



Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy

Acknowledgement

The Northern Territory Government respectfully acknowledges the First Nations people of this country and recognise their continuing connection to their lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and their leaders past, present and emerging.

While this strategy uses the term 'Aboriginal', we respectfully acknowledge that Torres Strait Islander peoples are First Nations people living in the Territory.

“ Aboriginal communities and government should negotiate through working together properly and respectfully – not rushing over the top of the other – but negotiating a way forward calmly together, with integrity.” ¹

Gäwa Elder, Both Ways Engagement Workshop

Introduction

The Northern Territory Government Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy (RECS) aims to improve the way we coordinate our services and engage with regional and remote Aboriginal community members. Doing this will lead to better outcomes through more culturally appropriate engagement between our workforce and the diverse Aboriginal peoples and cultures across the Northern Territory. The RECS is underpinned by the Northern Territory Government's (NTG) commitment towards self-determination and local decision making. It also aligns with the 'Everyone Together' Aboriginal Affairs Strategy 2019-2029 and the implementation of the Closing the Gap Report 2020, and their focus on supporting community aspirations and achieving better outcomes.

The RECS was designed by an interagency working group based in Alice Springs through a series of workshops. The group included representatives of agencies whose core work involves remote service provision, two regional councils and the Charles Darwin University.

The broader NTG including regional staff and other organisations provided additional input to ensure the RECS was informed by knowledge and experience of engagement in the Territory's unique physical and social environments. As the RECS continues to be implemented and evaluated, it will develop further. This will

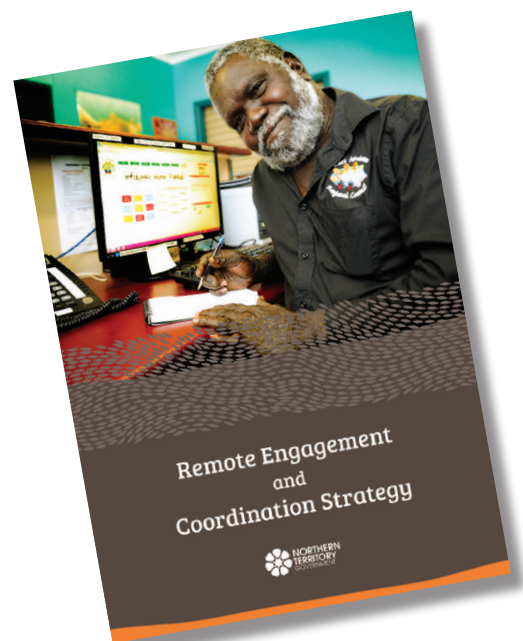
include agency and remote community input to continually strive for best practice and improved community engagement.

The working group considered a wide range of recognised community engagement principles, practice, research and literature, particularly relating to Aboriginal communities. The RECS also draws on major national and international best practice and rights declarations such as the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*, the *Brisbane Declaration (2005)*, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)* and the *International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum*.

The RECS was reviewed in 2019 to ensure it remains relevant and informed by best practice in remote community engagements. The 2019 review was conducted by a second working group whose members represented those NTG agencies who provide direct services to Aboriginal communities, as well as the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APONT).

“ We are pleased to see the emphasis on NTG agencies establishing and maintaining good relationships with Aboriginal people and organisations.”²

Wurrumiyanga community member



RECS 2016-2019

* The skills, practices and techniques detailed within the RECS encompass regional and urban engagement. These best practice skills and methods are transferrable across all engagement settings.

Context

The Northern Territory's regional and remote communities are home to many diverse Aboriginal peoples and cultures, most of whom speak their own and other ancestral languages and maintain traditional cultural practices and obligations.

Traditional governance and decision making in Aboriginal communities is unique and operates under a complex Aboriginal lore and kinship system. Traditional and contemporary forms of negotiation and agreement require willingness to engage with and learn from those who have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of how each local and regional community operates. Even geographically close communities could have quite different issues and circumstances. Understanding of and respect for Aboriginal peoples and culture is critical to successful engagement and sound outcomes.

Challenges in practising good engagement and coordination in regional and remote Northern Territory areas are intensified by sparsely populated regions, long distances, a harsh climate, many different language and cultural groups, a history of fraught relationships with governments, multiple programs working in the same space with the same people and high staff turnover. The NTG is committed working to address these challenges to ensure effective engagement in partnership with Aboriginal people.

“ It is not about more consultations but about listening to what the true message is. What is wanted is quality meetings that people act on...”³

Gunbalanya community member



Nyirripi community.

First Language

Aboriginal people make up one-third of the Northern Territory’s population of approximately 230 000. The majority of the Aboriginal population live in remote and very remote communities with more than 100 Aboriginal languages and dialects spoken.

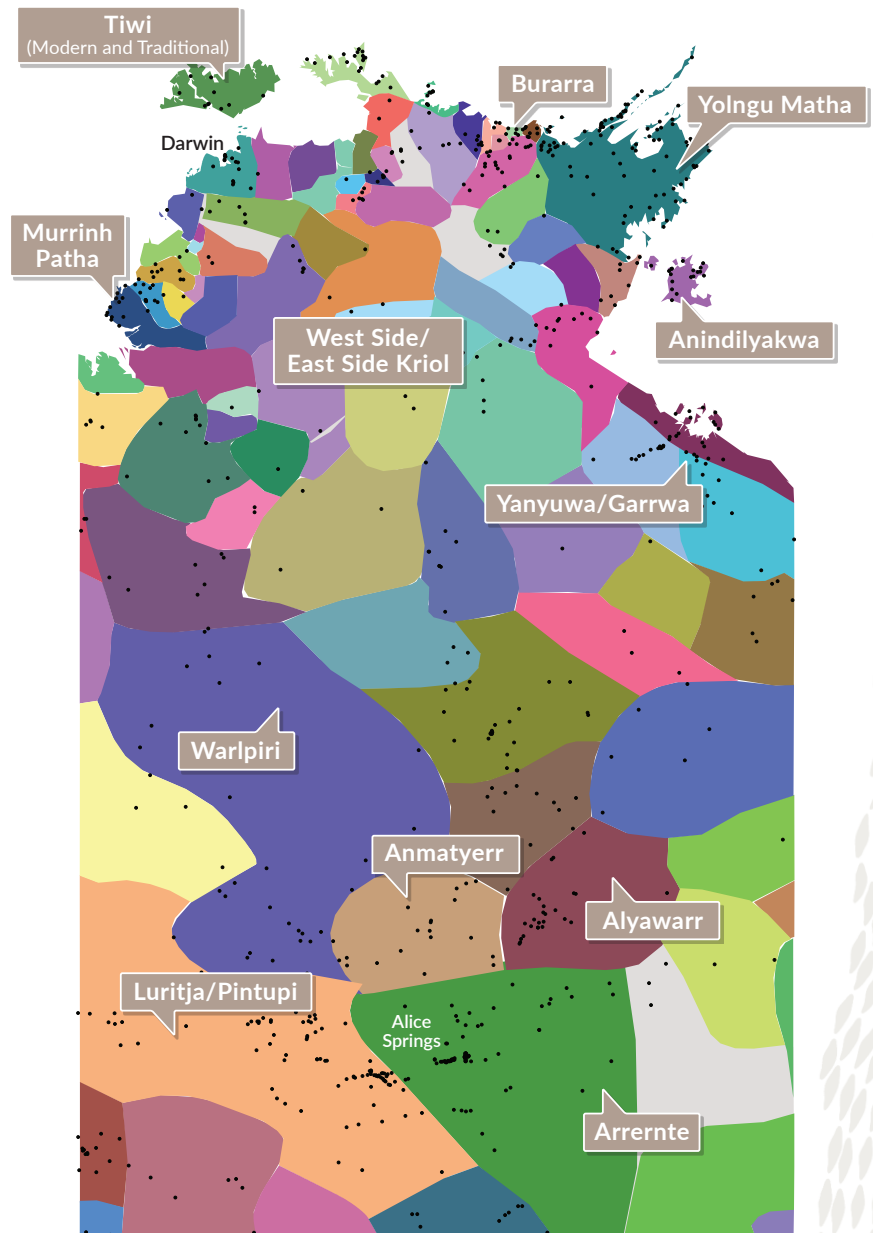
The Northern Territory is one of the most linguistically diverse areas of the world.

NTG agencies are at the forefront of establishing and maintaining good relationships with Aboriginal people and organisations. Effective engagement includes ensuring mutual understanding of information through the use of qualified interpreters.

The Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) in the Northern Territory employs qualified, professional, impartial and registered interpreters to cover the major languages of the NT. Interpreters cover close to 100 languages and dialects and interpreter trainers come from backgrounds such as linguistics, health, adult education and law.

The AIS facilitates effective cross-cultural communication between service providers and Aboriginal people who do not speak English as a first language.

For more information on the AIS, including how to book an interpreter or arrange a training session, visit: ais.nt.gov.au



* Based on the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages Map – Northern Territory 2019

“ Indigenous language interpreting services are critical for effective two-way engagement between government and non-English speakers.”⁴

Commonwealth Ombudsman – Accessibility of Indigenous Interpreters: Talking in Language Follow Up Investigation



Photo: Tourism NT/Peter Eye

Judbarra /Gregory National Park.

Purpose

The RECS aims to achieve better outcomes for remote community members including:

- Community members know who is coming to their community from NTG, when and for what purpose; and have time to prepare for engagement before meetings are held.
- Engagement meetings are relevant and effective for the community member(s) and NTG.
- Trust exists between community members and NTG.
- Community members are informed about the outcomes of engagement meetings – ‘closing the loop’.
- Engagement is culturally appropriate, including the use of interpreters where English is not the first language.

The RECS aims to achieve better outcomes for NTG including:

- NTG uses community feedback to continuously improve engagement practices.
- Stakeholders are confident that NTG agencies are aware of and responding to local, regional, remote and Territory-wide issues.
- Policy, program and service delivery for remote communities is informed, responsive and coordinated.
- Engagement is cost effective.
- NTG agencies coordinate and collaborate.

“ By listening to locals rather than deciding before they come what they want to hear... actually understanding what is happening in the community”⁵

Ntaria community member

Values and Principles

The *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* is underpinned by the following values and principles.

Respect and Integrity

- Engagement is genuine, open and honest.
- Traditional authority and governance are respected by working with and being guided by local Aboriginal elders and leaders.

Commitment

- RECS policy, processes and practice are endorsed, implemented and properly resourced.
- Enough time is given for practices to change and outcomes to improve.

Accountability

- Processes are agreed and adhered to and any changes are communicated.
- Decision making is sustainable (economically viable, technically feasible, environmentally compatible, publicly acceptable and informed).
- Ongoing evaluation is used to inform and improve policy, practice and outcomes.
- Close the loop – feedback is provided to keep the community informed of processes and outcomes.

Clarity

- The purpose, scope and timeframes of the engagement are clear.
- Decision making processes and boundaries (government and others) are understood.
- Information and communication are understood by all.

Inclusion

- Enough time and space are allowed for dialogue, to reflect and to develop shared understanding and decision making processes.

Working Together

- Sound relationships are established, maintained and based on mutual trust and respect.
- Ways of engagement are place-based to suit local needs, language, time-frames and cultural protocols.
- Participation is encouraged and representative.
- All points of view are freely expressed, heard and understood.
- Effective engagement is based on dialogue and active listening.
- Effective communication and coordination occur within and across levels of government, other stakeholders and regional and remote community members.

“ We see the planes come in and go out and often we have no idea who came and why.” ⁶

Ngukurr community member

Who is the RECS for? Impacts

The *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* is designed for use by NTG and funded service providers staff who work in the Northern Territory. Other organisations will find the RECS useful when planning and coordinating a community visit.

“ We have enough meetings already. What is bad is when government calls a meeting without plenty of notice and without telling us what it’s about...”⁷

Umbakumba community member

Commitment to the RECS values, principles and practices will have the following impacts:

- **Regional and remote community members** actively participate in policy development, program management and service delivery affecting their communities resulting in better, more sustainable services.
- **Regional staff** are valued as an essential link between management, other stakeholders and remote communities and have input into planning and processes.
- **Management** have confidence that agencies are responding effectively to ideas, issues and needs raised at community level, and that policy, program and service delivery decisions and development are well-informed, inclusive and aligned.



Engagement with a Yirrkala community member.

Remote Engagement and Coordination

Remote engagement is the two-way communication, exchange of information and deliberation that occurs between governments, services and people living in remote communities. It increases mutual understanding, strengthens relationships and enables community members to influence decisions that affect their lives.

Remote coordination is defined as the processes by which government practices, policies, programs and services for remote communities are collaborative, integrated and aligned.

“Remote engagement and coordination are mutually dependent on each other – engagement will only work if there is good coordination and coordination will only work if there is good engagement. They must be understood and practised together, rather than separately”⁸

Professor Michael Christie, Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University



Community engagement meeting Gapuwiyak.

Best Practice Guide for Remote Engagement and Coordination

While many aspects of engagement and coordination are universal, some are specific to work that takes place in remote communities.

This table is a *Best Practice Guide for Remote Engagement and Coordination* with remote community members.

The *Online Toolkit* expands the Best Practice Guide into factors to consider, at both operational and strategic levels, **BEFORE**, **DURING** and **AFTER** visiting and engaging with regional and remote community members.

Focus	Engagement – Key Actions
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find out about the community, language, Aboriginal restrictions, local dynamics and any 'burning' issues b
You	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider your self-awareness, engagement skills, cult training and identify gaps in your knowledge and skill Be aware of assumptions and cultural bias you may b suited to regional and remote work. Stay open to learning and reflect on your performanc
Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define the project, opportunity or issue as well as the Clarify the decisions being made including negotiable make them, as well as any related decisions already m can be influenced. Identify community and other stakeholders. Describe the role of the stakeholders and the intende with the government agency. Identify the level and goal of engagement for each st Remote Community Participation spectrum). Identify the community engagement purpose, object outcomes (describe what success would look like if th Plan and use methods and tools that suit the engage of all stakeholders. Identify risks and plan how to manage them through
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good relationships are essential – find ways to build Aboriginal authorities, community members and other Respect and follow local cultural protocols.
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid rushing – allow time and flexibility to build rela participation. Allow time for community members and other stake input into the project, opportunity or issue.
Communication and Close the loop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate in ways that are appropriate and under Understand the diversity of the target audience, inclu remote locations with a disability. Where possible use a qualified Aboriginal Interpreter in first language. Ensure community members and other stakeholders the engagement. Follow up and close the loop with community memb
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Before you start, plan evaluation of the engagement from introducing the project, staying in touch and rec As you go along, document, monitor and evaluate wh engagement objectives were met or not and any unp Ensure evaluation process is relevant and meaningful Use evaluation to continuously improve engagement



Coordination – Key Actions	
governance, cultural protocols, bushtel.nt.gov.au .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify Aboriginal authorities, key stakeholders, other community members and regional staff who you should be informing, working with and learning from on the project or issue.
cultural competency, basic skills and bringing, or even whether you are ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify, organise and promote professional support, learning or training opportunities you may need. Record your reflections and evaluations.
... objectives and outcomes. ... and non-negotiables and who will made so that there is clarity on what ed relationship of the stakeholder stakeholder group (see Levels of ives, community expectations and ese engagement goals were to be met). ... ment and ensure the full participation out the project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find out what is already known about the project, opportunity or issue, knowledge gaps, relevant history, level of interest and potential conflict or risk. Use Remote Information Coordination Systems for planning, documenting and evaluating engagement, coordination and visit bushtel.nt.gov.au and bushready.nt.gov.au. Find out how to contact other stakeholders, and where opportunities for collaboration, coordination, challenges or conflicts may exist or arise. Develop, support and use community-based and regional processes (e.g. Aboriginal governance groups, inter-agency meetings, Regional Coordination Committees). Facilitate community members' understanding of government processes and responses. Establish a clear sequence of communications and engagement activities that aligns with the community's governance and protocols. Identify critical resources such as the Aboriginal Interpreter Service and other resources necessary for the engagement process.
... understanding and trust with er stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work closely with community-based and regional staff and others who have well-developed relationships with community members. Keep everyone well informed at every stage of the project/process.
... tionships and enable maximum holders to understand and provide ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early pre-engagement planning is crucial for getting the community prepared and ready. Base the negotiation of timing and timeframes on both community and government parameters. Ensure all stakeholders are kept up to date and have time to respond when things change.
... rstood. ... ding those living in regional and who can assist with communicating are informed before, during and after ers and other stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage the Aboriginal Interpreter Service early in your project to understand what is needed to communicate your project or information effectively in first language. Help community members raise ideas and issues with the appropriate government agencies or organisations. Obtain and pass on responses to these.
... objectives, outcomes and process – ceiving feedback. ... at happens, whether planned lanned outcomes. ... to the stakeholders. ... practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate input into the ongoing evaluation and improvement of the Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy and the Remote Information Coordination System from community and other stakeholders at regional and executive levels.

Elements

The *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* comprises six elements that together provide comprehensive and practical guidance, mechanisms and tools for remote engagement work and the coordination of government policies and services for Northern Territory regional and remote communities.



Best Practice Guide for Remote Engagement and Coordination

The *Best Practice Guide for Remote Engagement and Coordination* brings universal aspects of best practice community engagement and coordination together with elements of practice tailored to the specific needs of remote Northern Territory communities.



Levels of Regional and Remote Community Participation

The *Levels of Regional and Remote Community Participation* tool is designed to help identify the level of participation of community members in an engagement process as well as appropriate methods.



Remote Information Coordination System

The *Remote Information and Coordination System (RICS)* gathers and documents information, captures issues and facilitates a response and supports coordination within and across levels of government, other stakeholders and regional and remote community members.

The access points to the RICS are the public facing BushTel and BushReady sites, which provide users up to date information and tools when looking to engage regional and remote communities.

bushtel.nt.gov.au

“ We often have people approaching us for information about remote communities. It is fantastic to be able to refer them to BushTel so they can access up to date information about the community and current events. It's a valuable resource...”⁹

Ground Up team, Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University



The *Remote Engagement Essentials* workshop identifies induction and professional learning components that will support new and existing staff to develop knowledge, skills and behaviour required to work effectively in regional and remote communities in the Northern Territory, making them 'BushReady'.

If you are interested in attending a workshop in your region, register by emailing RECS@nt.gov.au



The *Evaluation Framework* outlines the process for continuous improvement in regional and remote engagement and coordination practices through ongoing review, evaluation and change.



The *Remote Engagement and Coordination Online Toolkit* (bushready.nt.gov.au) is a user-friendly website to support remote engagement and coordination.

It includes information and tools such as sample policies, processes and templates, stories and case studies, links to professional learning, the *Remote Information Coordination System* (RICS) and other systems.

bushtel.nt.gov.au

“ We work closely with a lot of Indigenous consultants and researchers in remote communities. Through the RECS (and associated work, such as REC-IER), these consultants are now being approached much more often to assist with engagement and coordination work in their communities” ¹⁰

Ground Up team, Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University

Levels of Regional and Remote Community Participation

The *Levels of Regional and Remote Community Participation* is designed to help identify the level of participation of regional and remote community members in an engagement process.

The higher the level of community participation in the engagement, the greater the influence community members have on the final decision.

This tool can also be used to identify the level of participation of other stakeholders. It is essential that all stakeholders have a clear understanding about their level of engagement and the say they have in decisions. The *Levels of Regional and Remote Community Participation* is based on the *International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum*.

“...talk to the right people, not just the people who want to talk to them, the first ones they meet.”¹¹

Ntaria community member

“Never give up – find a way. You have it in you to find a way. Sit down on the ground with people and find the way together.”¹²

Yirrkalā Elder, Both Ways Engagement Workshops



Making decisions in Yirrkalā.

Levels of Regional and Remote Community Participation

	Inform	Consult	Actively participate						
Goal of the engagement	Community members are <i>well-informed</i> .	Community members are well-informed and <i>give feedback</i> that government considers.	Community members are well-informed and <i>actively contribute</i> to decision making.						
Decision making level of community members	Community members <i>don't have</i> a say in the final decision. The final decision is made by government.	Community members <i>might have</i> a say in the final decision. The final decision is made by government.	Community members <i>will have</i> a say in the final decision. Community can actively participate at one of three levels:						
			<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Involve</th> <th>Collaborate</th> <th>Empower</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Some say</td> <td>High level or equal say</td> <td>Total say and control</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Involve	Collaborate	Empower	Some say	High level or equal say	Total say and control
Involve	Collaborate	Empower							
Some say	High level or equal say	Total say and control							
Government commitment to community members	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide information in the right way to the right people to help you understand ensure you know the whole story keep you informed enable you to ask questions. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> listen to you and make sure we understand what is important to you ask you for ideas and feedback consider what you tell us give you feedback on how you influenced the decision. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> work with you at each step of the process make sure your ideas are included as much as possible work with you to find different options and decide what the best decision will be actively use the principles and strategic directions of the NTG Local Decision Making (LDM) Framework. 						
Example tools and methods	Use qualified Aboriginal interpreters, posters, flyers, community noticeboards, walking around talking with people, newsletters, local radio, presentations, social media, websites, meetings, storytelling.	Use qualified Aboriginal interpreters, interviews, storytelling, small group discussions (interest, family, clan, governance groups etc.), focus groups, workshops.	Discussions over a period of time, use qualified Aboriginal interpreters interviews, storytelling, group discussions (interest, family, clan, governance groups etc.), focus groups, workshops.						

Actions



Results

Best practice remote engagement and coordination leads to:

- informed decision making with better and more sustained results
- communities actively participating in policy and program delivery
- government being better informed about communities and community issues
- communities aware of the government's agenda relating to the policies and programs that affect them and how they can influence or direct them in accordance with their local needs and issues
- community residents having a better understanding of government
- better relationships with community leaders, organisations and community members
- fewer unnecessary trips
- reduced engagement burden (communities and the service provider have positive experience of engagement)
- more effective use of resources
- communities getting a response (closing the loop).



Evaluate, review and improve performance

(regularly monitor and evaluate programs and remote engagement practices to continually improve service delivery and outcomes)

“ Better they change the way they think. Listen to us... and... let us teach them in our community. We can show them.”¹³

Yuendumu community member

Glossary

Aboriginal authorities	Leaders, Elders, Traditional Owners or other Aboriginal people who are recognised authorities in their community (sometimes community leaders will delegate responsibility to other community members)
Management	Decision makers in government – could include senior staff, agency executives or CEOs, Members of Parliament or Ministers
Remote community members	Aboriginal people living in remotely located communities, homelands and outstations
Regional Coordination Committee	A committee that meets regularly, comprising senior staff from government departments and sometimes other organisations operating in a particular region
Regional staff	NTG staff based in regional centres
Stakeholder	A person or group with an interest, influence or concern (stake) in something
Joint management boards/committees	Boards or committees with majority Aboriginal membership who are responsible for looking after jointly managed NTG parks and reserves

Sources of Information

In addition to the documents cited in the introduction, the *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* has been informed by engagement strategies and documents produced by the Australian, State and Territory governments and a number of local government councils from rural and regional Australia. Other useful sources include community development practitioners, land councils and Aboriginal community controlled organisations with expertise in this area.

Quotes from community members were taken from the 2018–2019 'Ground Up team, Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University' Remote Engagement Coordination – Indigenous Evaluation Research project and the 2010–2011 'Langford Team' research project managed under the Commonwealth, States, and Northern Territory Government's Remote Service Delivery National Partnership Agreement.

Additional quotes were gathered from discussions held with Aboriginal organisations and remote community members across the NT as part of the 2019 RECS review; the NTG Review of Regional Governance in 2013 (Department of Local

Government and Regions) and from the Both Ways Engagement Workshops conducted by the Yolŋu Aboriginal Consultants' Initiative (YACI) and Charles Darwin University in 2013.

There is particular acknowledgement of Professor Michael Christie and Juli Cathcart from the Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University, who have provided invaluable advice and input using their vast wealth of knowledge and experience in engagement with remotely located Aboriginal community members.


The RECS team acknowledges with much appreciation the crucial role of the late Cr B Abbott of MacDonnell Regional Council in the initial development and roll out of RECS and continually advocating for effective remote engagement across Central Australia.

A full list of information sources is available on the Online Toolkit at: bushready.nt.gov.au

For more information or assistance email the Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy team at: reecs@nt.gov.au

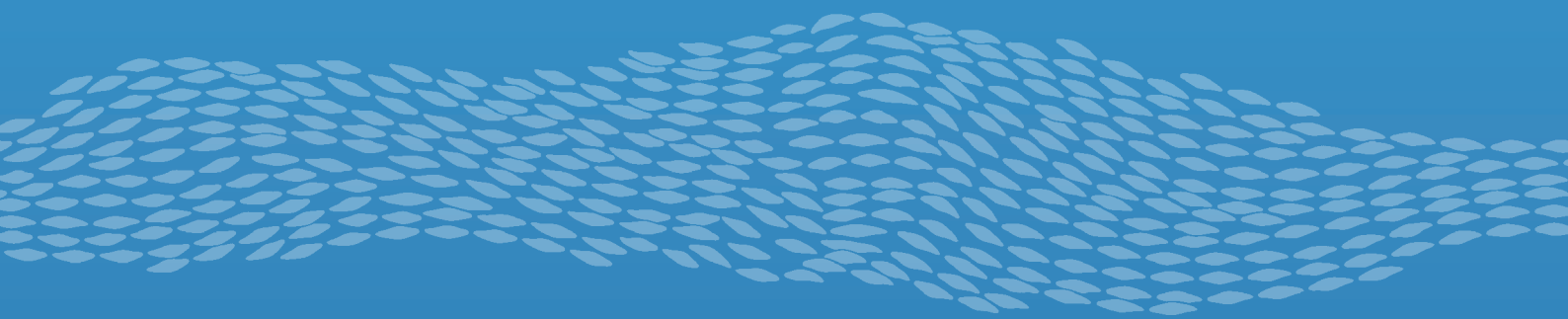
*The quotations and statements within RECS have been derived from a collection of Northern Territory and Australian community engagement research papers, engagement activities and experiences portrayed by community members themselves. The Northern Territory Government remain focussed on improving engagement with Aboriginal Territorians and are continuing to demonstrate many positive changes in this area, however the RECS working group still consider the quotes and statements relevant today to achieving effective engagement in regional and remote Aboriginal communities.

Quotes: ¹Gäwa Elder, Both Ways Engagement Workshop (2013); ²Wurrumiyanga community member, RECS Review (2019); ³Gunbalanya community member, Langford Consulting (2011); ⁴Commonwealth Ombudsman—Accessibility of Indigenous Interpreters: Talking in Language Follow Up Investigation (2017–18); ⁵Ntaria community member, Langford Consulting (2011); ⁶Ngukurr community member, Langford Consulting (2011); ⁷Umbakumba community member, Langford Consulting (2011); ⁸Professor Michael Christie, Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University (2015); ⁹Ground Up team, Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University; ¹⁰Ground Up team, Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University; ¹¹Ntaria community member, Langford Consulting (2011); ¹²Yirrkala Elder, Both Ways Engagement Workshops (2013); ¹³Yuendumu community member, Langford Consulting (2011); ¹⁴Ntaria community member, Langford Consulting (2011).



“ ...sometimes need to come back and talk a number of times to get it right.” ¹⁴

Ntaria community member



Published by the Northern Territory Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet.

© Northern Territory Government 2020

Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act, no part of this document may be reproduced without prior written permission from the Northern Territory Government through the Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Edition Date: December 2020

Enquiries should be made to:

Remote Information and Engagement Team Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet

t: (08) 8999 8401 | e: recs@nt.gov.au