



BACKING INDIGENOUS ABILITY

REVIEW OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INDIGENOUS BROADCASTING PROGRAM

WARLPIRI MEDIA ASSOCIATION INC

BACKGROUND

Warlpiri Media Association Incorporated (WMA) was established over twenty years ago and is based in Yuendumu, a remote Aboriginal community located 300km north west of Alice Springs. WMA began operating in the early 1980's broadcasting its own locally produced television programs on a low power transmitter. Satellite transmission began in 1986, with the launch of the Aussat satellite and free-to-air arrived in Central Australia. Since then a deliberate effort has been made to represent Warlpiri society for audiences in Yuendumu and other Warlpiri, Pintubi and Anmatjere speaking communities. WMA has a strong and long history of quality video production, including the hugely popular AFI (Australian Film Institute) Award winning documentary *Bush Mechanics* and the childrens' series *Manyu Wana*, amongst many others.

While our video productions have put WMA on the map nationally and internationally, it is our work in remote communities in the Tanami region which is the foundation of our current operations. We provide training and technical assistance to thirteen remote Indigenous communities and many outstations for their television, radio and in nine communities IT provision. WMA works with communities to produce appropriate media content for broadcast on our regional radio network (PAW Radio Network) or on ICTV, the Indigenous Community Television Channel broadcast through Imparja. We also produce important information campaigns on issues such as health and government services, video commissions and our own productions for a wider audience.

The organisation's breadth of history in Indigenous media and its current status as the RIMO (Remote Indigenous Media Organisation) for the western Central Desert area from Lajamnu in the north, Ali Curung and Engawala in the south, and Kintore in the west (an area of 240,00 square kilometres) positions the organization to be able to provide vital responses to this paper.

The organization will commence operating under the name PAW Media & Communications (Pintubi, Anmatjere and Warlpiri) from July 1 2006. The change of name reflects the organization's broader, more regional focus.



OVERVIEW

After carefully reading this paper, Warlpiri Media Association Inc's broad view is that government needs urgently to formulate, with stake holders, **clearly identified outcomes for Remote Indigenous Media**. Outcomes may be qualitative and/or quantitative including retransmission services, content delivery, sales, training and/or employment outcomes.

Remote Indigenous broadcastings has its origins firmly entrenched in video and television. This paper is clearly abdicating any responsibility for remote Indigenous television and video production. It is unclear what the rationale for this.

Surely the sector would have been better served had the un-stated expectation that the NITV service will pick up the video and television production/training that is currently delivered by at least half of the RIMOS, been clearly identified in this paper. There is substantial risk with the model presented in this paper that the production of television and video content by these RIMOS will no longer be funded. Given its very unique grass roots focus and the quality and passion of this service, will it be the first casualty of this change in focus for IBP Funding?

On the other hand, if the model for the NITV service was in place, and the position and role of the RIMOS was clearly identified, there could be a strong argument for changing the focus of the IBP funding to radio.

B-KEY ISSUES FOR COMMENT

B.1 PROPOSED NEW FUNDING MODEL FOR BROADCASTING SERVICES

B.1.2.1 Does the proposed funding model provide for a more equitable distribution of funds?

Indigenous communities are, just like non-indigenous communities, not all the same. An equitable distribution of funds **MUST** mean more than a straight per capita comparison of funding. As has been recognised by DCITA there are a range of factors that impact on the equitable distribution on funding, including key factors such as:

- Predominant first language – English or an Aboriginal language
- Distance/remoteness with its consequent impact on:
 - Skills training opportunities
 - Liaison and support for broadcasting sites



- The literacy and numeracy levels involved in quality broadcasting
- Technical support
- Pervasiveness of traditional customary practices and its consequent impact on Selection of staff
 - Development of content
 - Monitoring of broadcasts
 - Extent of liaison with senior people

Such factors result in higher costs for broadcasters serving remote and more traditional communities.

Warlpiri Media Association strongly states that the proposed funding model does not sufficiently articulate these factors and is concerned that that the proposed funding model will discriminate against remote broadcasters.

B.1.2.2 Are there any strong arguments to justify funding for broadcasting under the IBP on multi-year basis.

Most organizations are expected to submit a business or strategic plan for at least three years. In this context, it is not unreasonable to expect government policy for Indigenous media to remain consistent for at least a three year period and a flow-on commitment of triennial funding for core services for a three year period. Policy would need to focus around access to the same information and entertainment services for remote communities, as are available to all Australians and the support of an Indigenous media industry in both remote and non-remote Australia.

B.1.2.3 Comment is requested on the proposal for a capital equipment fund

Without doubt, the establishment of an ongoing capital equipment fund is long overdue. IBP should however take into consideration other incentives available through the ABC and CBF to ensure there is no duplication of funding. In addition, clear guidelines as to the purpose of such a fund would be useful, for example is the fund to support retransmission facilities or is the fund to support radio broadcast facilities.

B.1.2.4 Should activities such as training and recording festivals, stories, customs and traditions received funding from a competitive funding pool set up under IBP?

TRAINING



Training should receive dedicated funding, with specified outcomes. In addition ongoing informal training and the ongoing on-the-job support of participants should be considered when formulating outcomes for training.

RECORDING FESTIVALS

A dedicated funding for the recording of ceremony and traditional events is a positive move. However if this fund were competitive, our concern would be the validity of the **body** making decisions. A panel of people with demonstrated understanding of and experience in Indigenous media and cultural protocols would be an essential component of such a competitive fund.

We would envisage that the demonstration of agreed ICIP protocols for such a fund would be essential.

B.1.2.5 If so, what activities should be eligible for funding from this pool.

An example of activities that could be eligible for a 'cultural recording' pool of funding can be demonstrated in the body of work Warlpiri Media Association Inc has produced over the past twenty plus years. For example: recording and editing for broadcast oral histories, jukurrpa, ceremony. Other restricted material is also important to record, however strict protocols needs to be adhered to in its recording, storage and future viewing.

B.2.1.1 Will the proposed model for RIMOS enable RIBS to operate more effectively.

The proposed model presented in this paper is both bewildering and belittling. We would argue that it is not up to funding agents to tell organisations how to budget, but rather to come from a position of targets or outcomes. Funding bodies such as IBP need to distance themselves from budgeting and focus on agreed outputs as per policy. It would then be up to the individual RIMOS to demonstrate the achievement of these outputs.

In addition, the funding model proposed here is not realistic. with the figures provided being substantially lower than industry rates. The budget also does not take into account the exorbitant costs of operating from a remote location

The proposed figure of \$250,000, which is what WMA's funding would receive under this model to service 13 RIBS with a geographical area of 420,000km is completely unrealistic.

B.2.3.1 Would indirect funding of RIBS through RIMOS be a better way of supporting RIMOS.

In some cases it may be more appropriate to fund the RIMOS, however in other instances the individual RIBS may be the most appropriate body. In our region most RIBS are happy for Warlpiri Media to accept the funding to manage the retransmission sites on their behalf. This is mainly due to the fact



that the reporting requirements for a grant of \$5,000 are inappropriate for the size of the grant and WMA have demonstrated expertise in the management of the sites.

On the other hand most communities with RIBS do not received dedicated funding to maintain the physical site or to cover utility costs. The average cost for maintaining a site is between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per annum. This does not factor in the costs of operating a regional radio service and providing content for ICTV.

Given the challenging nature of local government in remote communities it is difficult to envisage local government having the systems that will support an effective management of transmission facilities. The effective operation of RIBS that are dependent on the technical integrity of the transmission facilities will be put at risk. A key risk factor in any such operation is the separation of responsibility for infrastructure from the responsibility for operation of services over the infrastructure. The NSW case of the separation of rail infrastructure from rail service provision is a case in point.

In our region, the RIMO taking responsibility for the ongoing performance of the technical equipment at a RIBS sites is the most appropriate model.

Providing adequate funding for the security, insurance and maintenance of the physical space where these sites are housed should also be taken into consideration. An appropriate model may be to provide funding to the RIMOS who can then enter into Memorandums of Understandings with the RIBS (communities), for the delivery of these services.

B.2.3.2 Should the operation and maintenance of radio/television transmitters in communities be supported by local communities themselves, rather than funded by IBP.

We interpret this question to mean “should local communities source their own funding for the repair and maintenance of radio/television transmission services rather than rely on IBP to fund this service?”

As no other government body is likely to fund this service, and DCITA and the now defunct ATSIC in most instances have been the agents who funded the initial installation of these services through Blackspots, ABC Radio Subsidy Schemes, SBS Radio Subsidy Schemes, the original BRACS rollout and the BRACS revitalisation, DCITA should arguably be the principal agent to take responsibility for the ongoing repair and maintenance of this equipment.

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B.2.3.3 Should a specific allocation of funds be made available within the IBP for local content production in RIBS?



The report notes the differences in RIBS as a starting point for this specific discussion. It is argued by Warlpiri Media Association that the overall report however has not looked closely enough at the differing models of RIBS operations particularly as applied by RIMOs/RIBS working on regional models. These regional models typically incorporate local content production facilities and retransmission only sites. The regional model enables the strength of the network to support growth in all sites and provides opportunities for retransmission only sites to easily partner with content production sites.

Warlpiri Media Association is concerned that regional models of funding as based on the models provided by current RIMOs has been overlooked. The emphasis on individual models of funding risks an ineffective usage of funding.

Warlpiri Media Association also notes that by asking this question in the first place there is an implication that such funding is not seen as a core function of those RIBS facilities undertaking content production.

B.3.1 Will the proposed changes to the funding arrangements between the IBP and the CBF assist in clarifying roles and eliminating overlap and the possibility of double-dipping of funds.

Funding outcomes and arrangements need to be clearly defined in order to eliminate possibilities of double-dipping. While WMA received funding from both the IBP and CBF there is no duplication.

It is concerning that the paper earlier identifies a proposed funding model for RIBS which funding model does not include, as per the current funding model, ANY component for payment of broadcasters AT THE SAME TIME as proposing a model in this section of the paper that removes the sole funding source for broadcaster payment for indigenous broadcasters. There appears to be an assumption that all broadcasters have other sources of income such as CDEP, which assumption is false certainly in the case of Warlpiri Media Association. The vast majority of broadcasters are casual workers and get paid an hourly unsubsidised rate of pay.

B.4.1 Are these appropriate principles for administering the program.

Principles a. b. c. f. we agree are appropriate principles for administering the program.

Principle d. states "*Organisations should be funded at a minimum level to assist the operation of basic broadcasting activity.*" It is our opinion that terms such as "basic broadcasting activity" should be avoided and that this paper would be well served by spelling specifically what government understands by this term.



C.1.1.1 How could the IBP encourage more Indigenous employment?

Adequate funding for trainee positions, as well as funding for an Indigenous Employment Support Officer and Aboriginal broadcasters would be strongly supported.

C.1.1.2 Should the IBP set targets for Indigenous employment within funded organizations?

Realistic, achievable targets for Indigenous employment with adequate funding would be strongly recommended, although it is important that any such targets be the outcome of a consultation process and cater for the diversity of employment practices across Aboriginal populations.

An alternative proposition would be to request the Boards/Committees of funded organisations to set out short to long term proposals for Indigenous employment rates , with annual reporting of performance against targets.

C.1.2.1 Should the IBP provide for two hours paid work per day for operators at qualifying RIBS sites?

Two hours per RIBS site would be a bare minimum. In addition the implementation of standard work place practices such as position descriptions, clear lines of accountability, timesheets and targets would be essential. It would also be important that this funding and outcomes were clearly identified as being different to the funding currently available through CBF for Indigenous Programming.

C.1.2.2 How should arrangements for paid work be monitored?

As in any workplace, paid work should be monitored through clearly defined and measurable outcomes. There is no reason that work arrangements as discussed in this paper should be any different.

C.1.2.3 How significant is the continuation of CDEP to the smooth functioning of Indigenous broadcasting, particularly in remote areas?

CDEP provides for flexibility in employment patterns within an organisation. CDEP provides an incentive for casual broadcasters to move into more regular employment, and over time into funded positions. CDEP is an important part of the employment options of broadcasting organisations such as Warlpiri Media Association.



C.1.2.4 Have any IBP funded organization completed, or are they currently negotiating an SRA with DEWR that includes broadcasting?

Warlpiri Media Association has not entered into such negotiations.

C.1.3.1 What is the best way of meeting the training needs of Indigenous broadcasting services?

Supporting the successful training that is currently happening and providing funding support for more flexible accredited delivery of training is the best way of meeting the training needs of Indigenous broadcasting services.

It is critical that training be seen as a staged process that is supported by localised training and monitoring of performance. That is training should not be seen as separate from the day-to-day performance of broadcasters. The development of training partnerships that realistically meet the needs of the workplace is of the utmost importance.

C.1.4.1 Comments are sought on opportunities for traineeships.

Traineeships have been implemented on several occasions in our organization with very little success. We believe other more appropriate models of on-the-job training should be developed.

C.2.1.1 How can IBP funding be most effectively used through AICA and IRCA to best serve the interests of members under the proposed new funding model?

Funding could be most effectively used for these peak bodies through the inclusion of governance training, adequate funding to cover travel costs for board members to attend meetings, strategic and business plans.

