, the need for targeted investment into higher education programs and services for Indigenous people is clear, particularly for those living in remote Indigenous communities (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, and Kelly, 2012). Indigenous people are less likely to obtain an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), less likely to participate in university, less likely to be admitted to university on the basis of their prior educational achievement, and are more likely to be mature aged students (DIISRTE, 2012; SCRGSP, 2011). The statistics generally demonstrate further disparities with increasing remoteness. The proportion of admissions to higher education at CDU from high school for non-Indigenous people from both urban or regional areas (17%) and remote areas (16%) is higher than that of Indigenous people (Charles Darwin University, 2017). Only eleven percent (11%) of Indigenous people in urban and regional areas are admitted to higher education from high school, and in remote locations this drops to eight percent (8%) (ABS Census of Population & Housing, 2011). In terms of education more broadly, data published by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) highlights that very remote Indigenous students fall well behind their non-Indigenous counterparts in both attendance rates and academic performance (ACARA, 2016; Turnbull, 2017).

Currently, low numbers of Indigenous students from NT schools progress into higher education. Only two percent of Indigenous people in the NT aged 18 to 19 years old are enrolled in university; in 2011 only nine percent of Indigenous students at CDU were admitted from high school. This is in contrast to fourteen percent of that of the non-Indigenous cohort at CDU. Very few articulate from VET into higher education. At CDU, four percent (4%) of non-Indigenous people in remote locations are admitted to higher education through enabling courses compared to ten percent (10%) of remote Indigenous people (ABS Census of Population & Housing, 2011, Australian Charles Darwin University, 2017).

Aside from the obvious benefits in individual empowerment, decision-making and community livelihoods, improving higher education outcomes for equity groups will positively influence Australia as a whole. The Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (2008) identified that improving Indigenous higher education access and outcomes will bring significant social and economic benefits to Australia as a nation. If the educational level of Australia’s Indigenous population was comparable to that of the non-Indigenous population, $1.09 billion per annum would be added to the Australian economy (Access Economics, 2008).

The funding application for the WCE initiative was submitted to the Australian Government on 5th June 2013 in response to a nationally competitive Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) funding round co-ordinated by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (DET). This was a response to recommendations of the 2012 Behrendt Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. The review explicitly highlighted that contextualised approaches to strengthening pathways into Indigenous higher education are needed.
Important contextual considerations

A number of political, organisational and relational factors are important to consider when reading this report. These are described below:

• In late 2014, when the WCE initiative was in the early establishment phase, the Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory was released (Wilson, 2014). This review contained a number of recommendations for the NT Department of Education that had implications for the WCE initiative. Most significantly, the Wilson Review recommended that financial support be withdrawn from remote NT secondary schools and funding redirected to secondary schools in urban centres instead. It was suggested that a minimum number of students were required to make remote secondary schools viable and that boarding schools were a preferred option. The NT Department of Education was a key partner in the WCE initiative. There was some feedback during initial community consultations that this decision about boarding schools was impacting on individuals and families. This affected initial engagement processes due to the level of uncertainty around secondary school funding and the potential for movement of some students into urban locations.

• The NT Department of Education (NT DoE) released the Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024 in January 2015. The Strategy was developed in response to recommendations of the Wilson Review. Feedback from communities highlighted there was some dissatisfaction regarding levels of Indigenous consultation during development of the Strategy, and inclusion of some programs that may not be considered appropriate to the NT context. Views were expressed that some strategies were contrary to the views of Indigenous parents and families. This created a tension between the intent of the WCE initiative and the NTG education policy environment. That is, the WCE initiative was promoting engagement and consultation, and broadly researching views on higher education (and ultimately education in general); the NT DoE was implementing a new Indigenous education strategy that had been resisted by some remote Indigenous communities. While the NT DoE actively participated in the Steering Group there was never a senior level representation on the Steering Group despite various requests of this nature.

• Responsibility for Indigenous higher education programs was transferred from the DET to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) in 2014. Indigenous higher education policy was, however, retained by the DET. Equity higher education program and policy responsibility was also retained by DET, including HEPPP projects. The Indigenous higher education sector has expressed ongoing concerns about coordination of Indigenous higher education program and policy responsibilities between DET and DPMC, particularly in relation to the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP).

• The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (ATSIHEAC) was abolished in 2016. This was a national Ministerial advisory body for Indigenous higher education matters.

• Federal and Territory elections occurred in 2016, seeing the Labor party elected to power in the NT and the Liberal party re-elected nationally. In the lead up to these elections, this brought further uncertainty to the political environment.
• CDU released its ten-year Connect Discover Grow – Strategic Plan 2015-2025 in late 2015 reasserting its commitment to Indigenous leadership, regional engagement and research. These strategic commitments all relate to various aspects of the remote Indigenous community aspirations articulated through the WCE initiative. However, the commitment of funding to support key aspects of implementation has been slow, and had not been finalised at time of writing this report. CDU, as with many other education institutions in the NT, is experiencing significant revenue challenges and as of 2017 was undertaking a restructure process, with an emphasis on measures to support aspirations for ‘growth and sustainability’ (Maddocks, 2017). Considering the significant resourcing required for remote Indigenous education services and support, a number of stakeholders expressed concern that adequate resourcing for Indigenous education may not be feasible for CDU within its Connect Discover Grow strategic plan.

These factors, individually and when combined with one another, generated levels of increased complexity and/or uncertainty and significantly impacted on the establishment and implementation of the WCE initiative.

The WCE approach

Theoretical approach

The WCE initiative was premised on three concepts outlined in 2013 by Professor Steven Larkin, the former Pro Vice-Chancellor of Indigenous Leadership at CDU. These were:

1. That universities have much to learn from and about each other, and that parity of esteem is therefore a given;
2. That communities will achieve their higher education aspirations better when their own leaders (Elders, teachers etc.) have the required information, resources and relationships rather than being dependent upon intermittent and de-contextualised approaches from university staff; and
3. That academic and research leaders will better support communities with educational services when they can work in partnership with those communities to create effective, lifelong pathways.

The WCE initiative was also premised on critical pedagogy theory, most often related to the work of Freire (1970), who states that meaningful education, and therefore initiatives working towards equality, require a ‘profound trust in people and their creative power’ (p.56). The design of the WCE initiative was grounded in critical pedagogy theory where Indigenous worldviews experiences and ideas were fundamental to planning and implementation.

‘Everything that’s going to be coming our way we’re going to have to make sense of that one... it will be our job, make it clear first for our self and even if we have to put it into a cultural context, you know, culture way, our way, the way we see the world.’

- WCE Initiative Community Researcher, Tennant Creek.

Consistently mentioned by community leaders and Elders throughout the WCE initiative was the ‘Both Ways’ philosophy. The Both Ways philosophy, conceptualised by Harris and developed further by Yunupingu (Harris, 1980; Yunupingu, 1991), is well known amongst Indigenous researchers and experts and is commonly cited as being mandatory when working in remote Indigenous settings.

5 ‘Both Ways’ philosophy refers to an approach in which learning together occurs through the sharing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges (Bat & Shore, 2013; Boyukarrpi et al. 1994; Christie, 1987; Harris, 1980; Marika, 1999).
‘... Sometimes Balanda\(^6\) teachers don’t understand; they just want to come here and do work to fill up their pocket and go. But they don’t want to learn. These are the sort of things that we want you to understand - the Yolŋu\(^7\) way - because we want to share information so you can walk with Yolŋu, so that you can walk with us as Balanda. Because you can teach me, but I will also teach you.’

- WCE Initiative Community Researcher, Galiwin’ku.

There is increasing discourse regarding the disadvantages of focusing on failure and deficit in political dialogue that relates to Indigenous education matters, such as the ‘Closing the Gap’ policy. The statistics and policy discourse in recent times tell only part of the story. By describing a ‘gap’ that must be ‘closed’, current education policy does not acknowledge the rights of Indigenous people to be able to express their cultural heritage and to be able to pursue their own education goals (Guenther, n.d.). If the education aspirations of Indigenous people are to be realised, there is merit in reframing the deficit model, recognising the valuable role that Indigenous communities and populations play in contemporary Australian society, and building on local strengths. This was a key feature of the WCE initiative approach.

**Operational Approach**

Vital to the implementation of these approaches was program flexibility. Every remote Indigenous community possesses diversity in culture, language, landscape, vegetation, wildlife, governance, infrastructure, community services, and social, economic and political histories and circumstances. The initiative aimed to harness this diversity and ensure that activities were contextually relevant and locally driven. The WCE team recognised the limitations of a program logic model in the context of this work, and that local Indigenous leaders and stakeholders needed to have primary leadership in such areas as undertaking data collection and analysis, defining local needs and priorities, and planning future action and direction. Remote community life is highly unpredictable and the ability to adapt is crucial – local leadership was the logical and preferred action and learning approach.

The approach adopted by the WCE initiative generally relied on the strengths and commitment of each participating community and the individuals, groups and organisations within them to lead research and action. This approach is counter to deficit models and disempowering processes often present in policy and discourse relating to Indigenous issues. There is growing evidence that this continual focus on failure runs the risk of becoming self-fulfilling in maintaining ethnic discrimination (Riley and Ungerleider, 2012). Through a deficit lens, blame is externalised and families, schools and communities are seen to be the cause, which absolves policy makers of responsibility (Lowe, 2011; Sarra, 2008; Vass, 2013). Embedding a strengths-based approach was important to the creation of an environment of conducive to positive aspirations.

‘We are very, very rich people.’

- WCE Initiative Community Researcher, Galiwin’ku.

The ‘whole of community’ engagement approach explored a wide variety of partner remote Indigenous community perspectives around education and higher education. Initially, it was hoped, that this would establish local projects that had high levels of engagement and interest with individuals, families and organisational stakeholders and therefore be primarily community-driven.

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6  *Balanda* is a term used by Yolŋu people of the East Arnhem region to refer to non-Indigenous people.

7  *Yolŋu* refers to Indigenous people and languages of the East Arnhem region of the Northern Territory.
It was also considered that identifying, disseminating information and facilitating local discussion on the features of an effective and functional educational ‘pipeline’ or ‘pathway’ from school and from VET into higher education was essential. This required a focus on the relationships and other factors that could facilitate a more streamlined pipeline. It involved taking a broader view to education, recognising that pathways into higher education required establishment of collaborative partnerships between leaders in communities, other relevant community stakeholders, and those responsible for higher education service delivery in the NT.

**WCE Communication and Engagement Approach**

In September 2014, a Communication and Engagement Workshop was held with a range of internal and external stakeholders, who provided input into the early development of a WCE Initiative Communication and Engagement Strategy, available at https://remotengagetoedu.com.au/uploads/assets/uploads/WCE_Communication_and_Engagement_Strategy_website.pdf. This strategy was referred to by the WCE initiative team throughout the implementation of the WCE initiative.

Key principles that were outlined in this Strategy are outlined below.

- **Thoughtful** – this will involve adopting a consultative and strengths-based approach; communication will be timely, consistent and regular.

- **Genuine** – this will involve taking time to establish relationships with community leaders and families that are built on trust and respect; expectations will be carefully managed; communication will be community focused, inclusive and transparent.

- **Meaningful** – this will involve clear and concise messaging (not too academic); with the support of community leaders communication will be delivered in local language, wherever possible.

- **Ethically appropriate** – this will involve a commitment to community engagement and decision-making that is guided by national and global Indigenous ethical frameworks; this also involves acknowledgement and ownership of intellectual property.

- **Culturally respectful (in both approach and delivery)** – this will involve an awareness of matriarchal and patriarchal decision-making processes, which will ensure responsiveness to local cultural practices; community leaders will be adequately remunerated for sharing and contributing Indigenous knowledges.

- **Participatory** – this will involve project partners working collaboratively (‘with’ not ‘on’ or ‘about’) to enhance a sense of ownership and minimise feelings of disempowerment; this will ensure that outcomes are directed by, and benefit, the local community.

- **Considerate of, and responsive to, first languages** – this will involve Honouring primary/first languages; the use of trained interpreters will also be supported.

- **Underpinned by two-way learning approaches** – this will involve engaging with both Indigenous and Mainstream/Western (academic) knowledge systems equally, with a view of supporting the co-creation of knowledge and aspiration development.

*Figure 3: Key principles outlined in the WCE Initiative Communication & Engagement Strategy.*
Governance

The WCE initiative worked with a number of key partners in the remote Indigenous education space. These included:

- OPVC-IL and the Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor – Education and Student Success (previously the Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor – Academic) at CDU
- Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE)
- NT DoE
- North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA)
- Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges & Education (ACIKE)

The WCE Steering Group

Representatives from each key partner together with representatives of each partner remote Indigenous community formed the WCE Steering Group, which met approximately on a quarterly basis. A total of 15 Steering Group meetings were held across the course of the initiative, including a final Steering Group meeting planned for August 2017 at the time of writing this report. These were held on:

- 6th February 2014
- 6th March 2014
- 22nd May 2014
- 30th July 2014
- 25th August 2014
- 27th October 2014
- 16th February 2015
- 11th May 2015
- 13th July 2015
- 14th October 2015
- 17th February 2016
- 23rd June 2016
- 25th October 2016
- 6th June 2017

Generally, the remote community representatives were also employed by CDU as members of the WCE team. Within the team they were referred to as ‘community-based’ staff. These members began to attend Steering Group meetings from 11th May 2015 onwards. Specific functions and responsibilities of the Steering Group as outlined in the Terms of Reference included:

a) To oversee the WCE program and ensure that it is conducted in accordance with the HEPPP Conditions of Grant

b) To approve the plans, performance measures and budgets for each subproject.

c) To monitor progress, including expenditure, and provide advice to the HEPPP WCE staff team.

d) To facilitate achievement of the project within the respective institutions represented on the Steering Group.

e) To promote discussion and dissemination of information regarding best practice in achieving the WCE objectives.

f) To provide the Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership with such information as is required for the purposes of acquittal and reporting to Australian Government.
WCE Partnerships

It was intended that the formalisation of partnerships would result in a range of benefits and help to establish sustainable communication channels between key project partners and communities. These partnerships were outlined through regular progress reporting to the Australian Government. The intention was to open up opportunities for system and practice improvements through, for example, formalising Indigenous education pathways and strategic workforce priorities - at both the community and institutional level. It was envisaged the establishment of community partnerships would provide a greater level of localised community control. The range of formalised agreements developed with other organisations and agencies are outlined below.

Formal agreements with key partners

MoUs with BIITE and NT DoE

BIITE and NT DoE signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with CDU in May 2015 which outlined responsibilities of each partner agency such as sharing of facilities and infrastructure, sharing of relevant data, support for relationships development, and commitment to internal systems improvements based on community priorities.

Service Level Agreement with NAILSMA

A Service Level Agreement (SLA; i.e. contract for goods and services) was signed with NAILSMA on 30th July 2014, and was varied in September 2014 and again in August 2016. This contract enabled NAILSMA to lead activities that promote higher education pathways in land and sea management. NAILSMA’s specific objectives within the WCE initiative were to:

a) Articulate the links between Indigenous aspirations for management of country and the benefits and opportunities of engaging in higher education;

b) Identify opportunities and impediments to greater Indigenous participation in higher education in the context of land and sea management, including livelihood development;

c) Provide on-country, in-university and other opportunities for Indigenous community leaders and members to learn about and engage in research and higher education, including but not limited to activities relevant to Indigenous land and sea management; and

d) Encourage the growing interest of young Indigenous people in career paths towards a number of topic areas including rangers and Natural and Cultural Resource Management, and linking this to the requirements for individual success in primary, secondary and higher education (NAILSMA & CDU, 2014).
Other formalised partnerships

**SLA with the Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods (RIEL)**
An SLA was executed with RIEL on 16th December 2014 to lead the development and piloting of an Indigenous fire curriculum specific to the Northern Australia context.

**SLA with the Research Centre for Health and Wellbeing (RCHW) at CDU**
An internal SLA was negotiated with the RCHW at CDU to provide Social Network Analysis (SNA) training to WCE initiative staff. This was executed on 14th November 2014. This work was supported by Dr. Gretchen Ennis and also involved collecting and presenting three waves of social network analysis data as part of the evaluation process.

Formalised partnerships in communities

**SLA with Yalu’ Marngithinyaraw Aboriginal Corporation**
A partnership with Yalu’ Marngithinyaraw Aboriginal Corporation in Galiwin’ku was established through the execution of two separate SLAs on 29th June 2015 (with a variation executed on 13th November 2015) and 20th May 2016. This partnership involved the delivery of a student mentoring program, research support, the delivery of cultural awareness training, and skills development for staff.

**SLA with Yambirrpa Schools Council**
A partnership with Yambirrpa Schools Council in Yirrkala was established through the execution of an agreement on 5th May 2016. The partnership involved the delivery of workforce development of Indigenous teachers, research about Yirrkala and homelands education history, mentorship and pathway development activities, production of Yolŋu Matha language resources, and community-based graduation celebrations that promote pathways into higher education. A Joint Remote School Council Gathering was delivered in May 2016 as part of this partnership.

**SLA with RIEL and a MOU with the ARPNET**
A partnership with Aboriginal Research Practitioners Network (ARPNet) was established through the execution of a SLA with the Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods (RIEL -CDU) (auspicing on behalf of ARPNet) and a MoU with ARPNet Directors on 15th October 2015 and 20th October respectively. This was specifically to undertake research activities in the West Arnhem region (both Maningrida and Gunbalanya). This resulted in the preparation of two reports to develop community action plans owned by each of the local communities for implementation beyond the timeframe of WCE initiative.

**SLA with Central Desert Regional Council**
A partnership was developed with the Central Desert Regional Council on 17th May 2016. This was to support the Yuendumu Mediation and Justice Program to reduce bullying and increase attendance at the Yuendumu School.

**SLA with PAW Media and Communications**
A partnership was developed with PAW Media Communications in Yuendumu on 29th May 2015. This partnership involved the establishment of an Indigenous leadership group to develop a Warlpiri Research Centre with a focus on Indigenous research capacity building to document educational histories across the region.
Licence Agreement with Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre

A licence agreement was established with Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre in Tennant Creek on 17th December 2015. This was to provide a culturally safe space from which Indigenous staff and youth could engage and interact. This included providing a space to facilitate a youth-elder event about Indigenous education pathways.

MOU with Research ‘Us’

A MOU was developed between Research ‘Us’ and OPVC-IL on 2nd August 2016 as a result of the WCE initiative. The purpose of this was to build educational research capacity in remote Indigenous communities.

Ethics approval

Ethics approval for the WCE initiative was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Charles Darwin University on 16th October, 2014. Regular communication occurred with the CDU Human Research Ethics Committee throughout the WCE initiative.
WCE initiative timeline

2013

Funding application submitted June 2013

2014

Funding application successful Dec 2013

Program Manager recruited July 2014

Team Social Network Analysis (SNA) workshop and first visits to remote communities Oct 2014

Research & Evaluation Manager recruited Feb 2015

First WCE team workshop Jan 2015

Second WCE team workshop June 2015

Evaluation Coordinator recruited Aug 2015

Third WCE team workshop Dec 2015

2015

CAMPUS BASED STAFF RECRUITED JULY 2014 – Jan 2015

COMMUNITY BASED STAFF RECRUITED JAN 2015 – EARLY 2016

STEERING GROUP MEETINGS

STRATEGIC PRIORITY PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION OCT 2015 – SEPT 2017

DESIGN & EARLY ESTABLISHMENT

Late 2013 – Sept 2014

ESTABLISHMENT IN COMMUNITIES

Oct 2014 – mid 2015

VARIATION 1: Change from five to six communities and operations extended from Dec 2015 to July 2016

Approved Oct 2014

VARIATION 2: Operations extended from July 2016 to Dec 2016

Approved Sept 2015

Steering Group meeting dates are listed on page 20. Please note a full timeline of the WCE initiative is included in Appendix 7.
WCE Community Level Planning & Evaluation Guidelines produced Feb 2016

Fourth WCE team workshop Apr 2016

WCE Research & Evaluation Framework produced May 2016

Fifth WCE team workshop Aug 2016

WCE Community Evaluation reports due Oct 2016

Indigenous Leaders’ Conference Nov 2016

WCE Community Evaluation Reports finalised Early 2017

2016

2017

WCE Initiative Evaluation Report due Aug 2017

COMMUNITY PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION & REPORTING
mid 2015 – end 2016

FINAL EVALUATION & REPORTING
late 2016 – Aug 2017

VARIATION 3: Extension of Strategic Priority Project until Sept 2017
Approved Jan 2017
Design and initial establishment of the WCE initiative

The design and early establishment phase took place between late 2013 and September 2014. In 2013, a small working group of high level academic and research staff at CDU developed the funding application for the WCE initiative on a very tight timeline. The Australian Government submission timeframe did not allow enough time to consult with potential communities, nor to conduct feasibility or readiness assessments. OPVC-IL was informed of the successful grant application on 20th December 2013. Funding for the WCE initiative was released to CDU in January 2014. There were significant internal delays in transferring cost-centre management to OPVC-IL, which was sorted by July 2014. Essentially this delayed commencement by six months, with the exception of some initial Steering Group meetings. CDU also received $360,000 less than what had been requested in the funding application.

The WCE Manager was recruited in mid-2014 and was tasked with establishing a team and setting up operations in five remote communities over an initial two year timeframe. An early variation was negotiated in October 2014 to expand the scope to six remote communities based on the under-spend from the delay in commencement. The timeframe was later extended until December 2016, changing operational implementation to a two and half year timeframe, through an additional variation request in September 2015. Within the existing budget allocation a subsequent variation was negotiated in January 2017 to extend the Strategic Priority Project (SPP) focus of WCE until 31 August 2017. The remote operations of WCE generally ceased in December 2016, the end date of all remote team contracts. Refer to timeline on pages 23 and 24.

During the first six months of 2014 representatives of key partner organisations met on a bimonthly basis. This marked the formation of the WCE Steering Group, who met to discuss specific design features of the initiative based on the original design contained in the HEPPP submission. Project planning also commenced.

Initial activity of the Steering Group included consolidation of Steering Group membership and finalising of the Terms of Reference, WCE site selection, initial budgeting, discussions around evaluation and reporting requirements, and WCE Manager recruitment. The first round of recruitment for the WCE Manager and other staff was a collaborative effort by several Steering Group representatives.

The WCE Coordinator had secretariat responsibility for the Steering Group, as per the Terms of Reference. There was a significant delay in recruitment to the Coordinators’ position, and the Coordinator did not commence employment until December 2014. As a consequence, significant additional financial and administrative burden was placed on the initial workload of the Program Manager during the early establishment phase of the project.

Establishment in participating communities
Site selection and community consultation

Potential WCE communities were initially short-listed by the Steering Group based on a broad range of criteria including school and Vocational Education and Training (VET) enrolment and completion data, existing infrastructure (such as broadband width, Child and Family Centres, Trade Training Centres), the presence of ranger and/or learning on country programs, existing relationships and projects with key partners or with CDU, location and perceptions of community readiness. Once identified and prioritised by the Steering Group, WCE staff commenced consultation with each of the communities beginning in October 2014. All identified communities expressed an interest in participating.
WCE staffing (the WCE team)

A team of 27 staff members in total were recruited incrementally by the WCE at various points throughout the funding period. Approximately half of the team were ‘campus based’, that is, operating from CDU campuses in Darwin and Alice Springs. These staff members operated on a ‘fly in, fly out’ arrangement, travelling regularly between Darwin and Alice Springs and WCE partner communities. Campus-based team members participated in a week-long induction process at the end of September 2014. The remainder of the team were termed ‘community-based’. Community-based staff were local Indigenous community leaders with a passion for education and resided and worked in their home communities.

Recruitment began with three Community Engagement Leaders (CELS) and three Mentor and Enrichment Officers (MEOs) roles. These staff were employed to work collaboratively in two communities each, operating as ‘regional teams’ (see Figure 4). WCE key partners were involved in the initial recruitment process. Several of the individuals recruited had pre-existing relationships with individuals, families and organisations in their designated communities, which assisted in ‘speeding up’ the relationship development and project establishment process.

Two other campus-based team members were also employed during this early stage. These roles were:

- Community Teachers’ Liaison Leader (December 2014), and
- Research and Evaluation Manager (February 2015)

The entire WCE team was employed in a flat organisational structure, in which the entire team of almost 27 team members were supervised by the Program Manager. This meant that no staff members, besides from the Program Manager, had authority over anyone else. It was considered that this would be ideal to enhance involvement of staff in the decision making process. Whilst the original intent was that WCE campus-based staff would work in pairs in two communities, over time operational decisions were made so that campus-based team members worked with one community each, rather than across two communities.

Other campus-based staff members that were recruited as the initiative progressed included additional Finance and Administration Support staff (during 2015 and 2016), an Evaluation Coordinator (August 2015) and the Strategic Priority Projects Manager (November 2015). In 2016 the MEO title was re-named to become ‘Mentor and Engagement Officer’ as it was reported that the term ‘enrichment’ may not have been appropriate.

The CELs and the MEOs began the consultation process in communities in late 2014. This initially involved each CEL and MEO working with two communities. They began speaking with relevant stakeholders, and obtained referrals from them about others in the community that were appropriate to talk to about education related matters. Recruitment of community-based staff was a priority activity. It took time, however, to speak with enough people to determine who would be employed. Sometimes names were put forward and they were already employed with other organisations. Some communities had Indigenous community-based staff recruited as late as July 2015.

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8 These terms were agreed to by all staff at a WCE team gathering in December 2015.
The various community-based staff roles that were established and recruited to between January 2015 and July 2015 included:

- Community Co-researchers
- Community Liaison Officer
- Community Research Leaders
- Education Team Leaders
- Facilitator in Education Engagement
- Mentors
- Mentor and Engagement Officer
- Mentor in Community Education Engagement

Figure 4: Map of evolution of WCE initiative staffing across partner communities.
Planning and reporting on WCE community projects

The campus-based team spent a significant amount of time during the establishment phase discussing a range of topics such as principles of engagement, roles and responsibilities, and developmental evaluation and participatory action research processes. Team building activities were conducted, including a two day staff retreat in January 2015. Staff members had the chance to get to know one another, participate in collaborative planning and discussion, and consider how they would begin the engagement process in each community. During this period they also received training on research methods that they may not have come across before, such as Social Network Analysis (SNA).

The regional teams developed early Community Action Plans in collaboration with the Program Manager using the Quality Improvement Program Planning System (QIPPS). QIPPS is an online planning tool, and was considered by many on the team to not be fit for purpose. In particular, it could be challenging to use and was considered not to be inclusive enough of community-based staff, as many of them did not have access to a computer or the internet. The team came to agreement in late 2015 to not utilise QIPPS, and to instead develop Community Action Plans written in a way that would be easily accessible to all members of the team including other interested stakeholders in communities.

Teams were required to write a field trip report after each visit to community, in addition to six monthly progress reports as part of Australian Government reporting requirements, reports for the Steering Group, and updates for team workshops. It was intended that these reports would always be written collaboratively by campus-based and community-based staff, however, this was not always possible due to a number of challenges discussed in Chapter 4.

WCE community project implementation and activities

CELs and MEOs initially travelled to two communities each, approximately once every month. Consequently trips were busy, with many meetings occurring with stakeholders from across each community during each visit. One of the priority tasks for the regional teams was to negotiate appropriate arrangements with local stakeholders for working in partnership. In four communities this involved negotiating service level agreements (SLAs) with local organisations, through which staff and other resources could be deployed.

The initiative was originally conceptualised to focus on ‘improving the relatively low number of Indigenous students progressing through the school system and completing year 12 who have both aspirations for further study and are academically prepared for the demands of higher education’ (Larkin, 2013, p.6). As time progressed, the initiative responded to a wider range of expressed needs and major themes. Refer to Chapter 4 for more details.
Strategic Priority Projects

In consultation with the Australian Government through an agreed contract variation towards the end of 2015 a number of Strategic Priority Projects (SPPs) were initiated from within CDU to stimulate appropriate systems level responses and positive change. An SPP Manager, based in Darwin, was employed in November 2015 to lead the projects. These projects were a response to common themes which had been identified across the communities through interview, team discussions and stakeholder input. Initially these projects were:

1. Indigenous adult English Language Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) policy and programs in CDU and the NT.
2. Strengthening the educational pathway between VET and higher education for Indigenous students.
3. A whole of university approach to improving outcomes for Indigenous students from the NT

Activities undertaken for each SPP included interviews, research, desktop literature reviews, preparation of grant applications, and feeding information into the preparation of academic papers/journal articles. During the second half of 2016, however, it was decided to limit activity to one strategic area. The primary focus became Indigenous adult English LLN, a concern that had emerged as a significant community-identified constraint to access, progression and attainment not only in higher education but along the educational pathways, in work and in life.

The decision to pursue the English LLN project was informed by an expert consultative group who recognised:

- the extent of the need for improvement in LLN policy, programs, services and resources;
- the potential for making a real contribution in the short-term through consultation and collective action; and
- that there was considerable Indigenous and multi-sectoral stakeholder support for action in this area.

A full description of the English LLN strategic priority project is included on pages 61 and 62.

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9 It is to be noted that most Indigenous students from the NT who enter higher education are mature age and functioning within a workplace (CDU, 2017).
Team gatherings

The team came together approximately three times per year for collaborative team workshops. From December 2015 onwards this included all community-based staff, who had not all been employed at the time of the preceding workshops. These workshops were generally held in Darwin however in response to requests from community-based staff, one workshop was held in Tennant Creek and one in Maningrida. These team gatherings usually lasted four days, with time required on either side of this for travel to and from remote and very remote locations. These workshops were an opportunity for the team to:

- consolidate the WCE team through building relationships, understanding and rapport;
- listen to teams working in each community present an update of processes, activities and progress;
- reflect collectively on a range of areas including key concepts and themes, ideas, successes and opportunities;
- communicate updates and receive feedback from the organisational level (WCE initiative management, evaluation and CDU as a whole); and
- discuss the LLN SPP, receive updates on progress, feed in Indigenous perspectives, engender team support and obtain input into planning.

Community-based staff were supported to travel to Alice Springs and Darwin several times a year for a variety of reasons. Most regularly, they attended Steering Group meetings, which were held approximately quarterly. They also came to the university campuses for several team workshops and to attend important events. They also were flown to Darwin and, on some occasions other capital cities around Australia, to present at conferences and forums to support information sharing and research dissemination – a priority emphasised by community-based staff.

In April 2016 at the Tennant Creek WCE team workshop, a plan for the remainder of the year was devised to ensure that teams would be on track to complete all required tasks by the end of the year. At this point, some teams were still collecting research data that explored community perspectives of higher education. A line was drawn in the calendar so that June 2016 was the last chance to conduct final data collection. Collaborative data analysis was to be conducted between May and October, with a draft of the final evaluation reports due at this point. The final two months would be spent on other reporting requirements, completing any remaining community activities and finalising community evaluation reports.
Attempts to secure further funding and extend WCE activity

Throughout the latter part of 2016, 13 grant applications were submitted by the WCE team (some in collaboration with key partners) to continue addressing community identified needs and priorities. The applications were submitted to the 2016 HEPPP National Priorities Pool (NPP) funding round and the Aboriginal Benefits Account (ABA) funding round. The proposed projects included:

1. Indigenous governance and leadership in remote schools: What impact does this have on remote Indigenous secondary student aspirations for further education?
2. Strengths-based stories: Strengthening participation in higher education through examples of success from remote Indigenous communities
3. Indigenous-led review and development of education policies: Framework for implementation (led by NAILSMA)
4. Out of school – Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) policy, programs and best practice for remote Indigenous Australians
5. Unlocking higher education capacity in East Arnhem Land’s multilingual/intercultural heritage
6. Recognition of Indigenous peoples’ prior traditional and cultural knowledges (led by NAILSMA)
7. Developing a model: Whole of university approach to remote/regional Indigenous higher education
8. Enabling Aboriginal higher education access and participation from remote and regional Northern Territory (led by BIITE)
9. Remote Indigenous Success in Education (RISE) Together (proposed extension of WCE over three and a half years)
10. A collaborative network for Indigenous adult English language literacy and numeracy (LLN) in the NT
11. Indigenous adult LLN in the NT: Engagement, feasibility and innovation
12. A cultural and intercultural awareness program for Galiwin’ku
13. Building remote Indigenous research and evaluation capacity through Research ‘Us’
14. Strengthening Indigenous school leadership and governance in the NT

Many days of staff time were spent writing the above applications, including scoping and designing projects, preparing budgets, assessing risks and garnering community, stakeholder and sectoral support. Unfortunately only one of the above grants was successful, and then only partly. Application (3) three above was funded however the budget was significantly reduced and therefore the project has deviated significantly from the original design and intent. This was a disappointing outcome for priorities that had been identified in WCE communities.
3. Evaluation outline

This chapter includes an overview of the evaluation approach and methods that were employed throughout the WCE initiative. Refer to Chapter 4 for additional details regarding the evaluation process, and to Appendix 8 for a reflections about the internal evaluator’s role.

Research and evaluation approaches

The WCE initiative attempted to combine research and evaluation approaches that are, in theory, suited to complex settings. Participatory action research and developmental evaluation approaches were selected by the WCE Manager and the Research and Evaluation Manager in late 2014 and early 2015, in consultation with the newly recruited campus-based team. It was anticipated that the key principles underpinning these approaches – such as collaborative learning and inclusiveness – would be suitable for the project aims and setting (Baum, MacDougall, and Smith, 2006; Patton, 2011). A ‘flexible’ approach to participatory action research was chosen, meaning that the research approach adopted in each community would be unique. It was theorised that this would support variability of contexts and variability of skills and knowledge of the staff employed through the initiative. In addition, both these approaches support emergence and adaptation. In plain language this means that we know things do not always happen as predicted, and by choosing these approaches we would be prepared to adjust and respond as needed. Importantly, this also meant that local Indigenous researchers could drive their own research process. This is consistent with some of the principles that underpin Indigenous standpoint theory outlined by a number of Indigenous academics (see, for example, Rigney, 1997, Moreton-Robinson, 2013, Nakata, 2007, Smith, 1999).

The intersection between developmental evaluation and participatory action research depends on, largely, how researchers or evaluators ‘resonate’ with different terms and how much they understand about different approaches (Patton, 2011, p. 280). Stern (1995, cited in Patton 2011) frames the linkage through the following statements (p.282):

- *Judgement and explanation require analysis, on the one hand, and*
- *Development and empowerment require action, on the other.*

*Action research integrates judgement with development, and explanation with empowerment – and thereby combines:*

- *Analysis with action*
- *Theory with practice*

At the remote community level, informal action and reflection cycles were undertaken by WCE teams. Project focus areas and research and evaluation approaches in each community project varied significantly. This led to difficulty in establishing a collective and consistent approach to collection and analysis of evaluation data and collective development across the WCE initiative.

An important challenge to note in this section was that between February to November 2015, evaluation staffing capacity was only 0.5FTE due to budget constraints from the original proposal. The Research and Evaluation Manager did not sit within OPVC-IL and was housed within the CDU Centre for Health and Wellbeing. From November 2015 onwards, evaluation capacity increased to 1.0FTE through employment of an Evaluation Coordinator (0.8FTE) and evolution of the Research and Evaluation Manager to an advisory role (0.2FTE). The Research and Evaluation Manager did not play a significant role in the early design and establishment period prior to February 2015.
Evaluation Methods

The total amount of data collected for research and evaluation purposes in the WCE initiative included:

- Interviews (272)
- Other audio, eg. videos, workshops and meetings (112)
- Field trip reports and other notes (153)
- Other reports eg. progress reports, community evaluation reports, partner action plans and reports (85)
- Other research data eg. dilly bag tool activities (Sithole, 2012), post it and butchers paper activities (30)
- Conference presentations (38)
- Diagrams, photos, stories and artwork

Evaluation Reports were written by teams working in each community (consisting of community- and campus-based team members) to document research and evaluation process and achievements in each community. These reports were written using data that had been collected at the local level. For this Whole of Community Engagement Final Evaluation Report, the data utilised included a total of 54 interviews conducted by evaluation staff, in addition to being informed by a selection of the data described above. As the developmental evaluation process did not function as had been intended, a relatively ad hoc approach to collecting and analysing data relevant to the whole initiative had to be taken for the purposes of this report.

Over the course of 2015, evaluation staff conducted reflective interviews with the campus-based team and Steering Group members to stimulate reflection about the process so far, things that were working well, challenges, and their next steps. Interviews were approximately one hour long each, semi-structured, and were guided by five discussion points:

1. Project aims and processes
2. Roles of team members
3. The process so far – strengths, challenges, changes etc.
4. Emerging issues from this process
5. Plans, expectations, ongoing concerns

Evaluation staff then facilitated a self-analysis process in which the interviewee reviewed their own interview transcript and coded themes using NVivo, in collaboration with the evaluator. This did not occur at the community level because some campus based staff were either confused about, had differing views on, or were resistant to the evaluation process; and there was also only one evaluation staff member to facilitate this process across a geographically distributed team. This process was very time-intensive due to the linguistic, cultural and environmental factors that were at play. This also did not occur with Steering Group members due to the time-intensiveness of the approach.
Two rounds of evaluation interviews were conducted with WCE team members and Steering Group members over the course of 2015. An initial Developmental Evaluation Framework was produced in May 2015 by the Research and Evaluation Manager. It was a questioning framework that included questions for reflection and further planning to assist in team and project development. It was developed based on emerging internal evaluation findings up until that point. It highlighted that a shared understanding of project scope, aims and objectives, and community planning, evaluation and dissemination strategies were key issues for the team to discuss. Subsequent discussions were held throughout 2015 between the Research and Evaluation Manager and, at that point in time, mainly campus-based team members including the Program Manager. Although regular meetings between the Research and Evaluation Manager and the WCE Program Manager took place a written evaluation progress report was not provided to the Program Manager and the WCE team until 2016. The delay in formalised reporting related to the restricted capacity of internal evaluation staff at that point in time (0.5FTE), a computer malfunction, and lost reporting content. The work had to be re-done, and the resultant report was not disseminated within the team until March 2016. Up until this point, there was a certain amount of frustration expressed by some campus-based staff regarding the lack of formal evaluative feedback that they had received.

As challenges in this process began to emerge additional funds were allocated to increase evaluation staffing capacity in August 2015. Discussions continued within the team around key opportunities for development, and the increased evaluation capacity time was also spent working with individual teams to further develop team communication. The second ‘phase’ of the evaluation process began once the WCE team co-produced the ‘WCE Initiative Planning and Evaluation Guidelines’ and a basic ‘WCE Initiative Research and Evaluation Framework’ in early February and May 2016, respectively. The Evaluation Coordinator then proceeded to continue to conduct interviews with campus-based team members and community-based team members (whenever possible), and with Steering Group members. The approach to this was relatively ad hoc as the workload had increased significantly with one position attempting to capture and analyse evaluation data relevant across the whole initiative. In addition, this next phase involved assisting to resolve some of the frustration that had been generated within the team and the Steering Group up until that point. As the evaluation data that was shared centrally from community projects was inconsistent across communities, with some staff sharing limited amounts of or no data, the evaluator began collating research themes and building on the process of ‘co-creation’ through workshopping these at team workshops to ensure consensus on emerging themes.

Towards the end of 2016, campus-based and community-based WCE team members were tasked with conducting interviews with community stakeholders to obtain information about the perceived impact of the WCE initiative in their community. The total number of community stakeholders interviewed as part of this process was 38 across five of the communities; there were no evaluation interviews conducted in one community. Stakeholders interviewed were both local Indigenous community members and non-Indigenous staff employed in community organisations. These interviews are included in the total number of interviews collected that are listed on page 32.

There were a limited number of evaluation interviews conducted in some communities throughout implementation of the WCE initiative with people other than the community-based staff (who were also community leaders). Therefore, the process evaluation findings contained in this report reflect mainly internal WCE team perspectives. Other data that support the claims made in Chapters 5 and 6 of this report include a selection of the data outlined on page 32.
Time constraints, evaluation staffing capacity and implementation factors significantly limited the level of analysis that could be conducted. NVivo was utilised, although there were limits to how thorough this process could be considering the varying scope, quantity and quality of evaluation data captured across communities. Themes relating to process evaluation (including themes relating to community priorities for action) were coded in a relatively methodical manner. NVivo was also used to code data relating to recommendations from WCE communities in Chapter 8.

**Social network analysis (SNA)**

SNA is best thought of as a research paradigm rather than a single approach or method. SNA involves the methodical study of social networks. A social network is a set of social actors (e.g. people, groups, organisations) and the ties (relationships) between them. Networks can be visualised using a social network diagram or graph (Hill, 2002).

It was decided by the WCE Manager in consultation with external staff who had expertise using SNA that this approach would be useful to track evolution of networks over time in order to map the community engagement process. A three day team workshop in October 2014 was attended by the campus-based team and a, external Social Network Analysis (SNA) Consultant. Dr. Gretchen Ennis from the CDU School of Health. At this workshop, WCE’s approach to using SNA was designed collaboratively by the campus-based team and staff were trained in its use and application. Within the WCE team the SNA process was supported by Dr. Matalena Tofa. This report will reflect on use of SNA in the WCE initiative in Chapter 4.
4. Key learnings – design, approach, methods and process

This chapter will summarise the key lessons learnt through the implementation process of the WCE initiative. It is to be noted that the recommendations included in this section do not necessarily imply that certain things were not done or that efforts were not made to do certain things. It is also highlighted that recommendations should not be considered as being based on isolated events or processes. The recommendations reflect summative judgements around what has been learnt through evaluation of the WCE initiative and/or confirmed from existing literature.

Design and planning

The WCE initiative was designed to, in the first instance, explore a wide variety of community perspectives about higher education within remote and very remote Indigenous communities. The aim was to establish initiatives that achieved high levels of engagement and interest of individuals, families and organisational stakeholders in research and activity that was led by local Indigenous community members.

‘Give us the power. In the past, Balanda [non-Indigenous people] have been coming from their own perspective saying, ‘do it my way.’ No, this is wrong, we want to do it our way. This is what we want.’

- WCE Initiative Community Researcher, Yirrkala.

There exists a tension in working in a way that is genuinely ‘community-led’. Community priorities differ across communities and regions depending on many factors, which can be at odds with establishing a coordinated strategy or approach to addressing issues such access to education. This is relevant to the genuine tension experienced by governments in catering to diversity and difference, but also in the context of large scale initiatives such as the WCE initiative in this setting within a limited timeframe. As examples, in Tennant Creek it became apparent that it would be difficult to focus on working in a way that was inclusive of the whole community when the process of establishing a local project reference group was delayed by complex political histories. Yirrkala and Yuendumu communities both have long histories of public advocacy within the education space and already had in place particular initiatives or programs that community members wanted to progress. Combined with several other factors outlined in this chapter, this contributed to an evolution from what the project was designed to achieve.

The team that developed the project application considered that for people living in remote Indigenous communities to be able to access higher education, first they had to finish school or achieve a certain level of educational attainment. The original intent of the project, therefore, was around academic attainment in schools. The open ended approach taken in order to respond to the needs of communities in addition to challenges in the evaluation design and feedback cycle, however, led to a vast array of differences emerging in perceptions of aims, scope and process. These existed between team members and the Steering Group and there were also inconsistencies across early key project documents. Some examples are demonstrated in Figure 5. The ‘whole of community’ phrase within the title also impacted on individual perceptions of scope, with some community projects choosing to focus on community governance systems.

The community development model adopted in this initiative was intended to enable remote Indigenous community leaders to be in control of a community-driven research and action process. There is an inherent tension between the hopes of remote Indigenous community members, who want to see change, and the world of research and policy, in which decision makers emphasise the need for evidence
and evidence-based practice. There are also endless potential solutions for change, demonstrated by the
diversity of approaches taken in community-level projects.

There were differences among team members about how much emphasis should be placed on:

- researching and exploring community perceptions of higher education (and how this should be
done); and
- implementing actions for change.

Some examples of varying perceptions of foci of change include:

- focus on individual level – eg. individual aspiration building; raising awareness of higher education
  study options and support services; building capacity of local leaders to act as higher education
  experts equipped with knowledge and resources.
- focus on school level - eg. increasing educational attainment in schools; influencing pedagogy and
  curriculums at the local level; influencing school governance systems and processes.
- focus on ‘systems’ level – eg. influencing access and participation systems and policies within
  institutions and governments; influencing community governance systems and processes.

Increasing educational attainment in schools:

‘The whole of the community engagement gave us more than the approach rather than
the outcome. Yeah, it was more the means, the outcome was actually high attainment.’
(Steering Group member involved with project design)

Building individual aspirations:

‘The overarching aim of the project is to build aspirations, expectations and capacity of
Indigenous people in remote and very remote setting to participate in higher education.’
(Campus-based WCE team member)

Increasing knowledge and awareness about higher education pathways:

‘Part of our role is to increase the understanding of what is out there so people can make
informed decisions about their education pathways, and employment pathways.’ (Campus
-based WCE team member)

Creating a more supportive education system:

‘... creating frameworks, processes and understanding that support communities to
continue the things that we’ve identified and perhaps helped initiate’. (Campus-based WCE
team member)

Figure 5: Some examples of varying perceptions of project aims and processes.

There were discussions held between the Research and Evaluation Manager and the WCE Manager around
the need to clarify the aims of the WCE initiative during 2015. The Research and Evaluation Manager had
identified this need through analysis of the interviews that had been conducted with (predominantly
campus-based) team members and Steering Group members. The WCE Manager considered that there
had been discussions with members of the Steering Group that had clarified this. Further discussion in the
team setting occurred at the December 2015 WCE team workshop and, at the time, it was considered by the WCE Manager that the team had adequately discussed the overall aims and objectives.

‘As Program Manager, I considered that the aims and objectives were discussed in length, and in detail, with WCE staff and Steering Group members on numerous occasions, both as a group and individually. This was negotiated at various points throughout the planning and implementation of the WCE and through reflective cycles consistent with PAR and DE approaches. However, interpretation of the aims differed between staff and community members, and it was important to adopt a flexible approach that allowed for contextually and culturally relevant approaches to emerge within each community and across the initiative as a whole. The tension between rigid (top-down) and flexible (bottom-up) approaches to aims and objectives had both its pros and cons throughout the implementation phase.’

-WCE Program Manager (2014 - early 2017)

The flat structure arrangement of the CELs and the MEOs caused tensions in this project design. It was a huge challenge for the WCE Manager to oversee individual projects in communities that were designed at the community level. The CELs had been employed on a higher pay scale than the MEOs thus there was a more senior level of responsibility implicit in their roles. The flat structure, however, meant they could not exert leadership and guidance in the process. The MEOs came into the project with different skillsets and backgrounds and had their own interpretations of what participatory action research should look like. In general, they had experience as practitioners and were more ‘action’ focused, which caused tension with the CELs who, in general, had more expertise in the research field.

Leadership and management roles within creative projects invariably experience a number of dilemmas (Mumford D, Scott G, Gaddis B, & J, 2002). Influence must be exerted while simultaneously encouraging autonomy, initiative, motivation and critical reflection within a team (Mumford D et al., 2002, p.711). There is a very real challenge in finding the balance between satisfying organisational demands and establishing an environment conducive to creativity and strong relationships. It was a significant challenge within this initiative to foster positive working relationships, whilst also negotiating the needs of individual team members.

The timeframe permitted by the Australian Government to develop the initial funding application was a period of only a few weeks. This made it impossible to travel to multiple sites across the NT to consult with communities on design of the initiative – a costly exercise which could have built unrealistic expectations (if the application had not been successful). The inclusion of a design and feasibility assessment phase at the outset of the WCE initiative together with a longer implementation timeframe would have enabled community input into the design of the initiative, and its aims and objectives. These aims could have been more achievable, realistic and more widely understood as a result.

The initial consultation process included building an understanding of what the project was about. This was a fundamental element to establishing the project in each community. In all cases, this occurred across multiple cultural and linguistic interfaces and it took time and patience for team members to develop an agreed understanding about what the project was aiming to achieve.
‘I need someone to break this project into pieces and help me understand before I can take it to my community. This is what I need. We are still trying to make it happen. Because why? Because the process was not explained to us properly. We need to learn about the policies, about the structures, because we don’t know. But if you give us clear information, then I can take your project, now I understand, and I can shape it, and I can break it down and explain it to my community.’

- WCE community stakeholder.

**Recommendation 1:** Ensure projects have clear aims and objectives that emphasise sustainability and are cognisant of timeframes. Revisit these regularly to ensure ongoing clarity and track progress.

**Recommendation 2:** Clarify boundaries – for programs/projects and for evaluation.

**Recommendation 3:** Embed sufficient flexibility into programs/projects to enable remote Indigenous community leaders to take the lead in determining how aims and objectives will be achieved, with support if required.

**Approach and methods**

This initiative was designed keeping in mind all of the features that we know are essential to working in complex settings (Patton, 2011). Privileging local expertise, remaining flexible and adaptable, embracing uncertainty and working inclusively were all key principles that were, in general, followed within discrete project areas that were part of the initiative. There was significant emphasis placed on listening to the perspectives of remote Indigenous community members and valuing their expertise and cultural knowledge throughout all stages of the initiative.

It was consistently reinforced that the term ‘education’ for remote Indigenous community members also encompasses the acquisition of Indigenous cultural knowledge that is obtained through a staged process to be able to progress in leadership and responsibility levels, similar to progression to gain Western qualifications. The WCE initiative placed high value on working together with Indigenous staff who ensured that local activities, approaches and outcomes were informed by Indigenous culture, education and worldviews.

There were advantages and disadvantages to working in this way. Although these principles are well supported in the literature, it is not possible to empirically highlight further the value of this approach within the WCE initiative in terms of impacts or outcomes using evaluation data due to challenges in the evaluation and implementation process that are described in this report. What was clear, though, was that:

- the diverse worldviews and perspectives added much value to the initiative as people involved learnt from each other in an iterative way. The importance of using a Both Ways approach was consistently highlighted by local community members as indispensable for local involvement and control and for development of mutual trust and respect;

- embracing Indigenous (intercultural) communication processes - such as the use of cultural metaphors and storytelling - were an important part of working together, and communicating and negotiating shared meaning;

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10 Refer to page 39 for a more detailed discussion around ‘interculturality’.
• the strong commitment to community projects by community education leaders and Indigenous corporations and other stakeholders was seen to be due in part to this approach but also relates to the fact that this short-term initiative enabled some components of the long-term visions of some communities that were already clear to be progressed. This also, of course, reflects these leaders’ high level of commitment for education, leadership and advancement in their communities; and
• WCE activities that included, or focused on, integrating cultural considerations, practices and approaches were highly valued by Indigenous community members and led to ownership over processes and activities.

**Recommendation 4:** Value Indigenous cultures as a rich part of Australia’s heritage and identity, and as an essential element of establishment of local control and ownership.

Strong and trusting relationships that developed within the WCE team enabled rich engagement and consultation within the team and between and within the six partner communities. The relationship between Indigenous culture and identity and education pathways are complex but a general consensus appears to exist on the following statements:

• strong cultural knowledge and practices act as a foundation for succeeding in ‘Western’ forms of education;
• although Indigenous cultural knowledges took first priority, Indigenous community leaders passionately believe in the importance of Western education and that Indigenous and Western education practices are mutually supportive;
• community leaders are worried about the preservation of their languages and cultures into the future;
• community leaders have many different roles and identities, or ‘hats’ – they do not only identify as Indigenous; they are also community leaders, board members, school teachers, mothers, fathers, researchers etc.; and
• it is the ability to negotiate these different ‘hats’ that maximises an individual’s potential for success in life, being able to slip between different identities and worlds of meaning. (Aikman, 1997; Kymlicka, 2003; Ujitami & Volet, 2008). The WCE initiative refers to the complex intersection and overlap of cultures and identities as ‘interculturality’

WCE community based staff and other community leaders who have navigated the educational pathway, and who hold leadership positions in their community have lived experienced of the tensions and dilemmas of the intersection of mainstream and Indigenous cultures. In functioning within these varying cultures they have acquired confidence, skills and knowledge that allows them to operate and negotiate interculturality and to act as mentors and role-models within their community. They are able to ‘wear different hats’ and have expressed pride in academic achievement of themselves and their families.

‘We are proud of our achievements.’ WCE Community Researcher, Galiwin’ku.

Though there are challenges, those leaders employed within the WCE initiative did not view acquiring a mainstream education as being contrary to Indigenous cultural learning. They saw the immense difficulties to be surmounted for those who do have aspirations, with the system being described as ‘a jungle’. It was considered important to highlight that data obtained through the WCE initiative indicated that community leaders in partner communities do not see Western education as being assimilatory or harmful – but that it is inaccessible and at a distance.
Nakata (2013) reports that traditional discourse about Indigenous affairs fails ‘to engage with the complexity of the contemporary space in which we as Indigenous people find ourselves today’ (p.289). He states that ‘in the rush to overcome the domination of Western knowledge through restorations of Indigenous language, concepts and knowledge, the complexities of the historical and contemporary convergences between them are not examined in enough depth.’ He argues that resistance to the assimilatory tendencies of Australian education systems has led to rejection of Western knowledge, theory and practice, and expresses concern about this. Indigenous agency is being stripped from analysis in favour of indigenous affirmation and assertions. Although Both Ways philosophy is a more commonly used concept within Indigenous settings, and is used for simplicity in this report, theory around the notion of interculturality was supported by WCE data. The broad range of projects developed though the WCE initiative saw positive engagement as they operated within an intercultural space and provided flexibility for local people to be able to move within these spaces as was necessary. Awareness of interculturality also assisted in team communication as it meant that the genuine tensions and dilemmas in communicating could be acknowledged and consciously negotiated.

Nakata’s Indigenous standpoint theory (2007) encourages Indigenous researchers to utilise their socio-cognitive interpretations of the world to identify beliefs and assumptions that are taken for granted by the wider society. The continual tensions that inform and limit what can and cannot be said every day forms part of this. Such tensions within this initiative included to some degree perceptions of non-Indigenous staff about the extent to which non-Indigenous members of the WCE team could or should provide input into consultation and decision-making. Having said this, however, the value and privilege of learning from senior Indigenous leaders in a team environment was generally thought of as the priority.

Practically, operating interculturally was potentially tiring for all staff, but in particular for Indigenous community-based staff. Functioning within unfamiliar environments – for example, the university – receiving large amounts of new information and vocabulary while speaking English as a second language necessitated a slow and patient process, which affected logistics and timeframes. This was combined with the regular requirements for travel, the logistics on arrival and poor health in a number of cases. They were challenges which had to be considered when for example, scheduling lead in times for travel and events, arranging agendas and workshop programs, planning activities and communicating with each other.

Operating interculturally was also challenging for campus-based staff – some more than others. Non-Indigenous campus-based staff were travelling back and forth regularly to remote Indigenous communities and working in environments that were not necessarily familiar to them. Operating in settings with such high levels of uncertainty and unpredictability, where day-to-day priorities of community-based colleagues sometimes varied from organisational priorities of the initiative, was not easy. These visits were also time-limited, which added a certain amount of pressure. Earlier suggestions about staff living or staying in communities for longer durations were not approved – mainly due to the cost factor, since accommodation costs in communities are extremely high. Longer stays – at least during the initial consultation and relationship develop process – could have relieved some of this pressure.

Even when campus based staff members had pre-existing relationships with the communities they were working with, there were constant challenges in ensuring that they were acting, speaking and working in a way that was considered appropriate by their community-based Indigenous colleagues. Indigenous community-based staff and community members consistently demonstrated patience and understanding for non-Indigenous members in their ongoing learning. This gradual process of getting to know each other and the joint learning process should not be undervalued and is an important element of working in partnership in this setting.
Working interculturally was perhaps even more complex for Indigenous campus-based staff who found themselves in a place where they were not necessarily part of the local community, but were obliged to adopt certain behaviours when working with Indigenous community-based staff. Open discussion was usually effective in resolving these difficulties.

‘With me being Aboriginal – part of our role was to make meaningful relationships in community so I do that, but then obligation comes with that and it’s something I can’t control, it just is. So now that I’m connected to [community-based WCE staff] in that way, there’s things I can’t do. If they say, ‘no’ I can’t do it. If they say, ‘Do this’ I have to do it, I can’t say, ‘No, I can’t do that’... Sometimes I try to go in the western way and do connections that they don’t approve of. They’re very good because I can tell they’re annoyed by it and they may verbalise that as well, but then we talk more and move on.’

- Indigenous campus-based WCE team member.

Other challenges associated with implementing the approach included the time that was required to ensure effective implementation in remote and very remote settings, from within a large organisation, with a restricted timeframe, with confident and experienced staff who had not worked with each other in the past and who came from very different backgrounds. Understandably there were differences in perspectives around how the initiative should best be implemented. It was highly challenging to negotiate these at both organisational and community levels and share them in a way which informed future direction and approach given the high levels of travel and the complexity of this environment.

Recommendation 5: Prioritise Indigenous voices in programming decisions, but encourage debate and critical thinking involving other experts and the literature.

Recommendation 6: Embed reflection about interculturality in internal evaluation and learning processes.

Local community leaders played lead roles in determining a number of features of each community project. At the whole of team level, Indigenous community-based staff were heavily involved in deciding reflection topics and leading group reflection activities. As much as was logistically possible, the perspectives of these leaders were included in WCE activities that occurred in urban centres, such as at conferences and high level meetings. This usually occurred through their physical presence at these events, however, on occasion video recordings were played to audiences when this was not possible.

The flexible approach to research and evaluation had some benefits for the program. There was strong involvement of community-based staff in the research and evaluation activities that were conducted in each community project, and as a result these projects and the resulting the recommendations regarding community perspectives about higher education are strongly grounded in the perspectives of remote Indigenous community leaders. This is an important outcome of the initiative as too often the voices of people in remote Indigenous communities are not heard in educational policies, policy discourses and programs. This also served to enable Both Ways capacity building; non-Indigenous people involved learnt about culturally relevant data collection tools and analysis methods, for example, and vice versa.

The collaborative process that was employed to develop the WCE Initiative Community Level Planning and Evaluation Guidelines and the WCE Initiative Research and Evaluation Framework was valued by the team. It enabled the team to abide by the principles that were important to Indigenous staff, including inclusion of Indigenous perspectives throughout the process of project implementation. It also assisted in building team cohesion after a challenging start to the project.
It is to be noted that in attempting to combine developmental evaluation and participatory action research approaches together in this setting there were no guidelines to follow. Developmental evaluation itself is an emerging field of expertise, and the remote NT context is unique in many ways. It was unknown how this approach should be implemented as, to our knowledge in the NT, it had not been trialled before in such a large scale project. The WCE initiative gave it a try, and although the challenges were significant, there is learning to be gained.

For most of 2015, there was limited evaluative data collected or shared from WCE community projects amongst the WCE team to assist in project development. This was influenced by a combination of:

- unclear aims and scope of the project;
- insufficient evaluation staffing capacity to support the evaluation process and the time intensiveness of the approach;
- campus-based team members’ roles had been designated as ‘research active’;
- the ideological view of some campus-based staff members that protection of intellectual property of communities took priority over broader team goals; and
- the time required to design and establishing the WCE initiative in each community.

Feedback was provided by evaluation staff regarding the need to agree on a common approach to data collection and sharing, however, the flexible approach to participatory action research was supported by the rest of the team. Campus-based team members were encouraged by evaluation staff and the Program Manager numerous times to participate in the evaluation process, however, some campus based staff did not collect or share evaluative data. These considerations were particularly important for team reflection and development, the sharing of useful information with the Steering Group, and on final evaluation and reporting. Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) Initiative Community Evaluation Reports therefore have utilised varying amounts and quality of evaluative data.

The approaches taken to the participatory action research process, and therefore partly the solutions for implementing change, were at the discretion of the campus-based team members who worked with Indigenous community members and community-based staff to implement the projects in each community. Shortfalls in the design of research and evaluation systems and the issues described above impacted iteratively upon one another and thus they were not resolved; rather community level projects progressed with a diverse range of approaches and areas of focus.

Evaluations are essential to policy and service refinement, analysis of program impacts and outcomes, and sharing of learning amongst many other reasons. The Hudson report (2016) demonstrated that less than ten per cent of federal, state and territory and non-governmental or not for profit Indigenous-specific programs had been evaluated either during or after implementation. The report also highlighted that most Indigenous programs continue to ‘treat Indigenous people as a homogenous entity and do not take into account differing levels of need’ (p.2). The reality is that in order for programs, services and policy to be able to respond to the diverse needs of Indigenous communities and evaluate process and outcomes, time is required. Had the evaluation process functioned in a more effective way or had the project been implemented in a more ‘structured’ way, the timeframe of the project may still not have been adequate to enable tangible, evidence-based outcomes to emerge.

**Recommendation 7:** Agree to a common approach to research and evaluation, including data collection and dissemination systems. Ensure this is embedded from the outset and factored into the design of the project.
The environment in remote Indigenous communities is one in which things cannot be rushed. In the first instance, relationships and trust must exist for any program or research to work well. In remote communities, people are extremely busy and there are often many demands placed on local organisations and staff.

‘There’s Balanda [non-Indigenous people] coming in sometimes, ‘We’re here, we want to call a meeting.’ Sometimes I don’t have enough time because I have so many demands from the government, and from those kinds of people, you see.’
- WCE Community Researcher, Yirrkala.

At the local organisational level, multiple things are often juggled at one time including delivery of core programs and services, hosting visitors, running events, supporting or participating in other community programs and events, in addition to other every day duties involved in running an organisation. Emotional or stressful events have widespread consequences and it is critical to respect the grief that these events cause, and the necessary cultural obligations and healing process. The initiative had to be respectful and supportive of such features of the environment.

‘For the research [during Cyclone Lam, February 2015]... how can you interview me if I’m not ready, if my backyard is still dirty and I’m packing all my clothes, packing all my blankets and sheets to move to a demountable or moving to the tents. We had to move all of them to the oval. People weren’t ready for that. Children were all over the place. The children didn’t go to school. People were worrying for their house, they were stressed and in pain at that time.’
- WCE Initiative Community Researcher, Galiwinku.

**Recommendation 8:** Factor timeframes and the socio-political, cultural and environmental context into determining program goals.
Social Network Analysis (SNA)

The SNA diagrams were utilised in various ways in each community project, with five of the six communities collecting SNA data that was intended to guide engagement processes. The diagrams produced demonstrated in a quantitative manner the ‘amount’ of engagement that had progressively occurred along the lifespan of projects. This was a way of representing the significant investment that was placed in engaging with broad community networks. The data also provides a picture of the expansiveness of the networks developed; by March 2016, which was the last point of data collection, up to 38 different organisations had been engaged with in each community.

The Yuendumu SNA process was unique in that it mapped leadership positions held by Yuendumu community leaders. The diagrams demonstrated that although several community leaders are represented on local Boards in a voluntary capacity, senior and middle management positions in the community are almost entirely held by non-Indigenous people. This highlighted the need for supported career pathways into these roles for local Indigenous community members. This data was fed back to community organisations, with one organisation then leading a discussion with its board members to employ and mentor a Warlpiri [local Indigenous] person in a senior role.

Tennant Creek community-based staff showed a particular amount of interest in the SNA process and requested that the diagrams be rearranged to be able to analyse engagement across different ‘sectors’ in the community, such as Aboriginal Corporations, research and education organisations, and government bodies. This highlighted to WCE staff working in Tennant Creek that up until that point in time the consultation process had engaged a wide range of stakeholders.

While definitions of terms such as ‘engagement’, an ‘individual’, and an ‘organisation’ were defined during the team SNA workshop in October 2014, it appears that the definitions in SNA data collection may not have been as clear cut as was thought. Despite providing preparatory training and support for staff, there were some difficulties experienced in the data collection process that led to inconsistency in the data recorded.

It is to be noted that SNA data was only collected and included in the SNA process for engagements that occurred when campus-based staff were present in community. This means that many formal and informal interactions throughout the project of community-based staff with stakeholders in their home communities were not captured. The data would have been significantly different if these interactions had also been mapped.

SNA data sometimes was not integrated into Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) Initiative Community Evaluation Reports. This is in part due to staff turnover through the course of the initiative, time pressures and the significant workload of team members.

SNA is a useful process for providing quantitative information about networks and engagement, however, requires significant time and effort to ensure consistency in definitions, process, method and recording so that it can be implemented and integrated into overall work in a meaningful and systematic way.
Figure 6: Yuendumu SNA diagram depicting Indigenous community leaders (blue circles) that are represented on three or more Boards of community organisations (pink circles).

Figure 7: Gunbalanya SNA diagram depicting engagement of WCE staff (centre blue circle) with individuals (orange circles) in community organisations (blue circles). Diagram includes data collected until March 2016.
Process: Governance and partnerships

Some positive features of the governance process (ie. the Steering Group) were reported, including that the perspectives of community representatives were highly valued at these meetings, and that community representatives felt empowered in having the opportunity to share their points of view directly with high level staff members in represented institutions.

‘For me, to be able to see that presence, it made me so proud, having such strong visions for our own people. We live in that community, and we will die there. We have our families there and we want the young ones to follow our steps.’

WCE Steering Group community representative.

‘There wasn’t a person around the table who was going to interrupt when the community elders wanted to say something and they did, they took advantage of that and they brought it right back to the pragmatic realities that they’re facing on the ground. I think it was extremely important for the Steering Group to bear witness to that and to learn from that.’

Non-Indigenous WCE Steering Group member.

In terms of the role of the Steering Group, the Steering Group’s function in supporting institutional change within represented organisations was hindered because of several intermingling factors:

Internal factors (arising from processes relating to WCE implementation)

- Varying interpretations of WCE aims, objectives and scope.
- Team members and Steering Group members had differing perceptions regarding the role of the Steering Group, which related to these differing perceptions of aims and objectives of the initiative.
- WCE team members were sometimes confused about, or resistant to, sharing information relating to planning and evaluation; some staff did not produce community action plans when requested, and shared limited amounts of evaluative data.
- When team members did share data it was not consistent across the collective WCE team because of the varied aims, objectives and approaches encompassed within each community.
- There was less regular communication between the Steering Group and the WCE team than what was requested by team members.
- The broad scope of the initiative meant there were many different activity areas occurring at once; meetings were reported by some Steering Group members to be a one-way transfer of information rather than an opportunity to discuss opportunities for system improvements.
- Challenges in the developmental evaluation process led to disparities in the information that the Steering Group could have utilised in a productive way (evaluative data) and what was actually reported (description of activities).
External factors (arising from the Steering Group or the environment)

- All Steering Group members valued the presence and input of remote Indigenous community representatives but it was questioned whether the involvement of team members in the project may have been a conflict of interest.
- There was questioning about the NT DoE’s commitment to the project due to the level of seniority of the DoE representative of the group and a recurring change of membership.
- Individual representatives were often busy people and sometimes did not attend meetings regularly.
- Several political considerations were in place relating to institutional histories, agreements and circumstances; such as an historically competitive relationship between BIITE and CDU, and the rollout of the NT DoE’s Indigenous Education Strategy.

 Recommendation 9: Agree on a clear purpose for governance structures. Align this with aims and objectives.

 Recommendation 10: Prioritise purposeful, transparent and timely governance communication.

 Recommendation 11: Do groundwork in establishing partnerships and pay attention to ongoing communication.

Process: Implementation

The relationship building process, as already mentioned, was imperative to establishing a new initiative such as this. Relationships and trust are known to be precursors of a strong consultative process, particularly in a remote Indigenous community context, and these also take time to develop (Hunt, 2013). The WCE initiative invested significantly in establishing and maintaining relationships and trust in the community setting.

‘We just don’t walk in and say, ‘Excuse me, come here, I want to talk to you,’ that’s you making a person a bit frightened you know, you’ve got to stand back a bit. If you’re going with your manners and approach him and want to talk to him, you want to have a good yarn with him, to sit down and give you his story, he will relax, he knows. He knows that you want to have a good conversation with him and he wants to hear your stories, where you’re coming from and all that.’

- WCE Community Researcher, Kabulwarnamu.

Consultation processes in WCE partner communities were led by local Indigenous community members and Indigenous community-based staff, once they were employed. These individuals have extensive knowledge about cultural, social and historical features of the community context. Only those that have lived the reality of life in their community understand best how to negotiate it. Finally, and most importantly, the initiative was premised on the belief that Indigenous people can and will, take on responsibility for what happens in their communities and assume control when they are given the space to do so.
With pre-existing relationships and local knowledge of community-based staff leading the process, the consultation process looked different in each community. Some common success factors in this process included the following:

- not rushing the process
- understanding that people often have many other socio-political, cultural, familial and organisational responsibilities
- understanding that sometimes it is not the right time to talk about certain things
- being aware of body language, gender sensitivities, language considerations and other cultural norms
- non-Indigenous staff endeavouring to learn about the kinship system
- listening respectfully and graciously when Indigenous knowledge is shared
- getting to know people personally where there were not pre-existing relationships
- treating everyone as equals, appreciating differences and being respectful
- participating in or supporting other activities or events that may not be part of core business
- engaging in humour
- regularly reflecting on the successes and challenges in the process, and agreeing to solutions for improvement

The timeframe for implementation placed pressure on all staff throughout the development and implementation of the initiative. Immense frustration with constantly changing government policies was often palpable, and at times it was important to provide time and space to air this frustration. The 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response, also known as ‘the Intervention’, was mentioned numerous times as having done damage to communities. Historical events such as this have cumulatively eroded trust in outsiders and as a result time to build this trust is lengthy and requires patience.

“We’ve gone round and round. We’re not going anywhere. It’s frustrating our people. They’re controlling people, pushing people down, not giving us any powers, not recognising our rights.’

- WCE Community Researcher, Tennant Creek.

**Recommendation 12:** Invest in the consultation and relationship development process, and systematise reflective learning within this.

The WCE initiative invested in group reflection sessions to help develop shared understandings about key concepts and terminology, roles, responsibilities and WCE aims in the establishment phase and later about important updates and team progress. Thrice annual whole of team workshops were a valued space to discuss and learn about, sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly, such things. Communication within teams working in each community was generally open, honest and transparent.

WCE team meeting agendas were relatively flexible, and meetings facilitated in a way that was inclusive of, and valued differing perspectives. Time was given to the exploration of histories, experiences, beliefs and metaphors. There was also priority placed on seeing some of the positive examples of work happening on site in communities; the WCE team had the chance to meet with a range of key local stakeholders in Tennant Creek and Maningrida. Community-based staff said they highly valued the opportunities to see
ways in which local organisations are supporting educational pathways of people in other communities. Strong team relationships were also developed in part due to these workshops.

‘I’ve been working here for 20 years, and I have found something new like my family now. You’re family in this group and I am very pleased you know, I feel safe.’

- WCE Community Researcher, Yirrkala.

It is essential to continually reflect on the role of linguistic, historical, political, intercultural and geographical factors on communication. Some of the considerations in communicating effectively in this context that have been described include differing modes of discourse and worldviews, the dominance of Western-centric service models, cultural and linguistic distance and staff cross-cultural competencies (Cass et al., 2002). Within the WCE team alone, more than twenty-seven languages were spoken collectively. Email is not the preferred method of communication for people in remote communities, often due to a combination of English and computer literacy challenges, however oral communication was often not always possible. Effort was made to overcome some of the challenges brought about by distance through provision of laptops, iPads, mobile phones and dongles to many staff. Of course, human errors were sometimes made and correspondence was sometimes forgotten. Some efforts were made to develop digital literacy with community-based staff by the WCE Coordinator and Community Teachers’ Liaison Leader, however, other tasks were seen as higher priorities by the CELs and/or MEOs, who were often the key point of contact for community projects.

There was, on the odd occasion, evidence of intercultural miscommunication between non-Indigenous staff and Indigenous staff or community members. To some degree, miscommunication between non-Indigenous, and even amongst Indigenous people, with local Indigenous community members is unavoidable and measures must be put in place that enable ongoing learning about, and resolution, of such challenges (Cass et al., 2002; Cunningham, 2003; Eades, 1991; Royal, 2003).

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<tr>
<th>Recommendation 13:</th>
<th>Prioritise reflection on communication processes in program evaluation systems and processes.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Recommendation 14:</td>
<td>Maximise digital literacy skills development, where required, as a means to assist with communication across geographic boundaries and for broader staff benefit.</td>
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The pressure to publish in the academic context has been well documented (Adam & Knight, 2002; Angell, 1986; De Rond & Miller, 2005; Devlin, 2016; Foster, Rzhetsky, & Evans, 2015; M. Larkin, 1999; Lee, 2014; Sarewitz, 2016; Vale & Karataglidis, 2016; van Dalen & Henkens, 2012). That the initiative was positioned within an academic setting, in combination with the designation of program staff positions as research active roles caused some tendency of activities to be focused on research focused tasks rather than action. There existed some lack of clarity around what constituted ‘core’ project work and the way in which related ‘research heavy’ tasks fit within the project scope. There were perceptions within the team that research activity within the initiative impeded progress to some degree.
It was unforeseen that some components within organisational systems, policies and administration support would be such a challenge to navigate. To illustrate this, some examples of the tasks that, in other contexts may not be such an issue to resolve, are highlighted below:

- The procurement process required a Certificate of Exemption to procure services if the intended service provider was a sole provider in that remote community. This sometimes took several months to obtain, which in the span of two and a half years was a significant period of time.
- Support offered by staff management systems for mediating staff management issues was less than ideal, and policies were vague and open to individual interpretation.
- Policies for some finance and administration processes were unclear and poorly suited for work in remote Indigenous communities, and there were no clear guidelines to direct what to do if it there were perceived policy breaches.
- There was a systemic organisational miscommunication of finance and human resourcing systems that led to confusion around monitoring of expenditure. Much time, sometimes hours or days at a time, was spent communicating between different areas within CDU to resolve these issues.
- There was a significant administrative burden, particularly for staff travel arrangements which included paper based movement requisitions and cumbersome booking processes through the corporate travel agency, that lacked flexibility and were poorly designed to cater for the needs of remote travel.

Factors such as those above added significant burden to the workload of the WCE Program Manager and WCE Coordinator. There was a swift response to realisation that support in this area had to be increased for WCE initiative to be able to operate effectively. It is crucial, however, that the supporting organisational environment be assessed when designing programs.

**Process: Dissemination**

The effectiveness of the dissemination process for collective findings was limited by the approach taken, implementation challenges and the timeframe. Multiple presentations were co-created and co-presented with community-based and campus-based staff at a number of conferences and forums. However, the extent to which collective findings could be used to inform opportunities for systems-level change was generally limited.
5. Achievements of the WCE initiative

This chapter includes a brief summary of achievements of the WCE initiative. Evaluative data to inform this chapter includes team meeting and workshop notes and observations, community- and campus-based staff interviews, Steering Group representative interviews and community stakeholder interviews.

The achievements and developments described in this chapter and in Chapter 6 should also be considered in the context of working in partnership. It is important to acknowledge that much work was already occurring within partner organisations. In some cases, the WCE initiative provided facilitation or support for processes or actions that were already underway. It is also important to acknowledge that for many of the developments described below other programs or work has been occurring simultaneously, for example, the NT DoE Indigenous Education Strategy. It is emphasised that what is reported below is the result of work of a wide range of people who were involved in WCE activities - whether that be community members, employees in communities, members of the WCE team, key partner representatives and a broader network of actors.

Relationship development

A number of mutually beneficial relationships were formed or strengthened through the WCE initiative. New relationships formed included those between community education leaders and high level staff in partner organisations. This occurred predominantly through regular Steering Group meetings but also through activities such as remote graduation ceremonies, workshops, conferences and a Joint Remote Schools Council Gathering. Six Indigenous community education leaders that were employed through the initiative were awarded honorary appointments by CDU, a process supported considerably by the initiative. Several staff members at CDU have also formed relationships with these community leaders and continue to collaborate in various research initiatives.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Galiwin’ku research organisation Yalu Marŋgithinyaraw Aboriginal Corporation, CDU and Menzies. The WCE initiative supported the negotiation process and an event to mark its establishment. This was attended in person by several high-level staff at CDU, including the former Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership, Professor Steven Larkin. These relationships have developed communication channels between urban based stakeholders and leaders in remote communities that will support ongoing strategy and project development, research and collaboration.

Interview data indicated that some pre-existing relationships between stakeholders in communities had been made stronger since the WCE initiative began. This is particularly important in this context; the siloed approach that government departments and organisations working in the community often take, for various reasons, was highlighted as a barrier to cross-sectoral collaboration in the research and education sector by many members of partner WCE communities. Relationships were reported to have strengthened between the school and community members in Alekerange and Yirrkala; the school and the Mediation Centre in Yuendumu; and the school and Yalu Marŋgithinyaraw in Galiwin’ku.

It was reported that relationships were developed between community members and members of some represented organisations on the Steering Group. NAILSMA’s Certificate III in Indigenous Land and Sea Management, which they had piloted as part of their agreement with the WCE initiative, was put on scope for delivery by BIITE as a result of relationships developed through the Steering Group. This was viewed as a positive outcome by both parties.
Contributions to the evidence base

The WCE initiative has made a strong contribution to the Indigenous higher education sector through its approach to research in remote Indigenous communities. The perspectives about higher education of people in these communities in the NT have been encompassed within the recommendations contained in this report, within the six Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) Initiative Evaluation Reports, and within other documentation produced – such as the Collective School Council Statement on Remote Indigenous Education (available at https://remotengagetoedu.com.au/projects/joint-remote-indigenous-school-council-gathering/). This is an achievement within the context of educational policy and policy development and the evidence base generated can be utilised by a range of decision-makers within the setting to inform future policy reform and development.
6. **Emerging developments**

This chapter includes a brief summary of developments that began to emerge in the later stages of the WCE initiative in 2016. Data that was used to inform this section includes a selection of the various data sources listed on page 38. Due the challenges that have been explained, there were limitations in the amount and type of evaluation data that was collected to demonstrate the impact to date of these ‘developments’. The information reported here should therefore be interpreted with caution.

This chapter will categorise developments supported by the WCE initiative by those that occurred in:

- partner communities; and
- at the ‘systems’ level.

**Community level initiatives**

The initiatives undertaken in communities were developed in response to identified priorities in each community. They are consistent with strategies to improve remote community educational outcomes that have been described in the literature (for example, Guenther, Osborne, Disbray & Bat, 2016). Some of these will require further funding to continue to progress.

**Community disposition towards higher education**

The WCE initiative was requested to report on ‘community disposition towards higher education’ as a key performance indicator. It proved to be extremely challenging to measure this, and to be able to demonstrate change, given the qualitative nature of appropriate data and the timeframe of this initiative. The following observations have been made relating to the WCE team’s interpretation of indications that community disposition towards higher education has been influenced through the WCE initiative.

Increased awareness about higher education pathways was reported by stakeholders in Tennant Creek, Yirrkala and Maningrida. While there is some ongoing remote delivery of further education services, predominantly VET courses, resourcing is generally steadily declining in the sector. Over time this has caused the physical accessibility of further education to significantly reduce. It was reported that CDU and BIITE do not have a strong presence in remote communities because of this. The informational support that was offered to community members in these communities about available study options, study support, and how to go about enrolment, for example, appeared to be a valued opportunity for community members to learn about how they could realise their aspirations.

Some stakeholders commented on the importance of the remote Indigenous education leaders demonstrating to other community members role modelling their success in education and employment.

There is evidence to suggest that some community-based researchers involved in the WCE initiative learnt about pathways into higher education, study options and available support. One community-based WCE researcher highlighted that community members saw him as a champion for higher education in his community:
When we talk to people in a group discussion, they think over the conversation we’ve had where we try to talk about it [higher education], sharing the ideas with those people. Later on, they won’t talk to you immediately, but now they know you, that you are there in that specific job about higher education. So by the next time, people sort of come forward and ask you a question. How can I get myself in there? How can I now get support to go to uni? Who can I talk to? So there are people - they’re listening and they’re watching. And then the next visit, people will start to approach in their own ways and start talking to you. So that’s a great achievement.’

- WCE Initiative Community Researcher, Gunbalanya.

The data highlights that for some of the community-based staff who were employed through the WCE initiative, their motivations to continue advocating for higher education and research have increased. Again, it would be imprudent to claim that the WCE initiative is responsible for this. These are highly committed and passionate individuals who have been working in the education setting for a long time. Nevertheless, they were provided with up to date information and increased access to resources and expertise during their employment with the WCE initiative. There are indications, that the conversations and learning that occurred during WCE implementation stimulated some individuals to pursue their own educational goals. Two community-based team members enrolled in Master’s degree courses, and another applied for a fellowship to conduct research into community-based Indigenous higher education.

‘I can recall before WCE, we’ve never really come around the table, we weren’t taken seriously and for me, I see that our people in the community that are leaders of our organisations and people that are highly regarded in our community, see that Indigenous education is an important area for us to come together, it makes us want to come together, it makes us want to work together and find a way forward together. That’s one thing that really stands out for me, is that ‘wanting’ to come together, ‘wanting’ to see action.’

- WCE Community Researcher, Tennant Creek.

The WCE initiative organised or supported many aspiration building activities including graduation celebrations [4], careers expos [8], student pathway visits to Darwin [3], human rights training [2 students] and a number of career pathway mentoring activities. Significant interest and engagement observed in these activities in addition to some observations by community stakeholders of their increasing confidence, however, are a marker that these events were part of the overall picture of building knowledge about, and confidence to aspire to, higher education. Several students who participated in WCE aspiration building activities have gone on to completion of VET studies or employment, although of course the WCE initiative is one part of this picture.

Interagency workshops delivered at Maningrida and Gunbalanya resulted in discussions around research protocols and the development of Community Action Plans that encompassed self-identified opportunities to support students and potential students engage in further education in their communities. Upon cessation of the initiative, some stakeholders in Gunbalanya reported that they felt motivated to follow through with the actions in this Action Plan to help support student study aspirations.

‘This has already opened up broader discussions about communication and decision-making processes within my team and is something that we have been able to begin feeding back to the higher education institutions conducting research with our team.’

- WCE Interagency Workshop participant, Gunbalanya.
Upon cessation of operational funding, all communities that partnered with WCE had expressed increasing interest in extending local implementation of WCE activities. Even though WCE implementation in each community looked quite different, WCE community leaders were keen to continue the work that they had developed in their communities.

‘Last week we did a proposal to continue the Raypirri [Both Ways mentoring] work. There is a lot of involvement from different community organisations. CDEP supervising the workers – they are involved; Night Patrol; Yalu; Marthakal Homelands; where can we take the children for this discipline. From the start – it’s growing bigger – from the small mentoring program, it’s going out in to the community. WCE planted the seed. This is the outcome.’

- WCE Community Researcher, Galiwin’ku.

‘I’d like to stay [with WCE] a few more years to really, really build the communities aspirations about education pathways. Get all of the organisations, government service providers, Indigenous organisations and Education Departments working together. If things are working properly in the community and people are really, really working together, it would be so different.’

- WCE Community Researcher, Gunbalanya and Maningrida.

‘We come here to see that we can come together strong. We come here to see what strength we can muster from everybody, all the organisations who talk about Indigenous education in Tennant. I said, ‘Why can’t we be leading the way in Tennant Creek? Let’s keep going from here on. Why don’t we do our own?’

- WCE Community Researcher, Tennant Creek.

‘The fishtrap metaphor is something within Yolngu culture that inspires us on our education pathways. We have that foundation, but we have a problem with ongoing funding. There are a lot of things that need to be done. We want to continue working with everyone in community – especially the young school leavers. We’ve been doing a lot of mentoring and school leadership. We need to keep building that understanding.’

- WCE Community Researcher, Yirrkala.

‘We started things up with the WCE initiative and now it’s really working very well in the community with the school and the other organisations, and we will continue ourselves - because of WCE it was possible. We want to continue the work ourselves in the community.’

- WCE Community Researcher, Yuendumu.
Impetus for existing community initiatives

For some communities, the WCE initiative was a valued opportunity to progress work that was part of pre-existing community aspirations. Community leaders in Yirrkala and Yuendumu, for example, have historically been strong advocates in the education space and utilised support provided by the WCE initiative to build on initiatives that had been developed over decades of work. School staff in Tennant Creek and Yirrkala reported that the WCE initiative provided a means for stimulating conversations that were already of interest in relation to education in the community.

‘We have been able to do things here in the school that we weren’t normally able to do – having workshops, forums and meetings that wouldn’t normally happen... They may have been things that we would have done – but having [the WCE initiative] involved it made us do them and really kicked things along.’

- Yirrkala Homelands School Principal.

‘Everything’s not going to happen overnight but those discussions help to move it along and do help in working towards something bigger.’

- Tennant Creek High School Teacher.

Similarly, Yalu’ Marŋgithinyaraw Aboriginal Corporation in Galiwin’ku has been heavily involved in numerous health and education research projects and they harnessed WCE funding and support to, amongst a number of other things, build the confidence and capacity of local Indigenous staff members.

‘Before, they were relying on me or on the Assistant Manager, or to other people who are Balanda [non-Indigenous] to do their planning to help them. But when WCE program came in, and when we employed the Skills Development Officer, [he] works to help and support the team of Yalu’ here. Now as you can see, they can do their own database recording, their own planning, even do their own programming, and typing reports.’

- Yalu Marŋgithinyaraw Manager, Galiwin’ku.

Mentoring and youth leadership

Several projects aimed at providing academic, leadership, and social and emotional support for students were implemented through the WCE initiative. The remote Indigenous Youth Leadership Summit was attended by more than thirty youth from around the NT and northern Western Australia. Participants commented that it was helpful for them to hear ideas from, and be inspired by, young leaders in other communities. There was excellent engagement by most participants in the activities that aimed to help them identify leadership qualities, identify their own areas of strength, and instil confidence in themselves to become future leaders of their communities.

Programs directly targeting school students were established in Yuendumu and Galiwin’ku. The Community School Safety Program in Yuendumu saw a number of conflicts successfully resolved through mediation, support and counselling.

‘Of the 35 youth offenders we have engaged with, only 3 have since re-offended.’

- Yuendumu Mediation Centre staff member.
Establishment of the mentoring program in Galiwin’ku was delayed and subsequently began with insufficient planning. The time factor, of course, was an important reason for this. During its operation, students were highly engaged in learning activities, however, the frequency of classes slowed down before the end of 2016.

Intensive mentoring activities occurred with several young people in Tennant Creek. As a result of this, mentored youth were able to complete Indigenous Human Rights professional learning courses, apply for a driver’s license, and in one case become employed at the local school.

‘[He] went a long way. Especially as a male person, you know. You don’t see very many local men from here do training like [he] did... I believe if it wasn’t for the mentoring that he received, he could have been just another one fell off the rails.’
- Tennant Creek Elder.

Cultural safety within schools

School staff in Tennant Creek High School, Alekerange and Galiwin’ku were confident that the WCE initiative had assisted to accelerate reform of education delivery in their community to include an increased focus on Indigenous perspectives. They believed that this helped new staff in particular to be better prepared to work with students and people in the communities. The Alekerange School Principal reported that the reflective process facilitated by WCE staff assisted teaching staff to identify priority areas for their own professional development to be able to support the use of Indigenous metaphors in the classroom.

Cultural awareness training for school staff in Galiwin’ku, according to a senior staff member, was part of a change in culture within the school that included a shift in expectations around how staff should be working together.

‘The Yolŋu voice has increased in the classroom, the teachers are more across why it’s important for children to understand their place in the classroom and their place in the community and their responsibilities and roles and so forth... I’m confident that what has been established now in the school will continue and a lot of that will continue through the Learning on Country project.’
- Senior staff member, Shepherdson College, Galiwin’ku.

‘[The WCE initiative] has made me think more broadly about the purpose of my teaching and who I am as a non-indigenous Australian and how I can promote reconciliation from within a classroom and within a school setting more broadly.’
- Tennant Creek High School Teacher.

‘The WCE has brought in an Aboriginal perspective which overlays and it should be part and parcel of the future delivery of education across the Territory, especially where you’ve got English as the second and third, fourth language. It’s also where you’ve got culture that drives individual and that identity type of things.’
- Tennant Creek Primary School Teacher.
**Language and cultural knowledge resources**

The development of language resources were valued by school staff in Yirrkala. They will be available to use in the future to support the protection of local language and culture. This was consistently put forward as a community priority and is consistent with perspectives put forward across all partner WCE communities regarding the need for local languages and culture to be an ongoing part of education and teaching.

’We now have three literacy production workers with the skills to produce the iBooks and explore the international market.’

- Yirrkala School Teacher.

The WCE initiative provided funding to the *North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA)* to identify opportunities for remote Indigenous students and adult learners to participate in higher education, specifically relating to land and sea management. NAILSMA’s work resulted in a number of project successes. These include contextualisation of the teaching and learning content of a Certificate III in Indigenous Land Management, which is now on scope for delivery by BIITE as a result of pilot projects in Maningrida and Yirrkala, development of and training for iTracker applications to support literacy skill development and learning, and production of linguistically and culturally relevant training and learning resources such as books and posters. NAILSMA’s work has also seen numerous other successes described in their reports, which are available at:


The Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods (RIEL) at CDU was funded through the WCE initiative to develop a suite of culturally appropriate training units relevant to Indigenous environmental management. The units take a transformational education approach and rely on the knowledge and expertise of local people to deliver aspects of the training. Course content for twelve North Australian Fire and Emergency Management units were developed, and the final report mapped potential VET qualifications within which these units may be accredited.

**Indigenous research capacity**

It was viewed as important for people in remote communities to have control over research. In 2015, the WCE initiative organised the Remote Indigenous Researchers Forum. This was attended by 22 remote Indigenous researchers from around the NT. The group expressed a passion for establishing an ongoing network of Indigenous researchers that could be drawn upon for their expertise, thus it was decided that Research ‘Us’ would be established. Research ‘Us’ became an incorporated organisation and was signatory to an MoU with CDU that suggested agreement to ongoing support by the institution. Unfortunately at the time of cessation of operational funding for the WCE initiative, activity from within Research ‘Us’ had slowed down as members were experiencing difficulties getting in touch with each other without the support of the Project Coordinator. Some smaller groups of individuals who were members of Research ‘Us’ have now gone on to develop their own independent Indigenous research groups.

Capacity for ongoing, locally led research was developed in Yuendumu. A Warlpiri Research Centre has been established to design and conduct Indigenous research projects, and for the digitisation and repatriation of archival research material. The WCE initiative provided support for equipping the renovation of this space. A significant amount of Warlpiri research material has already been repatriated and digitised through the Warlpiri Research Centre; Granites Mines Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation (GMAAAC) also contributed funds for this project.
Community governance and inter-organisational collaboration

Significant efforts were made in some communities to address weaknesses in community educational governance and inter-organisational collaboration. Yuendumu, Tennant Creek, Maningrida and Gunbalanya projects in particular spent lengthy periods of time consulting with individuals across different sectors in attempts to improve communication between organisations. The goal was to achieve consensus about how these organisations could best work in harmony to support education and further education needs of people in the community. Multiple stakeholders from across Maningrida and Gunbalanya, in particular, developed community specific action plans with identified opportunities for collaboration, such as supporting work experience students and conducting workplace skillset reviews. Tennant Creek has been a site of inter-organisational conflict for a number of years; some progress was made in smoothing historically tumultuous relationships. These relationships, however, are highly complex and difficult to influence.

‘...Community networks of family authority and responsibility have been strengthened and made more harmonious through inter-agency collaboration.’

- Yuendumu Mediation Centre staff member.

A number of positive developments were seen in relation to school governance in Yuendumu and Tennant Creek. In Tennant Creek, representation of local Indigenous community members on school councils increased by 10% at the primary school and by 20% at the high school. There is still room to improve the degree of genuine participation of these members in decision making; although this was a step forward, one member reported feeling intimidated and somewhat unsupported during meetings.

Yuendumu School Council achieved a full complement of members in 2016, representative of every different family group in Yuendumu. For a number of years, meetings had not been achieving quorum and the school’s constitution was outdated. The WCE initiative supported a collaboration between Yuendumu School and the PaCE project, auspiced by the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC), to update the school council constitution to meet current standards. The WCE initiative and the Yuendumu School also developed a submission for the review of the Education Act (NT), facilitated by the Council of Government School Organisations (COGSO), regarding its use of the term ‘parent’. Legislation was passed successfully in which the definition of ‘parent’ was changed to recognise Indigenous customary law and tradition in relation to responsibility of a child, and this is now reflected in the language used in COGSO publications.

Indigenous leadership

Leadership capacity of the Indigenous community education leaders employed through, and involved with, the WCE initiative were supported throughout the implementation of the WCE. Of course, these leaders were already leaders for a reason; they are highly esteemed individuals who have extensive experience in education, health, governance, research, advocacy and many other fields. Their involvement in WCE, though, provided them with a platform to have their voice heard in a range of forums.
**Systems level initiatives**

The limited success in system level change that the WCE initiative contributed to partly reflects challenges experienced in the implementation process, the complexity of these systems, and to some extent the lack of clarity regarding the function of WCE key strategic partnerships. It also partly reflects the difficulties associated with achieving significant structural change at this level within such a short timeframe. Finally, the contextual challenges described in Chapter 2 are also factors. Nevertheless, some advances were made.

**Resources to inform research with remote Indigenous communities**

The revision of consent forms and information sheets during early consultation stages in Galiwin’ku and Yirrkala are displayed on the CDU website and are an example of culturally and linguistically appropriate consent process. See:

https://www.cdu.edu.au/research/ori/exemplar-cdu-research-project

WCE also provided support for the development of the online Indigenous research resource centre, found at:

http://www.cdu.edu.au/indigenous-leadership/ripci

These resources are aimed at researchers, academic supervisors, and graduate students who are researching in Indigenous spaces, topics, or communities. They explore the issues, challenges, and adaptations needed to make research practice ethical and culturally relevant.
The Strategic Priority Project (SPP) on adult English language, literacy and numeracy

Significant research and consultation for this project occurred with a broad range of stakeholders including subject specialists, high level CDU staff, Senior Indigenous leaders, Australian and NT Government staff, peak bodies, NGO staff and WCE Steering Group. The type and extent of input depended on the activities which were underway at the time. From January to July 2017 the primary focus of this SPP was within CDU itself – undertaking interviews, considering what was available for Indigenous adults wishing to improve their English LLN, how the ‘system’ worked. A workshop held in July 2016, attended by 33 University staff, provided an opportunity to discuss English LLN provision within the University, to network and explore current LLN-related English LLN enablers and barriers.

The SPP engendered broad based support within CDU. A small consultative group composed of specialist LLN practitioners and University staff/management informed the action and strategy of the SPP throughout its operation. The group has been strongly supported by Indigenous Elders from some of the WCE communities. These individuals attended workshops and meetings, provided video footage and been available to guide the process and the SPP manager – adding their perspectives and strength. The work of this group was supplemented by working groups on an ‘as needed’ basis.

This consultative group ensured that the presence of specialist knowledge and NT relevant experience and academic understanding and increased potential for strategic internal information sharing within the University; organisational learning and sustainable systems/service improvement; and provision of information on findings for use in strategic and operational plans within the University where required.

The direction of the SPP started to shift after the July workshop from initial CDU focus to an NT–wide collective focus. This shift was a response to low levels of participation in higher education and VET and indications that this was partly related to: a) low levels of English LLN; b) identification of the need for coordinated action around Indigenous adult English LLN; c) deficits in adult education policy and programs in the NT; d) the extent of need identified through interview; e) community conversations and desktop research; and f) stakeholder willingness to participate in collective processes.

The SPP was now aimed at building momentum for system-wide strategic change in the NT through increased engagement around LLN within university, government, non-government, business, industry and RTO sectors. Given the short-time frame it was not intended that NT–wide change would be achieved, but that change would be catalysed, interest increased, and stakeholder willingness to share expertise and resources would be demonstrated, acknowledged and documented.
In November 2016 eighty one individuals (36% Indigenous) from twenty-eight organisations and agencies attended a LLN workshop at Charles Darwin University (CDU) as part of the 2016 Indigenous Leaders conference. The approximately 80 attendees at this workshop agreed to be part of a network, which has subsequently increased to over 100 organisations and individuals. The basic elements of a consensus statement, ‘The Action Statement on Indigenous Adult English LLN in the NT’, were agreed upon and the Statement was released in April 2017. Attendees also expressed interest in attending the 2017 ACAL Conference, which will be held in Darwin in September 2017. Another symposium, post closure of the WCE was being arranged for the 12th September, 2017 at the time of writing – organised by the SPP Manager and the A/Director of the office of Learning and Teaching at CDU.

The SPP identified that there is no comprehensive source of adult LLN data for the Indigenous population of NT. Other jurisdictions use results from the 2011/12 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey to understand adult literacy and numeracy competency for their population. The PIAAC survey in the NT, however, did not sample people in very remote Australia, and did not cover populations living in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This significantly impacts the utility of the data for the NT and disproportionately affects data for the Indigenous population in the NT. The implications of this deficit for policy development and socio-economic research are broad. Therefore the SPP has employed a statistician to produce a report on English LLN in the NT between June and August 2017. This statistical analysis incorporates analysis of Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) data from a range of providers. The simple-English, pictorial report will be presented at the September 2017 workshop, and will be available for use within the University to support the Post Graduate Diploma on Applied Language Literacy and Numeracy Skills Development and other presentations to organisations, agencies and indigenous boards.

In addition to the workshops, research contributions have been made to journal articles, conference and seminar presentations, a conference panel discussion, a strategic research framework developed by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), and strategic planning consultations within CDU. Literature reviews and archiving of research material for each strategic priority project are near completion and will be available for future use of this LLN Network and abroad. A range of case studies have been prepared and more were in preparation at time of writing. Video footage of interviews on LLN have also been edited and supported conference and workshop presentations.

A number of attempts to secure further funding to continue the Strategic Priority Projects have been made, but have been unsuccessful to date. A further submission will be made to the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Education and Training before closure of the project.

Other dissemination activities

The information gathered through the initiative is intended to be used in future endeavours within CDU and within other opportunities that may arise. For example, WCE data was requested and has been used to demonstrate that there is a cohort of Indigenous researchers who would potentially be interested in the Diploma of Indigenous Research currently being developed by the School of Indigenous Knowledges and Public Policy at CDU.

Many internal CDU staff assisted WCE initiative staff to navigate organisational processes during implementation. Much time was spent attempting to influence internal organisational processes to cater to the demands associated with working in remote communities. These included:

- Providing feedback to human resources services about the importance of representation of remote Indigenous community members on selection panels during staff recruitment when it is appropriate, and making arrangements to do so;
- Providing feedback into a review of the CDU remote travel policy. This resulted in influencing the parameters of the tender and resulted in an invitation to participate on the tender panel;
- Providing feedback to ITMS regarding issues arising from the use of digital technologies when in remote communities, such as laptops.

Although we cannot state that these efforts have led to concrete change within organisational systems, it is hoped that they have contributed to raising of awareness regarding work in remote Indigenous communities.

Positive education experiences of five youth from Gunbalanya were recorded as part of a youth film project led by the school, and supported by WCE initiative, to highlight some of the challenges that these people faced, and how they overcame them. These stories are available at:


Other dissemination activities included:

- A team submission was made during the development phase of the CDU Strategic Plan 2015-2025. Feedback was provided to suggest that the WCE submission reinforced the need for ongoing remote community engagement and Indigenous leadership;
- Information exchange and partnership development visits have occurred at the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE) and Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle, Curtin University, University of Western Australia, Swinburne University of Technology, Monash University, and RMIT University.
- The WCE initiative provided in-kind and financial support for the organisation and facilitation of three national conferences in 2015, 2016 and 2017, which were valuable information exchange opportunities;
- The WCE initiative delivered 42 conference presentations and has contributed to publishing of 11 books or book chapters. This dissemination activities have related to topics such as remote Indigenous community education aspirations, remote Indigenous student experiences, Indigenous leadership and governance, Indigenous research and evaluation methods, social network analysis, participatory action research, Indigenous adult English LLN, community engagement and digital technologies for enhancing professional pathways. A large majority of conference presentations
were developed and delivered in collaboration with remote Indigenous community staff members to ensure the principles of inclusion and valuing Indigenous expertise were adhered to throughout.

A list of WCE publications is available at:


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**The Indigenous Leaders Conference: Engagement and the power of choice**
**Charles Darwin University, 10-11th November, 2016.**

The WCE team was involved in the co-planning and co-delivery of the 2016 Indigenous Leaders Conference facilitated by the School of Education at CDU in partnership with BIITE, the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory (AMSANT) and OPVC-IL. More than 280 people gathered in Darwin to explore and debate the conference theme ‘engagement and the power of choice’.

There were multiple presentations, workshops and panel discussions facilitated by the WCE team, including many involving remote community-based staff. This demonstrated WCE’s strong commitment to collective action and partnership development. This provided a timely opportunity for the WCE team to report on key WCE findings, actions and outcomes from its work over the last two and a half years. This included presentations about community engagement, mentoring, metaphor use, educational leadership and governance, Indigenous adult LLN, and remote education research processes and achievements. Importantly, we also supported more than 30 youth from WCE communities to attend and learn from the conference, as strong and aspiring education leaders and advocates in their respective communities. This also provided an opportunity for intergenerational learning.

Further information about the conference can be found at:


7. Limitations

The limitations of this evaluation include that the amount and quality of evaluation data collected throughout the WCE initiative was variable. This report has attempted to make clear that the key learnings and achievements outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 have been written utilising triangulated data. Chapter 6 contains a summary of some developments across the initiative that cannot be claimed as being relevant to all partner communities, nor claimed to have demonstrated significant ‘outcomes’ at the time that the initiative ceased.

The cultural and linguistic barriers between evaluation staff and Indigenous community-based staff and stakeholders are always a consideration when conducting research or evaluation in this setting. It must be acknowledged that there may have been some degree of miscommunication, misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the meaning of information collected during the various data collection and analysis activities conducted throughout the initiative.

Finally, this report has been written by non-Indigenous program staff. It is not written from the perspectives of a lived Indigenous experience, nor does it intend to be. This evaluation report was written using available evidence to make evaluative judgements from the perspective of a non-Indigenous evaluators about the value of the approach, process and activities conducted as part of the WCE initiative. It is hoped that this report does justice to the significant amount of time and effort that was invested by the WCE team, and by our valued strategic and community partners.
8. Recommendations

This chapter includes a list of recommendations that have been drawn through WCE initiative implementation, as well as those that have been developed through the research process.

Recommendations drawn from WCE initiative implementation

The following recommendations are for those involved in implementation of (higher) education programs and services relevant to remote Indigenous communities and have been made based on the evaluation findings of the implementation of the WCE initiative.

DESIGN AND PLANNING

Recommendation 1: Ensure projects have clear aims and objectives that emphasise sustainability and are cognisant of timeframes. Revisit these regularly to ensure ongoing clarity and track progress.

Recommendation 2: Clarify boundaries – for programs/projects and for evaluation.

Recommendation 3: Embed sufficient flexibility into programs/projects to enable remote Indigenous community leaders to take the lead in determining how aims and objectives will be achieved, with support if required.

APPROACH AND METHODS

Recommendation 4: Value Indigenous cultures as a rich part of Australia’s heritage and identity, and as an essential element of establishment of local control and ownership.

Recommendation 5: Embed reflection about interculturality in internal program evaluation and learning processes.

Recommendation 6: Prioritise Indigenous voices in programming decisions, but encourage debate and critical thinking involving other experts and the literature.

Recommendation 7: Agree to a common approach to research and evaluation, including data collection and dissemination systems. Ensure this is embedded from the outset and factored into the design of the project.

Recommendation 8: Factor timeframes and the socio-political, cultural and environmental context into determining program goals.

GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS

Recommendation 9: Agree on a clear purpose for governance structures. Align this with aims and objectives.

Recommendation 10: Prioritise purposeful, transparent and timely governance communication.

Recommendation 11: Do groundwork in establishing partnerships and pay attention to ongoing communication.

IMPLEMENTATION

Recommendation 12: Invest in the consultation and relationship development process, and systematise reflective learning within this.

Recommendation 13: Prioritise reflection on communication processes in program evaluation systems and processes.
Recommendation 14: Maximise digital literacy skills development, where required, as a means to assist with communication across geographic boundaries and for broader staff benefit.

Recommendation 15: Assess and consider organisational systems and processes when planning new projects.
Recommendations from remote Indigenous communities that partnered with the WCE initiative

The following recommendations are for those involved in educational policy development and implementation of (higher) education programs and services relevant to remote Indigenous communities. They have been made based on the findings of the exploratory action research processes undertaken in WCE partner communities. As has been described we cannot substantiate these recommendations based on evaluative data - since research approaches and methods employed in communities may not have been consistent across communities; and the research may not have been conducted rigorously according to Western research approaches. However, these recommendations have been informed by a research process that saw a deep level of engagement of remote Indigenous community leaders and stakeholders.

These recommendations have been drawn from Whole of Community Engagement Initiative (WCE) Community Evaluation Reports in addition to other data such as interviews with community stakeholders, WCE team workshops, field trip reports, minutes of meetings, artwork, videos and other data outlined on page 32.

IN SCHOOLS

The role of Assistant Teachers

**Recommendation 16:** Foster positive, mutually supportive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers.

**Recommendation 17:** Increase understanding of non-Indigenous teachers about the important role of Indigenous teachers in the school.

**Recommendation 18:** Take responsibility for ensuring professional development pathways for Indigenous staff – structured and supported pathways to full qualifications and career development opportunities.

**Recommendation 19:** Enhance the leadership role of Assistant Teachers within schools.

Family engagement

**Recommendation 20:** Improve levels of engagement with families in order to increase knowledge about, and build trust with, the school.

**Recommendation 21:** Support and provide education for families to equip them to be able to assist in and support their children’s learning.

**Recommendation 22:** Implement bullying and school safety programs that involve families to improve student attendance, engagement and minimise impacts on the broader community.

Culturally safe environments

**Recommendation 23:** Initiate/develop cultural competency training for Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff that includes content around local Indigenous history and protocols.

**Recommendation 24:** Develop training resources to support sustainability of Indigenous and non-Indigenous teacher training efforts.

Curriculum and pedagogy

**Recommendation 25:** Implement Both Ways teaching and learning approaches from early childhood through to secondary education, supported by Elders.
Recommendation 26: Increase subject choices for students completing Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCET).

**English LLN**

Recommendation 27: Continue to invest in English LLN student outcomes.

**Bilingual education**

Recommendation 28: Continue to develop bilingual programs, developed with local Indigenous subject experts, with research and evaluation embedded within.

Recommendation 29: Develop language and culture resources.

**Mentoring**

Recommendation 30: Establish or support academic mentoring programs in schools to support struggling students.

Recommendation 31: Implement cultural mentoring for students to improve engagement, respect and confidence.

**School governance**

Recommendation 32: Ensure school governance structures are representative of the local community.

Recommendation 33: Provide support for local Indigenous community members, where required, to actively participate in decision making processes in school governance structures.

Recommendation 34: Ensure school governance processes are facilitated in a way that is inclusive of local Indigenous community representatives.

**IN COMMUNITIES**

**Employment**

Recommendation 35: Designate local employment opportunities, particularly in management roles, for local people and ensure formal and informal study pathways and support are linked to career progression.

**Community organisations**

Recommendation 36: Foster Both Ways working cultures – ie. equal value for diverse perspectives and knowledge systems.

Recommendation 37: Provide induction training for new, non-local Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff about community context, cultural protocols, leadership structures and networks etc.

Recommendation 38: Collaborate across sectors to ensure Indigenous student further and higher education pathways are well coordinated and supported.

Recommendation 39: Monitor and evaluate education/training initiatives and keep accessible and continuous records of individual participation and achievement.

**Community governance**

Recommendation 40: Improve mechanisms for supporting community governing organisations to more effectively govern.
Recommendation 41: Provide governance training and support for local Indigenous community champions.

Learning centres
Recommendation 42: Establish or support already established adult learning centres to strengthen local community capacity to lead and provide informal, accredited and non-accredited education and training.

Youth
Recommendation 43: Develop youth engagement programs to provide positive support and learning opportunities for marginalised youth.
Recommendation 44: Include perspectives of Indigenous youth in the design and delivery of programs and services aiming to support and engage with youth.
Recommendation 45: Support youth leadership capacity development initiatives for young people in communities.

The WCE initiative
Recommendation 46: Progress WCE developed local-level education action plans.

FEDERAL AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS

Attitudes/cultures
Recommendation 47: Ensure strengths-based approaches are adopted when working in Indigenous settings or with Indigenous people.
Recommendation 48: Instil hope, expectations and aspirations for life-long learning in Indigenous education programs and services.

Indigenous leadership and decision making
Recommendation 49: Involve Indigenous leaders, Elders, educators, and youth in decision making relating to education policy and practice.

Adult English LLN
Recommendation 50: Support, implement and extend the recommendations contained in the Action Statement for Indigenous Adult English LLN in the NT11.

Investment in locally driven initiatives
Recommendation 51: Invest in homelands education and other locally run institutions.
Recommendation 53: Continue or increase investment in Indigenous teacher training programs and support, modelled on past programs such as the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) Program.

**Programming**

**Recommendation 55:** Lengthen program funding timeframes to maximise potential to achieve sustainable change.

**Recommendation 56:** Ensure flexibility in anticipated program outcomes and measures of success (and move away from narrow output focused approaches).

**Recommendation 57:** Increase responsiveness to research and evaluation data.

**Recommendation 58:** Learn from exemplars and models of education service delivery that have worked well in the past.

**Coordination**

**Recommendation 59:** Improve coordination across different levels of government (Territory and federal) and across sectors – housing, health, employment, corrections etc. – and adopt a ‘whole of government’ approach to Indigenous higher education policy and programs.

**FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

**Coordination**

**Recommendation 60:** Improve coordination of education delivery between BIITE, CDU and other Registered Training Organisations.

**Remote community engagement and education delivery**

**Recommendation 61:** BIITE and CDU and partner organisations continue advocacy regarding funding and provision of community-based training and education services.

**Recommendation 62:** Sustainably invest in community engagement initiatives within communities that build understanding about higher education and pathways/study options and support mechanisms.

**Recommendation 63:** Inform and support Indigenous community members to ensure they have access to up-to-date and appropriate information and understanding about study options, support services and contacts.

**RESEARCH**

**Youth**

**Recommendation 64:** Conduct more research with young people and youth to improve understanding about reasons for not attending school.

**Local Indigenous research**

**Recommendation 65:** Conduct locally-driven, locally conducted education research, incorporating local Indigenous methods of research.

**Recommendation 66:** Build local research capacity eg. developing community-based archives (or support for archival services) and local research centres.

**Recommendation 67:** Conduct further research in remote Indigenous communities to investigate exemplar school models and educational histories.
9. Conclusion

The WCE initiative was a valuable opportunity to undertake remote Indigenous community-led research and action in focusing on pathways into higher education for remote Indigenous communities. It was an ambitious undertaking within a relatively short timeframe in this context. A number of implementation challenges, often influenced by this short timeframe, meant that project aims and approaches evolved. Initially, the focus was on educational attainment within schools. In choosing to work in a ‘community-led’ way, the dilemmas that were presented throughout the implementation process for project staff and stakeholders were multiple. Although diverse in their focus areas, a range of initiatives have now been established that were developed in close consultation with local Indigenous leaders and stakeholders. Some of them do, however, require further funding to continue.

The presence of well-resourced design and planning stages are absolutely fundamental to effective implementation of any short-term government funded initiative. The design, consultation and planning phase of this project was rushed because of a short window to submit the funding application, a delay in commencement and the overall short funding period. The aims and objectives were broad and open to being interpreted in different ways. This had both advantages as well as disadvantages, however, increased the potential for lack of clarity about the purpose of high-level strategic partnerships. Choosing to take a developmental approach should have assisted in the resolution of some of the challenges that were presented. The research and evaluation design did not function as anticipated. The initiative attempted an approach that had not been tried in this setting in an initiative of this scale before, and efforts to ensure that Indigenous voices were given primacy throughout the process should be commended. When attempting to work in a flexible way, though, there still must be clarity in project aims to ensure that there is agreement amongst all involved stakeholders from the outset.

The WCE initiative invested in the process of exploring remote Indigenous community perspectives of higher education. Amplifying Indigenous leadership and perspectives, working in true partnership, and responding to the complexity of remote Indigenous communities brought about benefits for the building of relationships and ownership over the process. A result of the Indigenous led research process is recommendations that are strongly informed by the perspectives of remote Indigenous communities. This research has given a voice to remote Indigenous communities in the higher education setting and will be useful for informing future Indigenous education programs and policy.

Linking these perspectives with existing strategies for achieving quality of life aspirations was more difficult. At the community level, this certainly happened. Oftentimes the WCE initiative was, in fact, utilised as an opportunity for community schools and other stakeholders to further their own agendas in relation to advancing educational outcomes for their communities. Implementation challenges made integrating community perspectives at the ‘systems’ level more of a challenge. In any case, change at this level takes time. It is unlikely, given the timeframe and the complex environmental, political and socio-cultural factors at play, that significant change to education systems could have been achieved.

Some ongoing opportunities for community, research and academic leaders to engage in mutually beneficial and critical relationships have been established. Relationships were formed between remote Indigenous community leaders in six communities that have already seen increased remote Indigenous participation in a number of research initiatives within CDU in addition to raising organisational awareness regarding work in remote Indigenous settings. Relationships were established or strengthened between communities and a number of NT Indigenous higher education stakeholders and between stakeholders within communities. Implementation factors, again, together with complexities in organisational relationships and histories impacted on the potential for relationships to be strengthened between some
relevant stakeholders and public policy makers. It is hoped that momentum gained in Territory-wide adult language, literacy and numeracy networks will continue beyond the WCE initiative and be led and owned by those who have been heavily involved to date.

The WCE initiative identified means for making education relevant and culturally and physically accessible through the development of a set of recommendations that remote Indigenous community leaders see as being enablers to create more accessible pathways into higher education. Practical application of these recommendations, in order to continue to influence change within organisations, institutions and governments is worthy of at least another five years for implementation, if not ten.

It was major part of the WCE approach that remote Indigenous perspectives, priorities and needs would be a focus throughout the process. The WCE initiative, despite its many implementation challenges, has reinforced the fact that culturally- and contextually-responsive approaches, given time and flexibility, result in community ownership and control over solutions.
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Whole of Community Engagement Initiative

www.remotengagetoeedu.com.au