

The Central Land Council Community Development Program

MONITORING REPORT

2024 – 2025

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LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY

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Warning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: document may contain images of people that have passed away.

Photographic credits

Cover photo: WETT Willowra Culture Day - Young Fellas Class

Back cover photo: Kids enjoying the Tara playground

The artwork used in this report (pages 1-2 and 27) is used with permission and is from a painting by Samantha Watson. Samantha is on the Yuendumu Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation (GMAAAC) committee that is supported by the CLC community development program. The painting represents the nine GMAAAC communities.

Central Land Council Community Development (CD) Program report 2024/25

Key Messages

736

Community Engagements
Supporting Local Decision
Making

\$41.6 million

Approved for
Projects

247

New Community Benefit
Projects Funded

121

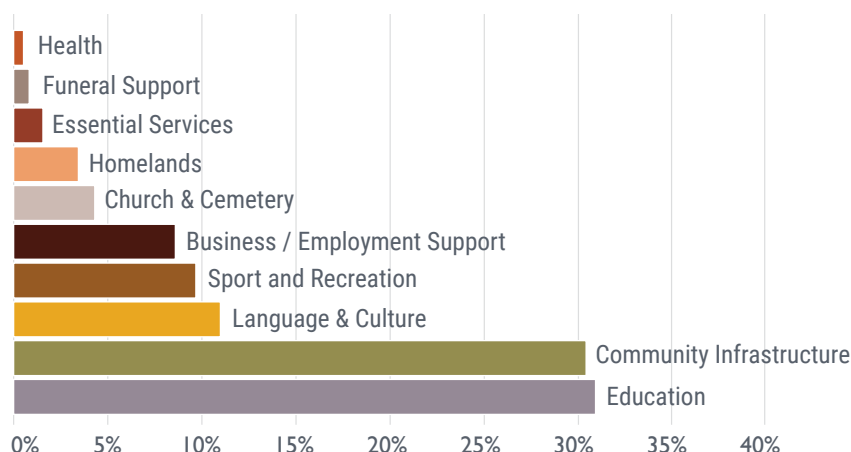
Projects Successfully Completed

107

Governance Groups

\$12.6m in additional funding leveraged through the CD program

Funding allocation \$ by project type



It's been really good for me to work with the CLC staff and the community. Makes me feel proud and I feel confident to speak and to work with other organisations. I bring out the skills I've been doing, governance training to work with other organisations within the community.
(GMAAAC Governance group member)

"Whatever we do, or fund is for the benefit of the community not for individuals or for families. Good governance is all about the community – what we want, what we need, how we go about it".
(GMAAAC Governance group member)

Social and Economic results

- **681** occasions of employment provided through the program, a **3% increase** on the previous year.
- The Alpururulam community finally have the funding and approvals needed to develop a **new water source**
- **736** community engagements including consultations with traditional owners and community members by CD program staff
- Community governance groups leveraged an additional **\$12,638,385** of funds for community development projects with support from the CD program.



GMAAAC Directors at Indigenous Governance Awards

The CD Program Objectives

- To increase Aboriginal engagement, ownership and control over the development of our communities, homelands and futures.
- To deliver development outcomes that are prioritised and valued by Aboriginal people and that make a meaningful and sustained difference in our lives, communities, homelands and futures.

Yeah, feeling really good that I learn so much about the money story and about the governance training and working with the [non-Indigenous] and [Aboriginal] people in different communities.
(GMAAAC Governance group member)



Yuelamu Art Centre establishment

We run our own meetings in the community but so that I can share what I do here in the (GGP) workshop...so that they know what to expect... Some people might just talk for their family [when they need something] they talk to me because of the relationship and trust they have in me and then I talk to the other five committee members, I ring them up and ask them to help.
(GMAAAC Governance group member)

It gives us self-determination, gives people a chance to think and discuss ideas, to think about what we want – ceremony or youth activities. A lot of discussion about short- and long-term needs. It's about building up the community – the recreation hall, footy oval, ceremony ground.
(GMAAAC Governance group member)



Governance for me is really important – that we know about it, the risks and challenges we face and most importantly that we all sit together and that we fight for rights especially the policy that's affecting us
(WETT Governance group member)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This document presents an overview of the Central Land Council's (CLC) Community Development (CD) program over the 2024-25 financial year. It also includes a case study of governance within the CD program. The report summarises monitoring data collected by the CLC about the community development program while the case study is compiled from interviews with GMAAAC Directors, GMAAAC Community Committee members and WETT Advisory Committee members. The reflections of community members are presented alongside the themes from reflection sessions by CD staff on governance in their regions to present some overall conclusions and recommendations.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE 2024-2025

The CD program reached a record level of investment in 2024-25, with total funding allocated increasing by 33% to \$41,584,957. The number of approved projects rose by only 9% to 247, indicating a shift towards fewer, higher-value projects, delivering stronger community outcomes. GMAAAC remained the largest funding stream (45%), followed by WETT (25%), and significant additional value was leveraged through \$12.6 million in auspiced funds. The program delivered 681 occasions of Aboriginal employment, and while total employment hours declined, this reflected a positive transition of employment funding to the Australian Government's RJED program following CLC advocacy. The education objective attracted the largest share of funding (31%), closely followed by community infrastructure (30.5%), and strong community engagement continued with 736 consultations recorded with community members. Funded projects generated tangible community benefits, including support for local arts and tourism and the construction of essential community infrastructure such as a playground in Tara.

Case study on Governance in the CD program

GMAAAC and WETT governance members strongly and positively frame good governance. They identified that it is grounded in two-way approaches that bring together Yapa and Kardiya worldviews, relational ways of working centred on kinship and Country, strong and inclusive community representation, strengths-based Aboriginal leadership, and Indigenous data governance. These views align with the perspectives of CD staff, who emphasise shared vision, high-quality dialogue, and active engagement and advocacy by governance members as markers of effective governance. CD staff note, however, that strong governance depends on having sufficient time, organisational incentives and resourcing to work closely with governance groups and support them to lead the delivery of community development projects and advocacy work, rather than prioritising speed of project delivery and expenditure.

CD staff also note that governance effectiveness is shaped by contextual factors such as income stream funding levels, levels of CD staff engagement, the presence and capacity of Aboriginal Corporations, local government and implementation partners. There are particular challenges in the East due to smaller income streams and growing numbers of governance groups. There are clear examples of increasing governance capacity, cross-community impact and transformational change,

including promising youth governance models. However, CD staff identified the need for clearer, more intentional approaches to two-way learning, adaptable governance models across regions, and greater opportunities to share good practice and support continuous learning and improvement as important for strengthening CD governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Revise the CD MEL framework to better capture lessons about successful governance, advocacy and systems change.**
 - a. Work with community researchers to document stories of good governance practices and ensure these reflect the local context, the governance model being used by the CD program and the relational way of working of CD staff.
 - b. Establish regular forums and peer learning opportunities to support knowledge sharing amongst both staff and governance group members.
- 2. Analyse the stories to determine common success factors and identify what governance approaches work best under different conditions to improve program effectiveness.**
- 3. Strengthen two-way learning about governance between CDOs and community members** through dedicated resourcing for ongoing cultural competency and relationship practice development for CD staff, including learning local languages and local cultural protocols during meetings.
- 4. Expand and formalise youth engagement pathways.** Capture models being used to engage youth in governance and share these amongst governance group members to support increasing youth participation in governance.

Community member recommendations to strengthen governance in GMAAAC funded Community Development programs and WETT included:

- Establish a GMAAAC office in CLC (like the ranger space);
- Explore ways to involve more men in the WETT Advisory Committee reflecting men's role as knowledge holders and teachers of culture;
- Fund a regular community feedback BBQ to allow the GMAAAC Directors and committee members to communicate back to the community about GMAAAC decisions and activities;
- Employ a Yapa person to work alongside the CDOs to support the CD work in community; Publish the GMAAAC book in languages other than Warlpiri (like Jaru) to support communication with other non-Warlpiri community members.

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ACRONYMS

ABA	Aboriginals Benefit Account
APONT	Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory
CD	Community Development
CDO	Community Development Officer
CDU	Charles Darwin University
CHSSC	Centre for Human Security and Social Change
CLC	Central Land Council
CLM	Community Lease Money
DSS	Department of Social Services
EPU	Economic Participation Unit
GGP	Good Governance Program
GMAAAC	Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation
MEL	Monitoring Evaluation and Learning
MFI	Matched Funds Initiative
MFX	Matched Funds Extension
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NT	Northern Territory
NP	National Park
P&W	Power and Water
PBC	Prescribed Body Corporate
RJED	Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program
TMAAAC	Tanami Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation
URM	Uluru Kata Tjuta Rent Money
WETT	Warlpiri Education and Training Trust
YWPP	Yitakimaninjaku, warrirninjaku, payirninjaku manu pina-jarrinjaku (Tracking and learning)

INTRODUCTION

This report focuses on the performance of the Central Land Council's Community Development Program and is a core part of the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the program which informs ongoing improvement. It comprises two parts. The first documents the performance of the Central Land Council's (CLC) Community Development Program over the financial year 2024-2025. This section aims to present key program achievements and trends in the Community Development (CD) program, to showcase what has been delivered over the reporting period and inform continuous program improvement.

The second part of this report is a deep dive into governance at the community level within the CD program, which is one of four strategies to support social, cultural and economic development in Aboriginal communities under the Community Development Framework.¹ The case study explores what constitutes good governance in a community development context from the perspective of Aboriginal people, the extent to which governance is supporting Aboriginal self-determination, and how CLC staff can support governance practices that contribute to transformational development² and the CD program's overall vision and goal of Aboriginal self-determination.³

THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Central Land Council is an Aboriginal Controlled Organisation which represents the traditional owners of Central Australia. It is committed to Aboriginal self-determination and control and supports communities to translate their land and native title rights into development outcomes.

The community development program supports Aboriginal communities within the Central Land Council's region to deliver a range of projects which support social, cultural and economic development. The program aims to maintain Aboriginal identity, language, culture and connection to country and to improve health, education and employment outcomes. These programs are prioritised, planned and funded by Aboriginal people using income from land-use agreements. Projects are wide ranging and include supporting the development of community development masterplans, the construction of physical buildings and community facilities and support for education and cultural activities.

The program is characterised by strong Aboriginal leadership, the development and refinement of governance structures that are developed by the local communities themselves to be locally and culturally appropriate, planning processes which are a good fit and can be adapted over time, and respectful relationships between Aboriginal participants and community development staff.⁴

The CLC Community Development Framework (2021- 2026) outlines the goals, principles and strategies which guide the program. The program uses four strategies to work towards achieving its goals and objectives. These are:

1. Governance support strategy
2. Planning and project management strategy
3. Partnerships and networks strategy; and
4. Lobbying and advocacy strategy.

Income sources

There are seven major income streams managed by the program. These are:

- Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT)
- Uluru Rent Money (URM)
- Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation (GMAAAC)
- Northern Territory Parks Rent Money (NT)
- Community Lease Money (CLM)
- Matched Funds (MF)
- Other Land Use Income (this includes TMAAAC and Matched Funds Extension (MFX)).

Communities may receive one or more of these income streams.

There is significant variation in the size of the income streams available within different communities for community development. In order to support communities with smaller income streams, in 2024-25 the CLC received funding from the Aboriginal Benefits Account to provide matched funding, helping to boost the income of communities with smaller income streams. A review of the Matched Funds Initiative (MFI) program in 2025 found that MFI was addressing the disparity between the amount of income across the three CD program regions, with most funds directed to lower income regions of the East and South-West.⁵

There are also examples of the CD program helping to leverage funding from other sources. This includes advocacy support, grant writing support and the development of masterplans which facilitate communities to source additional development funding.

*Youngfellas with the Kings
Narrative project in Mutitjulu*





MTA Reggae jamming at the Yuelamu Recording Studio

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM PROGRESS 2024-2025

INTRODUCTION

This section presents an analysis of the quantitative monitoring data collected by the program. This aims to showcase trends in the volume of funding allocated to projects, volume of expenditure and the different ways in which that funding is spent. It also presents data about the employment and training opportunities created through the CD program and the extent to which community engagement happens during the implementation of the program. The report presents an analysis of the data provided and aims to explain trends over time and identify any issues which have emerged from this data. The report also documents some of the program's key achievements and identifies some recommendations for the future monitoring of the CD program.

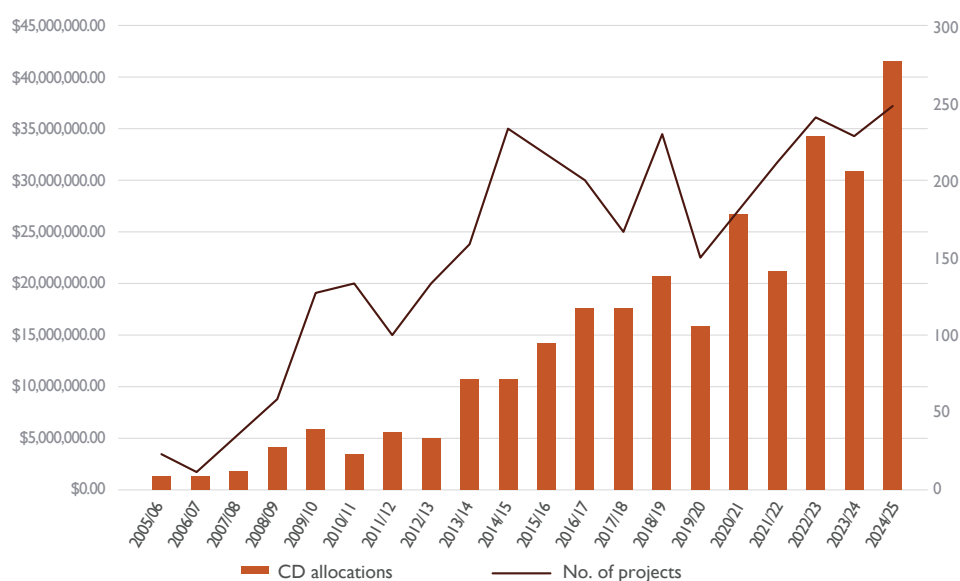
METHODOLOGY

The report is purely based on data collected by CLC through its standard project monitoring systems and provided to La Trobe University who have analysed it using basic descriptive analysis and presented overall data summaries and trends compared to previous annual reporting periods. The reasons behind data trends have been drawn out in a reflection workshop with CLC CD staff.

PROJECT ALLOCATIONS AND EXPENDITURE

A total of \$41,584,957 was allocated to CD in the 2024-25 financial year, the largest value yet in the program's history and a 33% increase on the previous year. The number of projects delivered only increased by 9% compared to the previous year, meaning that while there was a modest increase in the numbers of projects, most growth was in the value of the projects. This represents an ongoing positive trend towards larger value projects consistent with the program's intention of supporting communities to do more in-depth planning and undertake larger, more impactful projects. Larger projects can allow for stronger relationships between CD staff and community and more impactful work. However concurrently there was an increase in the number of projects being managed by each CD officer, which increased CD staff workloads and made it more difficult for them to work more deeply with communities.

Figure 1: Total CD allocations and number of projects in each year of CD program



The GMAAAC income stream was again the largest – as per previous years – accounting for 45% of the overall allocations, with the WETT allocation comprising a further 25%. There was an increase in allocations across nearly all income streams, with only CLM, other, and Matched Funds recording decreases of 4%, 69% and 4% respectively.

Overall expenditure increased by \$1,131,454 or 7% compared to the 2023/2024 financial year.

The lower expenditure level compared to the allocation values increase reflects that longer time is required to deliver the increasingly larger value projects. The program naturally experiences some fluctuations each year as there can be a lag between funding being committed and formally allocated with the executing of a funding agreement. Some community groups also choose to save their funds over a number of years in order to have funds to allocate to larger value projects.

Figure 2: Community Development Funding Allocations and Expenditure by Income Stream 2024-2025

Income Stream	# of projects	Allocated funds \$	% of total 24/25 allocation	% of total 23/24 allocation	Change in % allocation		Mean project value \$	Expenditure \$ (GST incl)
CLM	12	1,165,337	2.8	4	↓	1.2	71,812	568,420
GMAAAC	122	23,173,082	55.7	56	↑	0.3	189,943	8,096,608
MFI	65	2,484,501	6	8	↓	2	38,223	1,421,295
NT Parks Rent Money	11	926,051	2	2	—		46,303	597,781
Other income streams	12	861,744	2	9	↓	7	71,812	3,086,023
Tanami Dialysis Support Service	0	0	0	0	—		0	0
URM	1	1,588,701	4	2	↑	2	1,588,701	1,460,225
WETT	15	11,385,542	27	9	↑	18	759,036	3,259,866
TOTALS	247	41,584,957	100	100	—			18,490,219



Nyirpi residents enjoying the renovated Recreation Hall

LEVERAGED FUNDING

A total of \$12,638,385 was leveraged through work under the CD program over multiple years across two projects. The funding for these two projects was auspiced by CLC. The true value of funding leveraged through the CD program is much greater. Other examples of leveraged funding are where local government commits money to fund an action identified through a Masterplan developed by communities using their CD funds, or CD funded an activity which provided a basis for advocating to another organisation to fund part of an activity.

1. Yuelamu Art Centre and Manager's House Construction (\$4,538,385, funded by DSS)

An initial investment by GMAAAC CD funds was leveraged to seek funding for the construction of an Art Centre and Manager's House in Yuelamu. CD funded the scoping projects for the art centre and manager's house, including detailed design work that commenced in November 2024. In February 2025, an application to the Department of Social Services (DSS) was made to fund the full construction of the art centre and house. The GMAAAC funded scoping and design work was nearing completion by the time the activity plan was submitted to DSS in Aug 2025 so this initial progress and investment by GMAAAC was able to be leveraged to apply for DSS money to fund construction of the art centre and art centre staff house.

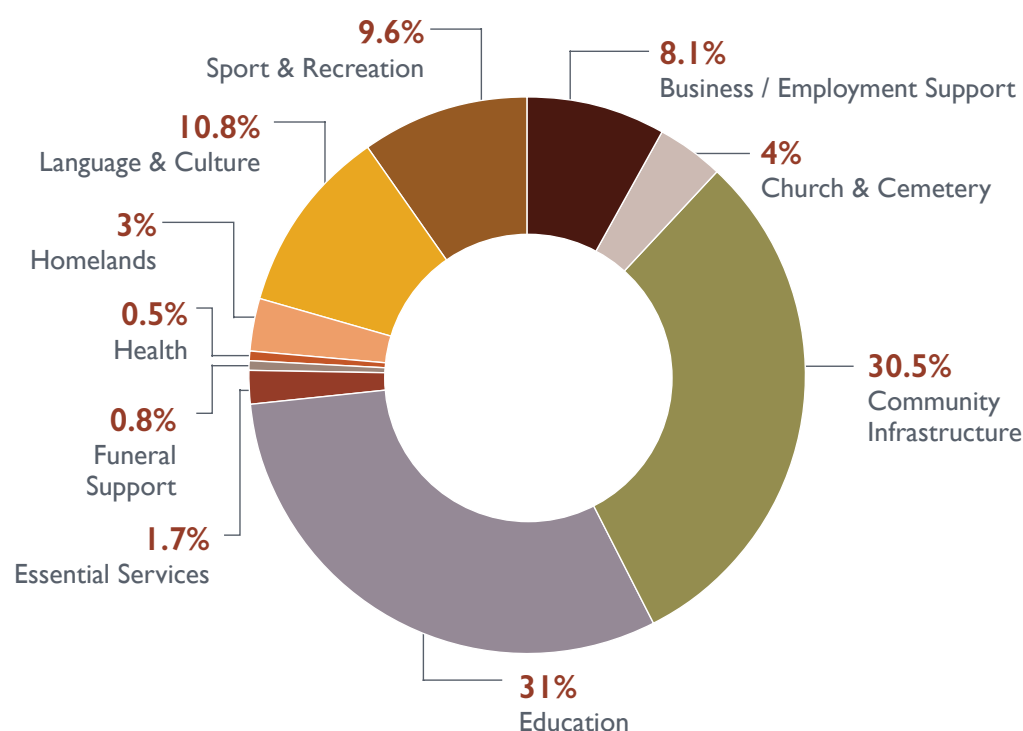
2. Alpururulam Water Infrastructure project (\$8,100,000 funded by NIAA) (CLM)

After many years of the community raising concern about the quality of the water, advocacy from CLC and the Alpururulam community, a grant of \$8,100,000 was finally received from the Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA), managed at the time by the National Indigenous Australians' Agency (NIAA), to allow for the establishment of a new bore. During the long period of advocacy, the community allocated \$110,000 of their community development money⁶ to support work to help fix the water, followed by \$37,000 in funding to a water treatment plant- a Calgon softener. The ABA grant reflects a significant achievement in directing considerable government resources towards a remote community in line with community priorities. The full story is documented as a key achievement under the CLM income stream later in this report.

ALLOCATIONS BY OBJECTIVE

The largest allocation of funding was directed to education projects (31% of the total), followed by community infrastructure at 30.5%. This particularly reflects the level of funding spent under the WETT program (27% of the overall allocations). The next largest was language and culture at 10.8%. This was a significant difference with last year, where the largest investment was community infrastructure (39.41%) followed by sport and recreation at 15.46%. Last year education was the seventh largest objective allocation, with only 6.23% of funding. The significant increase in funding for education relates to the large allocations under the WETT income stream this year. WETT operates on a biannual funding cycle and so there was a larger allocation this year.

Figure 3: 2024/25 allocations by objective

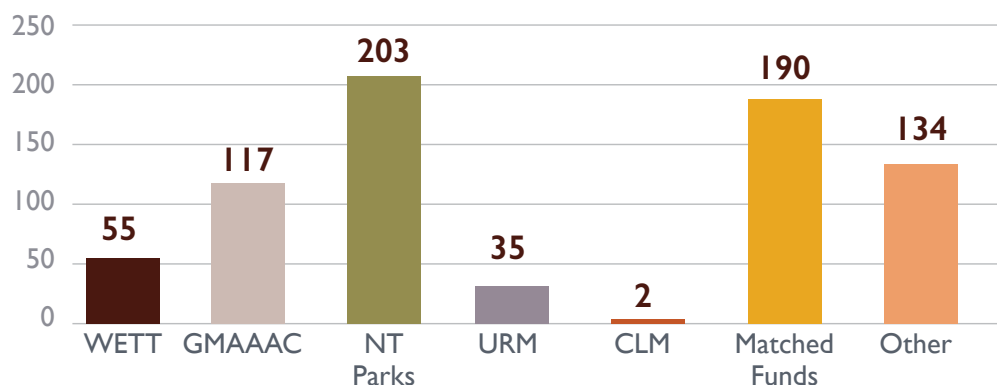


COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BY STAFF

There were 736 engagements with community members recorded for the CD program in the year with the majority (203 of them) related to the NT Parks funding stream and 190 engagements related to matched funds.⁷ The majority of these engagements were either face to face (327 engagements) or phone consultations (310) with traditional owners and other community members. There were also 12 meetings to support planning for the Yitakimaninjaku, warriminjaku, payiminjaku manu pinajarrinjaku (YWPP) work (the tracking and learning work for WETT) and 10 engagements related to conference or forum presentations. The overall number of engagements has remained fairly steady since last year, with consistency in how this data has been captured and recorded. However the engagements per income stream were less heavily weighted towards the matched funds income stream compared to previous years.

As a result, the engagements data does not present a comprehensive view of the extent to which the program is engaging with the community and the support that is being provided in relation to the income streams. For example, the two engagements recorded for CLM relate to engagements that related to projects only funded by CLM, with other CLM engagements captured under MFI as many projects receive both sources of income. The data is captured in this way to support reporting back to the matched funds account.

Figure 4: Engagements per income stream, 2024-25



ABORIGINAL TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

A total of 681 occasions of employment for Aboriginal community members were created through the CD program, providing a cumulative total of 53,526 hours of employment. This was a 3% increase in occasions of employment created since the previous year but a 24% decrease in employment hours (although significantly more than in 2022-23 and years previous), meaning slightly more of those employed worked fewer hours. The decrease in hours of employment represents that some of the occasions of employment were picked up and funded under the Australian Government's Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program, a really positive example of leveraged funding from the CD program. Overall, the number of occasions of employment has remained fairly steady, although slightly increased in the last three years, while there has been a fluctuation in the number of employment hours under the CD program.

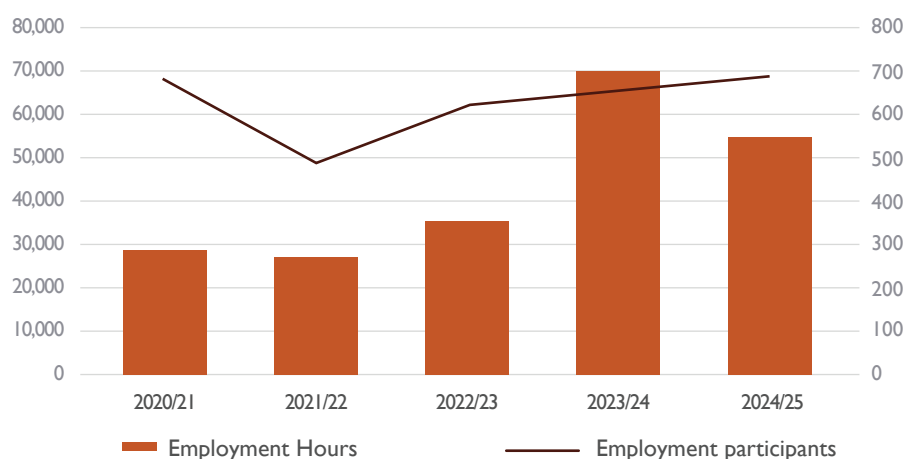


The Arlparra working group

Figure 5: Number of employment hours and positions by year

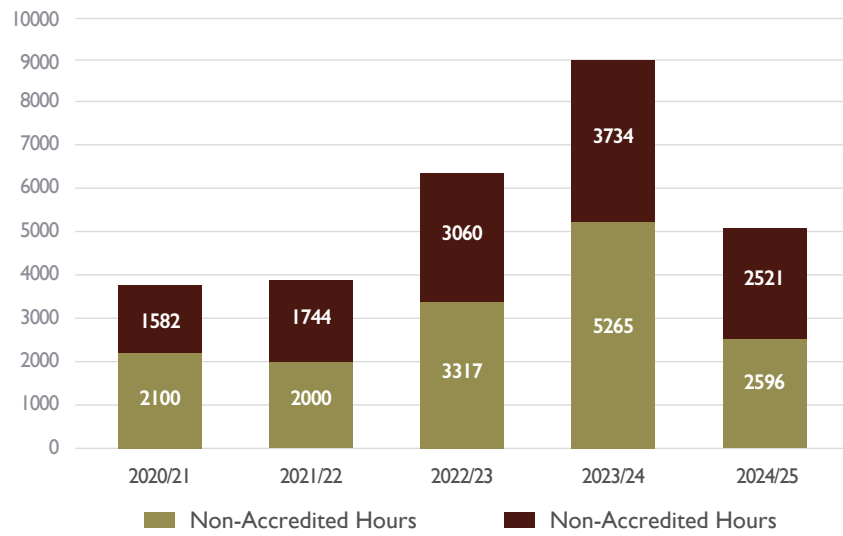
Income Stream	Number of Occasions of Employment	Employment Hours
MFX	2.51	149.87
CLM	24.88	6,832.73
GMAAAC	468.00	33,720.20
MF	12.61	686.4
NT PARKS	7.00	144.00
TMAAAC	9.00	17.50
URM	12.00	3,347.75
WETT	145.00	8,627.21
OTHER	-	-
Total	681	53,526

Figure 6: Aboriginal Employment by Income Stream 2024-2025



The most occasions of employment were available under projects funded through the GMAAAC income stream. These employment occasions comprised 63% of the overall employment hours allocation, consistent with the larger income share to GMAAAC. This follows a general trend where larger income streams are able to fund larger programs which create more employment opportunities. Furthermore, 312 training sessions were provided for a total of 5,117 hours in 2024/25. This included 2,521 hours of accredited training and 2,596 hours of non-accredited training. After increasing for three years, this represented a decrease in the number of training hours provided compared to the previous two years.

Figure 7: Trends in accredited and non-accredited training



Students gathering bush tucker on WETT's Yuendumu country visit



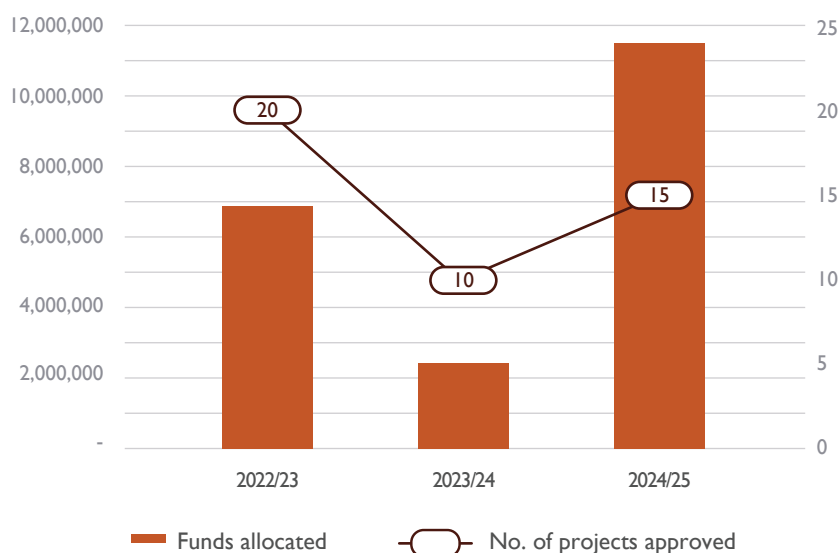
PROGRESS OF INDIVIDUAL INCOME STREAMS

THE WARLPIRI EDUCATION AND TRAINING TRUST

The Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) projects use gold mining royalties to support Warlpiri education and training initiatives in the Tanami communities of Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Willowra and Nyirrpi. WETT is governed by traditional owners through the Kurra Aboriginal Corporation, with advice from the WETT Advisory Committee. WETT's focus areas are: children and families, language and culture in schools, secondary school support, youth development, and community learning centres.

55	\$11,385,542	145	15	3
engagements conducted	funding allocated to projects	occasions of employment for Aboriginal people for a collective total of 8,627 hours	projects funded	projects successfully completed

Figure 8: Graph of WETT funding allocations



The increase in WETT funding allocations this year reflects that WETT funds ongoing projects across its five program areas. The funding cycles of these projects explains increases or decreases in allocations from one year to the next. In the July 2024 – June 2025 period WETT funded the learning centres for a further two years (\$5.5M), which was its most costly project. Other significant allocations included the Willowra playgroup for a further three years (\$1.7 million) and CLC CD staffing positions for a further 3 years (\$1.6 million).



HIGHLIGHTS

NAIDOC Award

WETT won the prestigious 2024 National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Award in the education category, a very proud moment for the WETT committee. For nearly two decades, WETT has invested more than \$57 million in education programs, including support for children and families, language and culture in schools, youth development, secondary school support and community learning centres. The NAIDOC award recognised WETT’s long-term commitment to improving educational outcomes, supporting bilingual and bicultural learning, and fostering lifelong learning for Warlpiri communities.

Growth of the Yitakimaninjaku, warrirninjaku, payirninjaku manu pina-jarrinjaku (YWPP or tracking and learning) team and capacity

WETT is supported by a dedicated team of Yapa (Aboriginal) researchers who support ongoing tracking and learning about WETT investments and provide advice to the WETT Advisory Committee. Over the 2024/25 year, the YWPP team has grown and become stronger, with some researchers also stepping up to senior researcher roles. There has been ongoing investment in building team capacity, such as training in Yuendumu and Nyirripi for new researchers to join the YWPP team. The team have developed researcher profiles for the Indigenous research initiative and are working towards Charles Darwin University (CDU) researcher credentials, with three researchers receiving credentials. Yapa researchers continue to take greater levels of control of the annual workshop and in recruiting and mentoring new researchers on the YWPP work. Furthermore, increased capacity in the YWPP team has meant that the team can do more lobbying using research results to the regional council NIAA and the Central Australia Implementation Plan.

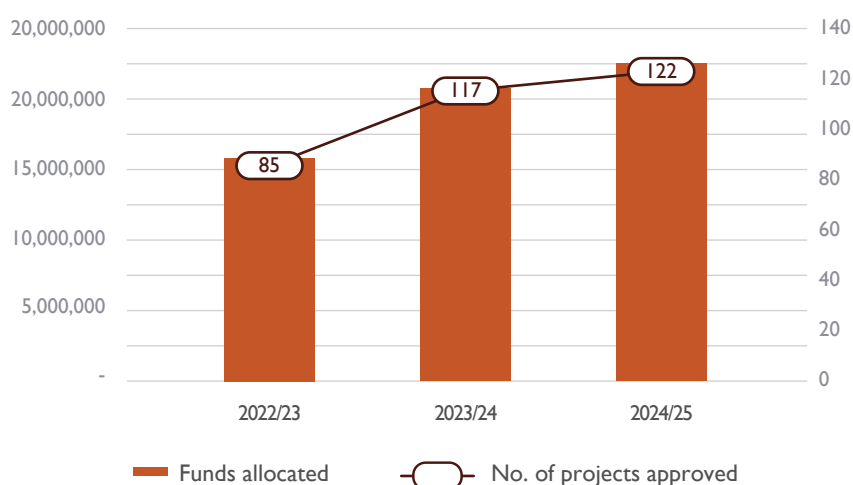
THE GRANITES MINE AFFECTED AREA ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

The Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation (GMAAAC) is currently the largest income stream administered by the CD program. Half of its compensation income benefits community projects in the nine Tanami communities affected by the mine. The other half is invested to ensure the communities continue to benefit after the mine closes. GMAAAC projects aim to benefit nine communities in the Tanami region affected by the granites mine through projects that focus on: health, education, employment and essential services; developing employment and training opportunities; and promoting Aboriginal self-management.

117	\$23,173,982	468	122	49
engagements conducted	funding allocated to projects	occasions of employment for Aboriginal people for a collective total of 33,720 hours	projects funded	projects successfully completed

GMAAAC allocations have continued their trend of annual increases and the number of projects has risen to a high of 122.

Figure 9: GMAAAC funding allocations and no. of projects



HIGHLIGHTS

Yuelamu Art Centre

Since the Yuelamu Art Centre opened in 2023, more than 50 artists have become members, painting, selling and showcasing their work. In its first year, the artists sold 450 paintings, providing \$45,000 in direct income to the artists. Before this, artists travelled three hours to sell their work at the Todd Mall in Alice Springs or drove 40 kilometres to Warlukurlangu Artists in Yuendumu. In 2023, the Art Centre employed a Manager and local arts workers. GMAAAC allocated \$264,000 to set up the centre and cover its operational costs between 2022 and 2024. GMAAAC then allocated an additional \$71,000 to the project in 2024, which included \$10,000 to build a website to help artists to sell and promote their work online. The community is now planning for a dedicated art centre space in a disused building.

Nyirrpi Recreation Hall

The community in Nyirrpi have spent 10 years working with the CLC through the CD program on improving community spaces. This is now being realised with the community committing more than \$4.5 million since 2016 to upgrade the Learning Centre and Recreational Hall. This represents a success as the first major tender for an AS4000 agreement which is a new set of construction contract standards, lifting the quality of building work throughout the CD program. It is the first \$4 million project for GMAAAC and included construction of a new learning centre and recreation hall. a community member who has been employed to work on the upgrades commented that:

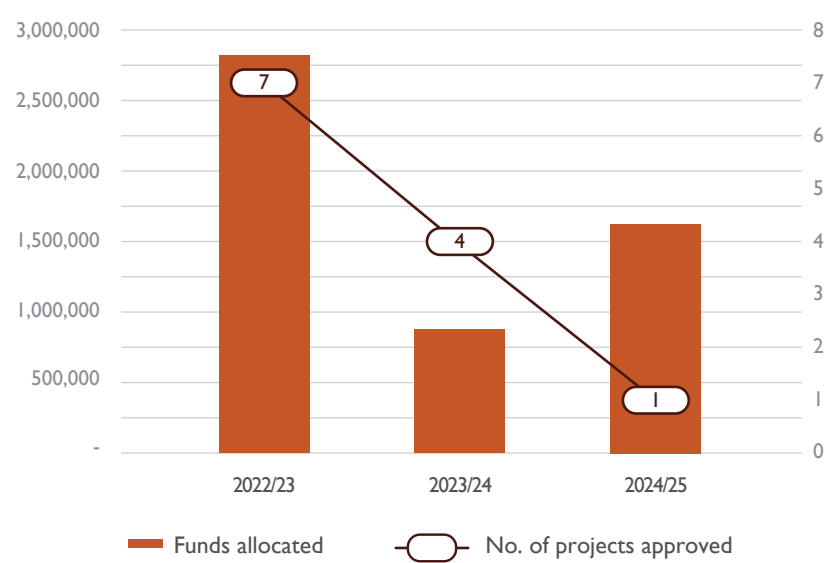
"Nyirrpi looks different, the building has more stuff, recording studio, kitchen and office. It's really good for the kids. I feel proud for being part of this project, proud for myself and for the community"

THE ULURU KATA TJUTA RENT MONEY

35	\$1,588,701	12	1	3
engagements conducted	funding allocated to projects	occasions of employment for Aboriginal people for a collective total of 3,347.75 hours	projects funded	projects successfully completed

The overall funding allocation for the Uluru Kata Tjuta Rent Money (URM) income stream significantly increased this year. At the same time, while the data shows only one project funded this year, these figures can be explained together by two reasons. Firstly, some URM projects are multi-year; therefore funding isn't allocated every year, and the Traditional Owners had made the decision to let income build up for two years before holding the next funding decision and allocation meeting. As a result, allocations may then be significantly larger or smaller during some years, and number of projects funded in some years lower or higher. Secondly, some other projects during this year were funded through URM as well as other income streams, such as matched funds income, and were counted in the data under the other income stream.

Figure 10: Uluru rent money allocations and projects



HIGHLIGHTS

Mutitjulu swimming pool

The CD program is funding the ongoing operations and maintenance of a pool for the Mutitjulu community, which opened in 2013 and has provided a range of health and social benefits, such as healthy activities for kids and young people, reduced skin infections, increased school attendance and employment opportunities for the community. A study of the child health benefits of newly built pools in three remote Western Australian communities found decreases in skin and ear diseases. Prior to the swimming pool construction, children in Mutitjulu were swimming in waterholes at the base of Uluru which, in a desert environment, were often stagnant and polluted.



The Mutitjulu community allocated \$100,000 of their CD money to the pool's construction and \$1.5 million to ongoing pool operations. This was supplemented with a \$3 million contribution from the Aboriginals Benefit Account and a substantial grant from the Mutitjulu Foundation.

The pool opened in 2013 and employs up to three local Aboriginal people each year. The use of a 'yes pool, yes school' policy, where children have to attend school to be able to access the pool has improved school attendance and also reduced skin infections. The pool has been a significant success for the community, receiving significant positive feedback due to providing long-term employment opportunities for the Anangu community and the health benefits documented above.

Mutitjulu walkway upgrades

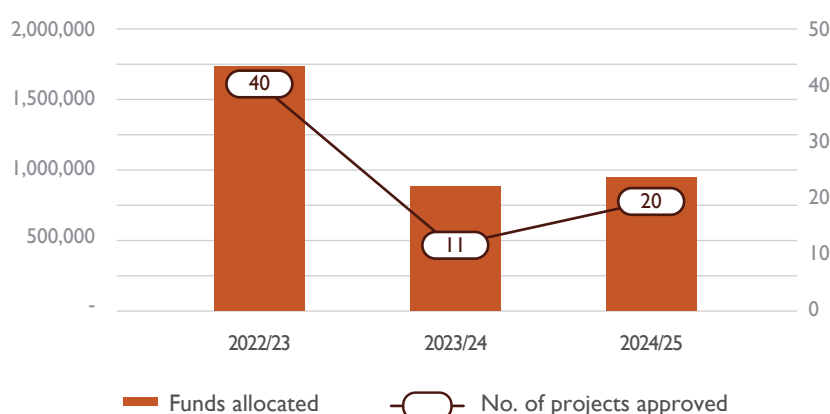
A new shaded walkway with seating has been constructed between the pool and the health clinic, providing much needed relief from the summer heat and a space to gather. It has created a space for community events and has facilitated access to critical community facilities, with mobility scooter users able to more easily get around. The CD working group set aside \$779,121 inc. GST to design and build the walkway, using both URM and matched funds.

THE NORTHERN TERRITORY PARKS RENT MONEY

203	\$926,051	7	20	11
community engagements conducted	funding allocated to projects	occasions of employment for Aboriginal people for a collective total of 144 hours	projects funded	projects successfully completed ⁸

After funding allocations and projects approved decreased last year, there was a slight increase this year to a total allocation of \$926,051 across 20 projects.

Figure 11: NTP funding allocations and projects



HIGHLIGHTS

Yalka Eco Stays Project

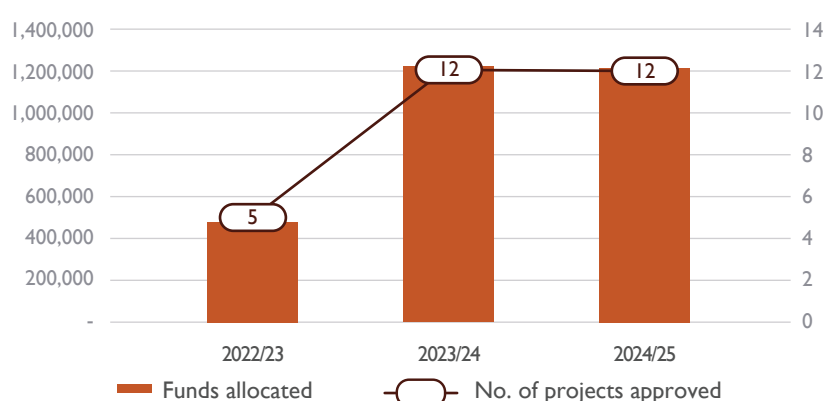
Community development funds have supported the establishment of an Aboriginal owned and run business called Yalka Eco Stays which is operated by the Yalka Ratara Aboriginal Corporation. The eco camp, located on the edge of Palm Valley within Finke Gorge National Park, is an example of supporting tourism on the family's own homelands, contributing to livelihoods, skills development and providing ongoing sources of income. Since 2014, the CD program has supported the development of the business, including \$64,141 in 2024-25 for the purchase of equipment for luxury tents, including beds, linen, a bathroom and outdoor settings, attracting more tourists to Palm Valley and improving income for the community. The Eco Stay is operated by Mr Ratara, who each evening meets guests at the Eco Stay and invites them to walk on country and shares what he can of the story handed down from his father and grandfather. The Yalka Corporation has developed a connection with Intrepid Travel, a small group tour operator. It began last year and has now moved into a six-month trial. The trial brings tour groups to the Palm Valley camp two days a week. "Every time I get guests, I get good feedback. Peaceful land, good feeling," Mr Ratara said. If the trial develops into a long-term partnership, Mr Ratara hopes the business will create new jobs for Western Aranda people on country, such as guiding, hospitality and buffel grass management work. "I want to see our young people working here instead of doing other things," he said. He really appreciated the CLC's support for obtaining a lease for the land to allow him to establish the business and for the funds to support his business costs.

COMMUNITY LEASE MONEY

2	\$1,165,337	24	12	10
community engagements conducted	funding allocated to projects	occasions of employment for Aboriginal people for a collective total of 6,832.75 hours	projects funded	projects successfully completed ⁹

After a significant increase in total allocation and numbers of projects approved last year, this year those values remained very similar, with 12 projects again approved and a total of \$1,165,337 allocated to projects.

Figure 12: CLM funding allocations and no. of projects



HIGHLIGHTS

Alpururulam water agreement

Since the 1990s Alpururulam community members have had concerns about the quality of the water in their community. Community members reported that the water makes some people feel sick; showering in the water caused itchy and irritated skin; people bought soft drinks rather than drink the poor tasting tap water and they worry about kidney health.

Community members on low incomes paid premium prices to buy bottled water from the local store, which led to lots of wastewater bottles piling up. The mineral build-up from hard water damaged household appliances and hot water systems, so residents paid to replace them and waited lengthy periods for contractors from Tennant Creek to repair services. Residents reported that people leave Alpururulam because of the poor-quality water.

Since its inception in 2012, the Alpururulam community development working group's highest priority has been improving the drinking water quality. In 2013 the community put \$110,000 of their own lease money aside to contribute to the cost of the required infrastructure. In 2015, the community funded the Power and Water Corporation (PWC) \$37,000 to install and operate a Calgon dosing machine (water softener) for five years. After the first year, Power and Water started funding the softener system. PWC have also worked to find an alternative, long-term water source, located off the Community Living Area and on Lake Nash Station; drilled and cased the bores; determined that the bores have a good flow rate and water that meets the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines; and provided indicative costings for the infrastructure project.

The CLC's Community Development team advocated for years to PWC and the NT Government for funding for the water infrastructure upgrades. Due to its governance structure and budgetary constraints, PWC were not able to fund the project and the CD team were informed by the NT Government in 2019 that the water problems in Alpururulam were not regarded as a high priority considering the critical needs of other water stressed communities. The CD team, at the direction of community members, applied for a grant in 2020 from the Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA) for the funding. The approved ABA funding fell short by \$1 million.

At this point, the CD team started working closely with CLC's Policy team on the matter. While negotiating with PWC, the NT Government and the National Indigenous Australians Agency to overcome the shortfall, there was a federal review of utility companies and the recommendation was made that PWC should charge a 20% project management fee. After a long period of advocacy, and during which time material costs rose substantially, the NIAA was able to secure \$8.1 million (the updated project cost) for the project.

There remained the issue of land access, which was finally resolved in November 2025 by the NT Government and Lake Nash Station reaching agreement that the community could access the new bores. This now means that the construction of the water access should start in the second half of 2026.

The CD team have played a critical role in supporting the community to work through the funding and other issues that have arisen over the past 14 years. The CD team drove the process of finding a solution by coordinating meetings with the necessary stakeholders, including working closely with CLC's Policy team on advocacy to government regarding the need for water access in the community. Working with the CLC's Policy and Legal teams, the CD team maintained the momentum around the advocacy for water, including meeting biannually with the key stakeholders to continue facilitating access to better water. This ongoing advocacy to stakeholders to prioritise the project eventually meant that all the issues that blocked this project were eventually overcome, allowing construction to start later in 2026.

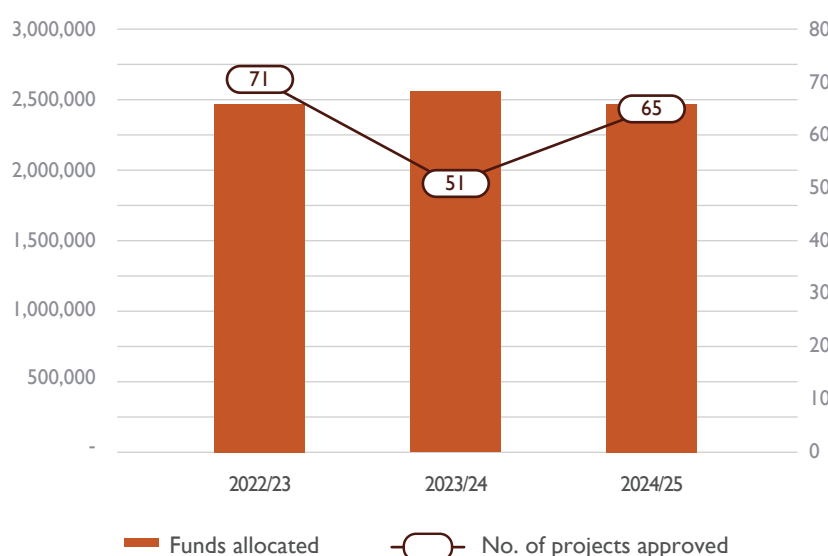
MATCHED FUNDS INITIATIVE

190	\$2,484,501	12	65	48
community engagements conducted	funding allocated to projects	occasions of employment for Aboriginal people for a collective total of 686.4 hours	projects funded	projects successfully completed

The Matched Funds Initiative continues to play a critical role in supporting communities with smaller income streams to use their funds for community development projects. It matches dollar-for-dollar funding allocations made to community development by traditional owner groups and communities and aims to incentivise groups to prioritise community development, increase impact by enabling longer-term and bigger projects and address income disparities between regions.

The amount allocated in the 2024-25 year was \$2,484,501. Allocations have remained fairly steady, with a slight decrease (4%) in the 2024-25 year.

Figure 13: MFI funding allocations and no. of projects



HIGHLIGHTS

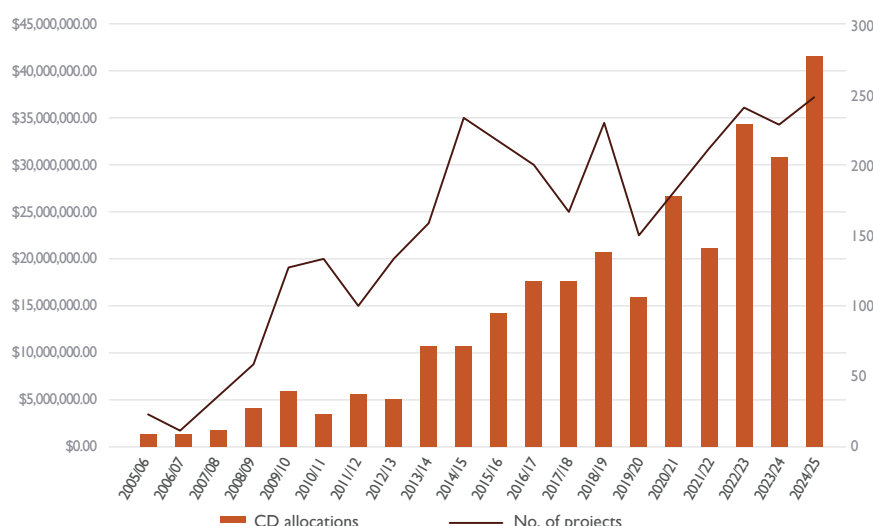
Tara playground built

A playground, first suggested by the community in 2021, was built in 2025, providing a suitable place for children to play and spend time. It was the first major project in the community, enabled by matched funds. The community have reported that children go there to play after school, are engaging better with each other, and as a central piece of community infrastructure, the whole community can look out for the children while they are there. "They play all day, have lunch, then come back and play again," said grandmother and group member Nancy Thompson. "Even after school they run straight here and play into the night. They love the playground." The playground was constructed with \$127,000 in matched funds from the Aboriginal Benefit Account.¹⁰

OTHER PROJECTS

133	\$861,743	12	18
community engagements conducted	funding allocated to projects	projects funded	projects successfully completed

Figure 14: Other funding streams no. of projects and funding allocations



HIGHLIGHTS

Lajamanu Ngurrju Kirri Palkakurlu

Lajamanu Ngurrju Kirri Palkakurlu, or the Lajamanu Good Community Life project, is a CD-initiated Aboriginal community-led longitudinal research project taking place in Lajamanu, a community with multiple CD income streams. 2024/25 marked the fifth year of this research project and the third year of longitudinal data collection to track changes in community wellbeing outcomes. The research team found that the community engaged positively with the interview process and the research team used kinship ties to decide how to facilitate the interviews which was effective in gathering a large number of in-depth interviews.

Wellbeing changes included improvements in housing after a long period of no change, with new raised houses being built. However there were concerns that the number of houses was still not enough and that the type of houses being built weren't appropriate. There was positive feedback about the health clinic with some feedback about how to encourage more men to attend and to provide more culturally appropriate health interventions, such as smoking babies and bush medicine.

Importantly, this third year of data collection marks a milestone for the project as it now has three years of longitudinal data about wellbeing that the community can use for advocacy and to inform community services and programs. The project enjoys strong community support and the community have identified actions they want to take in response to the findings from the research.

The findings from the research were shared with GMAAAC who responded positively to the seven wellbeing domains. The research findings have also been shared with a partner with the community's permission in support of a project aimed at improving service delivery in Lajamanu.



CONCLUSIONS

The CD program continues to grow, with overall funding allocations to the program increasing 33% from the previous year to the highest value to date of \$41,584,957. However, the number of projects approved only increased by 9% to 247 projects in the 2024-25 financial year. This represents a positive trend with communities investing in fewer, larger value projects, providing significant community value. As in previous years, the GMAAAC income stream was again the largest, accounting for 45% of the funding allocated, with the WETT allocation representing a further 25% of the allocation. There were two significant instances of funding being leveraged through the CD program with CLC auspicing funds with a total value of \$12,638,385.

The CD program also created significant positive community benefit through providing 681 occasions of employment for Aboriginal community members, a 3% increase on the previous year. The hours of employment provided decreased by 24%, however this was actually a positive trend. Following significant lobbying and advocacy by CLC, the Australian government took over funding for a number of employment hours through the Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program, a further example of the CD program leveraging additional resources for communities. Education was the largest sectoral allocation at 31% of the value, representing that this year was a significant allocation year for WETT in their funding cycle. Community infrastructure was the second largest at 30.5%.

The program continued its record of strong community engagement, recording 736 engagements with community members. The majority of these were either face-to-face engagements or phone consultations with traditional owners and other community members.

The income streams funded projects which created significant value for communities. Project highlights include the Yuelamu Art Centre which is supporting local artists to sell their work, the Yalka Eco Stays Project which supports local tourism, and the construction of a playground in Tara, providing an important place for local children to play. Highlights also included important lobbying and advocacy achievements, such as the Alpururulam water agreement, in which CD played a critical role alongside community leaders and other stakeholders.

CASE STUDY ON GOVERNANCE IN THE CENTRAL LAND COUNCIL'S CD PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

This second section of the report comprises a more in-depth analysis of governance in the community development (CD) program through a case study. Governance refers to the governance groups that are established in communities for each income stream, as well as the boards of directors of GMAAAC and the Kurra Aboriginal Corporation. The groups formed in communities are sometimes called Community Committees or Working Groups. These groups decide what projects to invest in and oversee the implementation of those projects, with the support of the CLC's community development team.

Governance is central to many other strategies in the CD Framework, and governance that is aligned with Aboriginal needs and priorities is critical to realising the CD program's aims around Aboriginal self-determination and empowering Aboriginal communities to make decisions on their own terms. CD staff identify tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous concepts of leadership and governance and continuously reflect on how to best reconcile these in their work. Furthermore, there is a need to better understand how effectively community governance structures are supporting the implementation of the CD program, and ultimately contributing to the CD program's goal of Aboriginal self-determination and transformational change. For example, CD staff suggest that members of CD governance groups learn about governance through their participation in CD governance structures and carry this experience and knowledge into other governance forums. There is also an interest in understanding more about how CLC can best support governance in partner organisations who support the implementation of CD projects, an issue which has been found to be relevant to the effectiveness of the CD program.

The case study explores the following three questions:

1. What does strong governance look like in the CD program for GMAAAC Directors, GMAAAC Community Committee members and members of the WETT Advisory Committee?
2. How does governance work at a community level in the CD program support or hinder the achievement of the CD program goal and vision, i.e. Aboriginal self-determination and transformational development?
3. What practices by CD, and the CLC more broadly, can enable and support groups to strengthen their governance processes and capacity for the goal or vision?

The case study starts with a brief review of the literature around Indigenous conceptions of governance, before presenting an overview of governance in the CD program. It then outlines how GMAAAC and WETT governance group members conceive of good governance and how strengths-based approaches to governance are being applied in the program. It subsequently outlines how CD staff view strong governance capacity and considers the program's approaches to two-way learning and building governance capacity. Finally, the case study considers how CD governance is contributing to Aboriginal self-determination. It concludes with some recommendations for CLC's consideration as to how to strengthen governance in the CD program.

Literature review of Indigenous conceptions of governance

*"Assessments of what is 'good' about governance cannot be separated from culturally-based values and normative codes about what is the 'right way' to get things done. In an intercultural milieu, determining whose way is the 'right way' is frequently a contested issue"*¹¹

This section presents a brief summary of some key relevant points drawn from academic and grey literature on governance in an Indigenous context. At the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory Strong Aboriginal Governance Report from a Governance Summit in April 2013, participants noted that the word governance means different things to different people and cultures. Former CLC Director David Ross said that:

*"Aboriginal Governance is about working together to build structures and processes that reflect your culture, your priorities, your world view and your solutions to problems. Governance is not just a matter of effective service delivery or organisational compliance or management. It is about self-determining ability and authority of clans, nations and communities to govern, to decide what you want for your future and to implement your own initiatives, and take responsibility for your decisions and actions."*¹²

The APONT Governance Summit report also includes key messages from discussion groups. The Men's group stated that Aboriginal Law is very significant because good governance must first begin in communities and families. Both the men's and women's discussion groups highlighted the importance of engaging with young people about governance, culture and law, and involving them more in governance so that they can learn the practical skills needed to govern well.¹³

A 2022 evaluation of the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APONT's) Aboriginal Governance and Management Program found that the effectiveness of the governance capacity building approach used by the program was linked to the depth of knowledge of staff, the relationships

WETT advisory committee and WETT community researchers



between staff and governance groups, and the tailoring of support to the local needs of each organisation. It found that the program was demonstrating good practice through its use of locally-led, relational and adaptive development practice.¹⁴ The evaluation also noted that the program had identified that Aboriginal organisations experience significant challenges, with Aboriginal leaders facing demanding governance workloads which are difficult to manage in a context of weaker management capacity, high community demand and limited resourcing. Research also found that Aboriginal organisations face challenges working in a system which prioritises accountability upward to the funding agency over accountability to an organisation's members or clients.¹⁵

The Indigenous Governance Awards established by the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute aim to acknowledge the successes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations from around Australia. The good governance criteria under the award include self-determination and the extent to which the organisation strengthens self-governance and leadership for its members and community and cultural legitimacy- that the organisation fits, reflects and strengthens the community's or region's culture.¹⁶

The CD governance strategy attempts to manage these issues and tensions and apply these best practice principles. This is evident through its emphasis on community-led decision-making which reflects local priorities and cultural values, the focus on developing group governance capacity through an approach that supports two-way learning as well as supporting Aboriginal people to extend control of their own development beyond community development working groups.

Governance in the CD program

The CD program places Aboriginal self-determination at its heart. Consequently, it aims to establish governance structures which centre Aboriginal knowledge systems and practices and incorporate the preferences and needs of communities. As the Central Land Council's Governance Guide notes:

*"Governance means doing things the right way in organisations, so that they can stay strong. When Aboriginal people talk about governance they mean having the power to make decisions about how their organisations get things done."*¹⁷

They also state that:

*"Governance is about doing business the proper way according to rules, culture and the law, making sure things stay on track, making sure group members have the power to make decisions, know their job and know what they and others can and can't do, and work well together."*¹⁸

Governance therefore refers to the mechanisms agreed for decision making, as well as committee processes and ways of working. CD decision-making can relate to project selection and allocations of income, as well as bigger goals relating to agency about what happens in communities and advocating for key issues to governments and other stakeholders. Governance includes the process for selecting governance group membership, the process for making decisions, the process for running meetings, the process for setting an agenda, having a chair, the meeting guidelines, and conflict of interest management. It also includes other informal, undocumented elements of governance, such as the conversations and engagement that happens outside of formal governance structures that support decision making, such as consultation and engagement with individuals and other community governance groups and partners. In this way, the governance strategy in the CD Framework is strongly linked with the strategies of partnerships and networks and lobbying and advocacy.

Governance approaches in the CD program are context specific. This is a strength of the program given the diversity between and within the communities involved in the program. For example, there are large income streams that have a longer history of engagement with the CD program

GMAAAC Directors learn about governance in the GGP



and well-established governance processes (e.g. WETT, GMAAAC and URM). However, there are also communities with much smaller income streams that are new to the CD program (for example, those that are part of the matched funds stream, particularly communities in the East region). The governance structure for each CD income stream committee is agreed between the CLC and the community, taking into account what is locally and culturally relevant, what mechanism will be practically effective and the resources available to support them.

Governance mechanisms are constantly evolving and changing, given they operate in a fluid context, with changes externally in government and policies and changes internally in governance membership and funding levels affecting how groups operate. While some levels of governance, such as the GMAAAC and Kurra Aboriginal Corporation, are less flexible due to being within incorporated organisations with established rulebooks, the Directors that work in these boards are still required to operate within the same often unpredictable and evolving context and therefore must exercise adaptability while remaining within their set rules and guidelines.

Governance support is one of the four key strategies under the CD Framework. The Governance strategy aims to:

Support good governance processes that prioritise participant knowledge and engagement and strengthen governance capacity including:

- *Support effective governance for the management of land use income streams*
- *Develop group governance capacity through an approach that supports two-way learning*
- *Increase the involvement of younger people in CD program governance*
- *Support Aboriginal people to extend control of their own development beyond community development working groups.*

The CD governance process often sits in a crowded space as one of many different governance structures in a given community. Many community members involved in CD governance are also members of other community governance groups. As outlined under the fourth component of the governance strategy above, CLC has had an expectation that capability and knowledge built in CD governance groups provides an opportunity for the CD governance group members to influence how governance works in other groups and apply their learning and experience from the CD governance group to other governance groups. This reflects an assumption was that this application of learning from the CD governance group would strengthen Aboriginal self-determination more broadly and therefore support the CD program's higher-level aims.

The role a CD officer plays in a governance process varies across the different communities. It can vary depending on factors such as the type of governance mechanism the group has, level of funding, local partner availability and capacity¹⁹, how functional the local Shire or Council is, and workload and pressure on CD officers working across different communities.

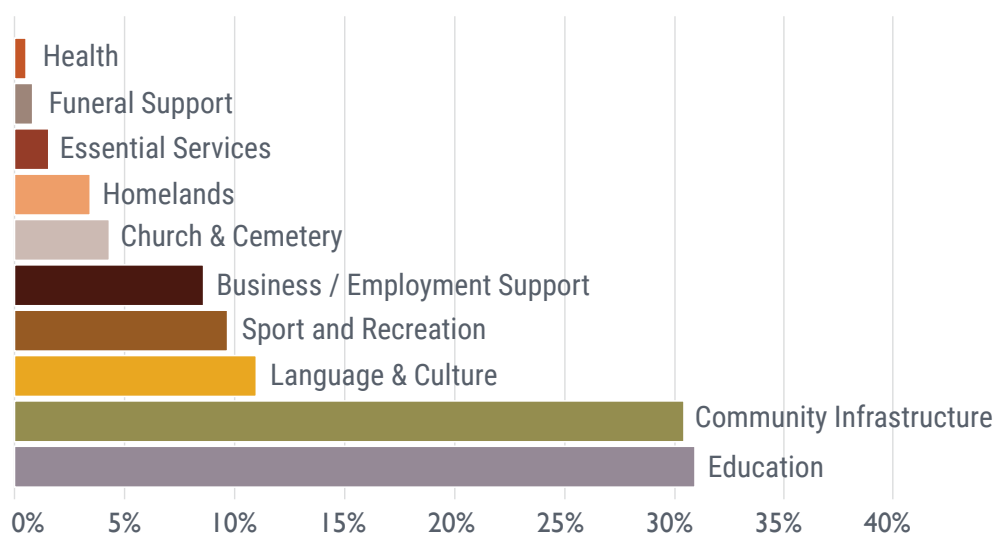
Governance in GMAAAC and WETT

There are a number of governance groups which relate to managing the income from the Granites gold mine and make decisions about how some of this income is invested in community development and in the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT). The Tanami communities elect community committees who decide which projects to invest in under the community development program, including consulting with the community on appropriate 'eligible community organisations' who then develop plans and budgets for prioritised projects.²⁰ In GMAAAC, these committees elect GMAAAC Directors who manage the Aboriginal Corporation and are responsible for the investment of funds and approving the costs to keep GMAAAC running.²¹

Governance capacity building and the Good Governance Program

CLC has long invested in building governance capacity amongst governance group members. Formal initiatives include the production of a Governance Guide, which is aimed at supporting Land Council members to understand key governance concepts explained in plain English.²² The Good Governance Program (GGP) is a significant investment in building their capacity in governance and financial literacy by two Aboriginal Corporations, GMAAAC and the Kurra Aboriginal Corporation. Under the program, the Directors of both Kurra and GMAAAC travel to Alice Springs three times a year for training and corporation meetings. The GGP supports the governance of the two Aboriginal Corporations, by equipping Directors with the knowledge to make good decisions and understand how to invest the royalty money from the Granites Gold mine to ensure there is income for the future.²³ Many of the members of these two Corporations are also members of GMAAAC community-level committees. These more formal investments in capacity building are complemented with the day-to-day work of CLC staff in facilitating governance working group meetings and supporting both Directors and community-level working group members in their roles.

Figure 15: Funding and governance arrangements related to the Granites Gold Mine



METHODOLOGY

Sampling

Prior to data collection, CLC and CHSSC researchers collaborated to identify areas of community level governance in which 'good governance' within the CD program was likely to be occurring. A strengths-based approach led to the selection of GMAAAC and Kurra members to participate in interviews. GMAAAC and WETT are the largest of the income streams managed by CLC (overall in 2024-2025 they comprised 70% of the overall CD funding allocated). They are also long-established governance groups, with a strong history of governance and were therefore expected to provide valuable evidence of what effective CD governance models entail. Furthermore, GMAAAC Directors and Kurra members were all due to come to Alice Springs for workshops, allowing interviews with governance group representatives across multiple communities for a broader representation of views. It is very common for GMAAAC Directors to also be members of the GMAAAC Community Committees making decisions about CD programs, allowing for a range of views to be gathered.

Data collection methods

Several data collection methods were used to inform the case study. The case study has been informed by:

- **Literature review:** A review of the broader literature relating to Indigenous governance and other documents discussing governance in CLC, such as the documentation about the GMAAAC good governance award. This enabled location of the primary data collection within the wider literature.
- **Semi-structured interviews** conducted by a CLC-contracted non-Indigenous researcher with 10 governance group members from governance groups in the Tanami, including Community Committees (9 interviewees), WETT Advisory Group members (2 interviewees) and GMAAAC

Directors (5 current, 1 former and 2 alternate Directors). Interviews sought views from participants on governance practices and their interpretation of good governance, and explored the following key themes: What is good governance? What does good governance look like in the CD program? How are good governance practices managed in meetings? How could governance be made stronger? How can CLC and CD officers support good governance? How has involvement in CD governance contributed to building governance capacity? The concept of good governance was approached in an open-ended way, and participant reflections were welcomed on any aspects of their governance group's history, including decision making, working together with CD staff, engaging with community and staying strong. Interviewer notes were taken from each interview which included some key participant quotes. Interviews were not audio recorded.



A GMAAAC Director accepting an award for continuous service

- **Reflection sessions conducted with CD staff.** Staff reflection sessions were held with staff participating across five online workshops, representing the three different CD regions (the East, the Southwest and the Tanami- with separate reflections sessions with GMAAAC and WETT) as well as staff involved in the Good Governance Program (GGP). Some sessions were facilitated online by CHSSC while others were facilitated by the CD Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Coordinator. These sessions sought CD staff views on their organisation's practice and how effectively they felt they were enacting the four elements of the governance strategy in their work, along with their experiences with community level governance in the CD program. All reflection sessions were transcribed into text using an online transcription tool, and deidentified to protect participants' identity.

Data analysis

Aboriginal and non-Indigenous researchers at CHSSC worked together during data analysis processes to understand themes related to conceptions of and approaches to good governance.

Researchers at CHSSC met to discuss and interpret themes identified in the data analysis, identifying strengths which support good governance as well some of the challenges towards achieving the broader aims and objectives of the CD program. The reflections of CD staff have been presented alongside interview responses from governance members, and our analysis has been guided by 'bringing together' the stories from interviews and reflection sessions. We have worked to build a narrative that highlights the strengths and challenges of CD governance, whilst centring the experiences and interpretations of all who participated. When interview participants are directly quoted, we note the speaker's role, gender, and which committee they represent.

The analysis and findings of the monitoring report have been refined through a sense-making workshop with CD staff on the draft findings facilitated by staff from the CHSSC.

Limitations

There were several challenges we faced in conducting this case study.

- **The interviews are not representative of the whole of the CLC region.** Given the resources available, the interviews focus on one region - the Tanami region and the GMAAAC Directors, Community Committee members and WETT Advisory Committees members within that region. They therefore do not represent perceptions of governance across the whole of the CLC region. The data from CLC staff reflection sessions is presented to also draw out some broader experiences of governance structures within CD and differences within other regions.

The Lajamanu GMAAAC Committee and CLC staff



- **Much of the interview data lacks depth and there were challenges with meeting sampling targets.** A large number of potential interviewees (n=16) were unable to meet with the CLC researcher due to the timing of the consultation period, which coincided with an international conference that some interviewees attended. Other challenges included sorry business, road closures, time pressures to meet milestones, logistical planning around data collection in remote areas, along with multiple demands on all the interviewees during the consultation period. Due to time constraints and busy agendas for many key interviewees, a reduced number of interviews took place during the consultancy period (n = 10), and some interviews were only partially completed. The richest interviews were undertaken with GMAAAC Directors and WETT Advisory Group members.
- **Potential interviewer bias.** While the original interview design specified that CLC staff should not be present during the interviews to promote frank discussion about CLC's role in governance, given the sampling challenges the CD Program's MEL Coordinator conducted an additional two interviews outside the consultation period. These two interviews were very rich interviews, with more in-depth questioning and clarifications, however participants may not have shared as frank views about CLC as a result.

To manage these limitations, the interview data has been cross referenced with a range of available other documentation and literature to attempt to corroborate conclusions. The strength of the findings has been clearly communicated and any emerging issues requiring further clarification identified.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

What does strong governance look like in GMAAAC and WETT according to governance group members?

This section outlines what strong governance looks like for WETT and GMAAAC governance group members. This includes the coming together of two worldviews (Yapa (meaning Aboriginal) and Kardiya (meaning non-Aboriginal)); a whole of community approach; and relational ways of working.

Coming together of two worldviews – Yapa and Kardiya

In line with the principles of 'Two-Eyed Seeing'²⁴, there is evidence that governance in WETT and GMAAAC has supported the coming together of Aboriginal knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems to build capacity within governance groups. This strengths-based approach emphasises *'learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledge and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledge and using both eyes together to address complex challenges and foster understanding'*²⁵. This has been recognised as an area of strength within the program by those interviewed:

We work with two protocols, like Kardiya protocols rules and Yapa protocols. That's making us really strong and it's good for us to share both ways. Ethics and all that, we follow same with the Yapa protocols. (YWPP Researcher, Female)

Working at the interface of Aboriginal and Western knowledges has been a dynamic learning space for governance members and CD staff, where two-way learning has supported respectful relationships based on open communication, transparency and accountability, and different worldviews and ways of knowing, being and doing are integrated and respected. In accordance with the *CD Framework*, a set of jointly developed principles outline core values and guide ways of working together at the interface, including *'Aboriginal leadership, Supporting everyone in the group, Respectful relationships and New ideas and learning'*.

They help us to work in our way, Yapa way, cultural things, and working with Kardiya to make Kardiya way of working with their resources and we bring our own resources... together, to make it easier for everyone to understand about the picture, language and the words. (GMAAAC Governance group member 1, Female)

A whole-of-community approach

Good governance within the CD program is characterised by those interviewed as eliciting strong community participation. Governance members interviewed viewed CD program governance as an opportunity for community members to come together around decision making for the benefit of the community, and for 'everyone to get involved'. CD governance group members described their role as 'leading in community' and 'fighting for community' in terms of deciding how CD funding should be spent, and an important opportunity to advocate for people on the ground.

"Whatever we do, or fund is for the benefit of the community not for individuals or for families. Good governance is all about the community – what we want, what we need, how we go about it". (GMAAAC Governance group member 2, Male)

We always try – we want two from each family group ... The old people always wanted that and so we want to continue that. (GMAAAC Governance group member 3, Female)

Good governance was further described as having a strong representation of community members from different family groups and communities. GMAAAC and WETT governance group members actively encourage community members to become involved in CD program governance and consider diversity to be important, including a mix of gender, age and family groups.

Yes, it's open to everyone to be involved in WETT. We just want all family members to be involved. (WETT Governance group member 2, Female)

Diversity is important – men and women, young and old. (GMAAAC Governance group member 2, Male)

Despite this valuing of diversity, for some WETT members, achieving a gender balance is a challenge.

There are two men on it at [community] but they are stepping down and we are going to need to get more men, young ones. We have got one young lady from [community]. We need men. I don't know [why it's difficult to get men involved]. (WETT Governance group member 2, Female)

Relational ways of working

Relationality is a central concept for Indigenous peoples which is about connection between people and Country. Relationality is a practice bound with responsibilities with kin and Country²⁶, and is premised on a truth that 'all things exist in relatedness'.²⁷ Indigenous identity is defined by relationships, and connection with Country is central to Indigenous identity.²⁸

Relational practices are interwoven throughout WETT and GMAAAC governance and describe ways of working and practices based on responsibilities to kin and Country. Aboriginal kinship is a sophisticated system and guides important governance protocols for the CD program in Walpiri communities. Kinship structures determine skin names, and direct protocols for how governance members engage with community, respecting relationships of avoidance (poison cousins), and how to relate to people and families.

The unique characteristics associated with each community in which the CD program operates demands a highly tailored and context specific response, as well as excellent local knowledge and

relationships. The ability of CD staff to work effectively to facilitate these networks of collaboration, elevate Aboriginal voice within them and broker relationships between diverse actors is a skill-set that is highly effective in this context.²⁹

They're [non-Indigenous CD staff] given a skin name to connect to the community. They do care ... creating a relationship of mutual understanding. (GMAAAC Governance group member 4, Male)

Relational practices within GMAAAC and WETT governance support highly effective ways of networking and provide a construct for engaging community members and communicating information to community. Engagement is enhanced through strengths within kinship structures which support relationships of trust between governance members and community. Relationships play a key role in the recruitment of individuals to governance roles, as many respected community leaders act as role models for interested individuals – often younger, looking to participate in governance. The design of CD program governance allows space for community members to be invited in and to observe governance in action. Encouraging family representation is particularly important in some CD governance contexts, as it supports relational practices and gives primacy to a collective and relational reality between peoples based on connection to Country.³⁰

We run our own meetings in the community but so that I can share what I do here in the (G&P) workshop...so that they know what to expect... Some people might just talk for their family [when they need something] they talk to me because of the relationship and trust they have in me and then I talk to the other five committee members, I ring them up and ask them to help. (GMAAAC Governance group member 3, Female)

What practices by CD, and the CLC more broadly, can enable and support groups to strengthen their governance processes and capacity to contribute to Aboriginal self-determination?

Strengths-based approaches to good governance

Within the context of CD governance, Aboriginal strengths-based approaches value Aboriginal leadership, knowledge, and identity and aim to support governance group members and communities to utilise those for the overall benefit of the community along with core principles such as supporting everyone in the group, respectful relationships and new ideas and learning, as outlined in the *CD Framework*.³¹

...We don't want any problems in each [Aboriginal] governance group, we want it to be smooth, to be doing everything right, work together and agree. Smoothly and especially making decisions. Working together, discussing together with good understanding and respect for one another. (WETT Governance group member 2, Female)

The 'Manja' Tree – Strengthening self-determination in WETT

The WETT research and evaluation team, also known as the Yitaki-maninjaku, warrirni-njaku, payirni-njaku manu pina-jarrinjaku (YWPP) team plays a key role in supporting good governance by sharing the voices of community with WETT decision makers so that the decision makers are empowered with a good understanding of community views on WETT projects to make decisions about where to direct WETT funding. Research through YWPP supports community decision making and advocacy. It also provides opportunities for youth to learn from elders and helps to keep language and culture and Jukurrpa³² strong.

In 2025, the YWPP team developed the 'Manja' Tree (figure 1) to describe principles for 'strengthening self-determination through Indigenous-led educational research'. The Manja tree was chosen to visually represent important principles which have strengthened the work of YWPP and efforts towards self-determination under WETT. The Manja Tree illustrates the story of the YWPP project becoming tall and strong and 'growing from the roots to the branches' and describes strengths-based approaches associated with bringing together Aboriginal and non-Indigenous ways of working.

Figure 16: The Manja Tree



That's how this project grew...we made a poster of this tree representing the project. How it grew from small to a big tree, how we used all these protocols and worked on it as a partner with La Trobe and WETT. (YWPP Researcher, Female)

The Manja tree is found in the Tanami Desert region of Central Australia and is deeply valued by Aboriginal people for its utility and spiritual significance. For the YWPP team, the illustration represents kinship, connection to community, leadership and decision making, strong language and culture, along with other important protocols related to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing, and sharing cultural knowledge to future generations. Further utility relates to sourcing bush fruit and honey ants, making traditional tools including boomerang and coolamon, and for building shelter, making it a significant tree for Aboriginal people in Central Australia.

Holding space – a strength-based approach

In this case study, 'holding space' describes CD program-organised meetings, places and events where Aboriginal identity, culture and community can be expressed and shared within an atmosphere of cultural safety, wellbeing, and respect.³³ The CD program was seen as playing an important role in creating and holding space for community-led governance, and for community to come together and engage with CD governance on their terms. GMAAAC and WETT governance members described the significance of the CD governance space in terms of allowing time for engagement, supporting family kinship structures, building relationships over time, bringing ideas together, and working together towards governance outcomes.

We just get together and sit and wait and get to know each other in the meetings, and we discuss what the meeting is about, what the project is all about. And we share our ideas about the projects, and other ways that we do with CLC and WETT and GMAAAC. (GMAAAC Governance Group member 1, Female)

CD staff views on strong governance capacity and how it differs across the regions

Governance capacity

The following characteristics were identified by CD staff in their reflection sessions as being demonstrative of strong governance capacity amongst governance committee members:

- **Governance committee members taking more of an active role in engagement and advocacy work (outside of formal committee meetings).** This was a strong theme amongst CD staff, mentioned by the East team, the Southwest team and the Tanami team. The Southwest team described how real transformational development happens where governance group members are supported by CDOs to undertake advocacy and talk to stakeholders themselves, for example in relation to the Papunya masterplan.³⁴
- **Governance committee members speak up strongly and demonstrate increased confidence.** The examples given by the GGP program included of governance group members speaking up in meetings with Kardiya and in front of crowds. They also cited an example of a Kurra Director at an Annual General Meeting presenting the money story in front of 2-300 people.³⁵ In WETT, CD staff cited examples of committee members giving feedback to community and YWPP members presenting community feedback to the WETT Advisory committee as examples of increased governance capacity.³⁶

- **Quality of discussion about issues in governance meetings and more conversation leading into decision making.** For staff on the GGP, this was evident when they saw Kurra and GMAAAC Directors asking for more detailed information from CLC and asking more learned questions about the information they were reviewing.³⁷ This was also identified by GMAAAC CD staff, who referenced examples of seeing more governance members leading processes and conversations during committee meetings and in other fora, such as conferences.³⁸
- **Committees having a shared vision of their future direction.** The Southwest team identified this as an important factor and gave the example of the Papunya masterplan as an example of bringing people together around a common vision, which provided a basis for advocacy and self-determination.³⁹ The Kintore community's commitment to the establishment of a campground was also cited as a key achievement and example of a strong shared vision. In the East region, the Atitjere community demonstrated a long-term commitment to the need for a dialysis facility which supported strong advocacy work and engagement with partners to receive funding and build the dialysis centre.⁴⁰ GMAAAC CD staff also noted that masterplans in their region have provided a basis for many years of work and progress.⁴¹ The GGP team also identified the development of the first strategic plans by GMAAAC Directors and Kurra Directors with support from the GGP as a good example of a shared vision supporting good governance.
- **Corporation Directors managing conflict within meetings themselves.** GGP described incidences of older members of a corporation managing conflict in a royalty meeting, rather than needing to call the police.

There are many areas of alignment between Aboriginal community members and CD staff in their conceptions of good governance, including in relation to community members working together smoothly in meetings, the quality of discussion in a governance meeting, having a shared vision, working together for the future, and governance members uniting to stand up for their rights (i.e. doing advocacy).

Contextual factors which affect governance

CD staff identified that the effectiveness of governance is significantly affected by contextual factors. These factors include the size of the income a governance group manages, and the legal structure around the income stream. Furthermore, the broader governance environment, such as the presence of strong local shires/councils and the strength and availability of partners who can support the delivery of the CD program⁴² also affect the strength of governance within CD.

Aboriginal corporations and local governments

The presence of, and strength and capability of other Aboriginal corporations was raised by a number of regions as a key factor affecting overall governance in a CD context.⁴³ In GMAAAC, lost governance capacity amongst partners had meant that there have been challenges with the ongoing maintenance of CD projects.⁴⁴ It was also noted by the GMAAAC team that CD was at times being used to fund public infrastructure that was really the responsibility of government to fund, which led to GMAAAC being held responsible for the infrastructure unfairly.⁴⁵ The GGP team also noted instances of Aboriginal corporations falling over due to information not being presented to Boards in an appropriate way for them to understand.⁴⁶

Traditional owner at his Ipolera homeland



Weakness in partner organisations is a long running issue for the CD program, having been identified as a challenge in the 2014 CD program evaluation. The evaluation also noted the broader governance weaknesses and vacuums left by the abolition of community councils through Shire reform under the NT Emergency Response.⁴⁷ CD staff describe working with partners to facilitate consultation with community and the critical role they have played in strengthening these processes. They note that it's hard to completely handover projects to organisations that can't do good community consultation.⁴⁸ A question was raised in GMAAAC about how long CLC should play that role with partners, or whether partners should engage their own officers to do that consultation.⁴⁹ It is evident that weaker capacity amongst partners and local governments are ongoing challenges which effect governance in the CD program.

How governance differs across the regions

The East and Southwest region teams identified a number of differences in how governance works in their regions compared to the Tanami.

The East Region

While there have been some real successes in building strong governance mechanisms⁵⁰, the East team articulated some particular governance challenges, due to working with communities who have more limited income streams, the large number of governance groups they work with, and few functioning Aboriginal corporations which leads to a more limited ability to attract and manage funding.⁵¹ The CD team noted that in the East transformational development looks different. It is not based on creating large masterplans which can attract additional sources of funding (as has been happening predominantly in GMAAAC communities and some Southwest communities) but is instead focused on building relationships and working alongside people to support them to shape their own development using the skills and resources they do have available and strengthening their confidence and influence.⁵² However staff noted that working in this way is challenging due to workload pressures and the number of governance groups some CDOs need to work with.⁵³ The East team highlighted the establishment of the Tennant Creek-based staff member as a particular achievement in allowing more direct engagement with community in support of CD outcomes.

The team also raised that the 2024 policy change which meant that CLC is no longer being able to auspice⁵⁴ funds was particularly challenging for them, given the more limited income stream money available for CD while there are few local partners who meet requirements to manage funds and would be able to support applying for funding from other sources. Teams noted that the pressure

*The Imangara working group
with CLC staff member*



for groups to incorporate to access grants was often unrealistic or a bad fit, creating too much of a burden and something that was externally driven.⁵⁵ For example, they noted that the only community who was able to apply for the Barkly Regional Deal money was Canteen Creek, as they still had an Aboriginal Corporation (their community council).⁵⁶

The Southwest Region

The Southwest team directly link the extent to which they are able to engage directly with a governance group and build strong relationships with how effectively the governance process works. They relate effective governance with groups leading and advocating for themselves, demonstrating an understanding of their responsibilities as governance committee members and having a shared vision. They felt they have been able to build good relationships with groups as they have had relatively stable CD team staffing and the number of governance committees they have been supporting has remained relatively stable.⁵⁷ They also raise challenges related to discrepancies in the strength of Aboriginal corporations in the region. They note that while it is often faster and easier for CDOs to do things for governance groups due to time pressure, real change that is empowering and contributes to Aboriginal self-determination happens when people are supported to lead and advocate for themselves.

Strengthening governance capacity

GMAAAC and WETT governance members views on capacity development through CD governance

As governance support has been identified as a key CD program strategy, CLC is committed to supporting governance processes that prioritise participant knowledge and engagement and strengthen governance capacity. Objectives under the strategy relate to developing group governance capacity through supporting two-way learning, increasing the involvement of younger people in CD program governance, and supporting Aboriginal people to extend control of development beyond CD working groups.

GMAAAC Directors viewed governance as supporting group capacity development through ongoing relationships between governance members and CD staff, cultural respect and recognition, and two-way learning principles such as training opportunities that integrate Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. Those interviewed also talked about taking learnings from their training under the GGP to other community organisations, providing important evidence of one of the elements of the governance support strategy in action⁵⁸.

It's been really good for me to work with the CLC staff and the community. Makes me feel proud and I feel confident to speak and to work with other organisations. I bring out the skills I've been doing, governance training to work with other organisations within the community. (GMAAAC Governance group member 1, Female)

Yeah, feeling really good that I learn so much about the money story and about the governance training and working with the [non-Indigenous] and [Aboriginal] people in different communities. (GMAAAC Governance group member 1, Female)

While there were many positive reports related to governance training and CLC staff and governance members working together, this was seen as an important area needing further capacity building support across some governance groups.

Traditional owners with the
Uralampe Cool Room Solar Project



Yes, we're going to start this governance training at [community]. I gave them feedback on what we do here [governance workshop]. We want to have governance training to help us. (GMAAAC Governance group member 5, Female)

Further evidence of supporting capacity development more broadly included creating welcoming spaces in CD governance for younger people to observe and learn about the role of governance, and support for senior governance members to act as role models and inspire and mentor younger generations.

I was just a shy young person when I first went on to WETT and I was just observing... I was looking at my cousin [...] she was my mentor all the way through. When WETT started she was passionate about education, and she told me to come to WETT meetings – observing by watching and learning. She was a good role model for me. (WETT Governance Group member 3, Female)

Capacity building in CD governance according to CLC CD staff

Two-way learning

The CD Framework outlines an intention to strengthen governance capacity *through an approach that supports two-way learning*⁵⁹. CD staff discussed how two-way learning involves everyone in the room learning – CD staff are learning from the governance group, and governance group members are learning from CD staff.⁶⁰ Another staff member described it as 'walking two paths at once'. It involves CD staff learning cultural ways and the community learning CLC ways. CD staff related this to the helix structure in the CD theory of change diagram.⁶¹ Staff working with GMAAAC discussed the need to prioritise language learning to allow them to introduce themselves in language and suggested directors put into agendas more time for things like teaching cultural protocols.⁶² They also described having project steering committees and other groups aside from the formal governance structures as supporting Yapa-Kardiya learning. Furthermore, they commented they were trying to build in more opportunities for committees to give feedback on governance processes as there didn't seem to be formalised avenues for learning to be reciprocated from Yapa to Kardiya.⁶³ Instead there was an assumption that it would happen in between the formal committee meetings, however it was hard to make space for this. The team had been having some language lessons but these had stopped. GMAAAC CD staff asked for more opportunities to engage in cultural learning and make space for this in a more intentional way, as has been happening between Kurra and GMAAAC Directors with the investment advisors during GGP workshops.⁶⁴ Overall, CD staff identified that while some two-way learning was happening through the CD governance work, there was a need for a more deliberate and planned approach to two-way learning.

CD staff identified a number of examples of governance group members using capacity they have built through their involvement in CD governance in other fora. For example GMAAAC Directors have reported that they have explained financial reports to other boards based on their learning through the GGP program. Others have heard GMAAAC Directors describe asking for more and different information in groups such as the store board as they now understand concepts such as trading insolvent thanks to capacity building through the GGP.⁶⁵ A governance group member interviewed also talked about using their increased knowledge about governance in other community groups.⁶⁶

Engaging youth in CD governance

The CD framework's governance support strategy includes the aim of increasing *the involvement of younger people in Community Development program governance*. All regions noted an increase in the involvement of younger people in governance groups. They noted that a common strategy involved youth attending meetings to learn as observers over a period of time before eventually taking on more formalised roles. They also commented on seeing older governance group members actively mentoring youth to take on governance roles. For example, the WETT team in the Tanami region noted that engaging young people has been a particular focus and that they have made space for young members to watch and listen, to build confidence and work up.⁶⁷ The team described one case of a younger member who started on the committee mostly just watching and observing, but after four years on the committee they were now chairing meetings very effectively.⁶⁸ They noted that this person had also been actively mentored by older committee members.

WETT noted that engaging young people and supporting them to take more active roles in governance is a long-term process, taking some time to bear fruit.⁶⁹ In the Tanami, staff noted that they are seeing an increasing representation of young people, that committees have young people they are actively preparing to become governance group members and appetite to develop a youth engagement strategy.⁷⁰

The Southwest team noted that the community does not have a deliberate approach to including young people in governance arrangements, but that it is happening naturally as older people pass on and new, younger people join and nominated Mutitjulu as an example of this.⁷¹

It is evident that there is progress in including more youth in governance groups and some emerging successful approaches to do this. However, the extent to which this is part of a deliberate strategy and process for increasing the representation of youth is mixed across the regions.

How does governance work in the CD program support or hinder achievement of the CD program goal and vision, ie. Aboriginal self-determination and transformational development?

Empowerment supporting self-determination

Empowerment was recognised as a theme within good governance, and key to supporting self-determination in GMAAAC and WETT governance by Aboriginal community members interviewed. Empowerment has been defined as *increased agency for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to exercise leadership, influence policy making or to exercise control over their day-to-day affairs*.⁷² The CD program supports Aboriginal leadership opportunities in accordance with the *CD Theory of Change goal of contributing to Aboriginal-led development in Central Australian communities and homelands*. Aboriginal leadership was described as an area of strength within GMAAAC and WETT program governance by those interviewed and valued by governance members in terms of exercising control

over development projects and feeling in control of the 'money story'. CD governance supports collective leadership and family representation in governance processes and inspires younger generations to take on leadership roles for the community, often through observing senior community members advocating for change and the value of having these role models.

Governance for me is really important – that we know about it, the risks and challenges we face and most importantly that we all sit together and that we fight for rights especially the policy that's affecting us (WETT Governance group member 3, Female)

It gives us self-determination, gives people a chance to think and discuss ideas, to think about what we want – ceremony or youth activities. A lot of discussion about short- and long-term needs. It's about building up the community – the recreation hall, footy oval, ceremony ground. (GMAAAC Governance group member 4, Male)

There is evidence that GMAAAC governance has supported the empowerment of communities at the local level to exercise greater control over decision making and community development strategies. Supporting self-determination requires a 'shift' in decision-making power back and to Aboriginal peoples, and at times has seen CD governance 'push back' on government funding and pursue alternative funding options that align with needs and aspirations identified by those communities.

We look after money and how to use it in projects, it helps us to make decisions on what we want to do and we put in for the funding. It's a lot easier than when we put in for government funding – sometimes we wait a long time or we get knocked back, but GMAAAC we just put in and get the money – more quickly and the project gets done. (GMAAAC Governance group member 5, Female)

The Kintore working group with
CLC staff member



Supporting Indigenous data governance

At the heart of Indigenous data sovereignty and Indigenous data governance is the right of Indigenous peoples and nations to decide what data development occurs and the controls over the collection, governance, ownership, and application of data about their peoples, territories, lifeways and natural resources.⁷³ Assertive Aboriginal leadership was identified as a key factor for driving Indigenous data governance within the CD program, reaffirming the importance of community having authority over the design, ownership and access to community data.

[Governance is] a group where people make decisions. We made a governance group for this Lajamanu [Good Life Study] program. For if anyone needs the information regards to the interviews we did, for maybe health, if they want information from there they go through the governance members. (WETT Governance group member 1, Female)

CD staff views on governance supporting self-determination

CD governance members undertaking advocacy

CD staff drew a link between governance and self-determination where governance group members are being supported to lead and advocate for themselves, rather than where CD staff doing things for the group.⁷⁴ Examples of this included in Papunya with a Masterplan supporting the community to seek funding from different sources aside from CD and delegating advocacy responsibility to people who will be most effective and are now engaging with other stakeholders in support of the implementation of the plan.⁷⁵

However they noted some constraints to working in this way. CD staff in the Southwest identified that they face organisational pressure to get money out the door and get projects moving and that it's often faster and easier for a CD staff member to talk directly to partners and do advocacy, rather than support governance group members to do this advocacy themselves.⁷⁶ The GMAAAC CD team commented that they would spend more time doing advocacy work if there was urgency attached to it, similar to the urgency attached to project work and getting the money moving.⁷⁷ However they identified a positive approach in that a capacity building policy in the Tanami enables the payment of GMAAAC members outside of committee work. This often means that while the CD Officer may be involved initially, later committee members can take forward work by themselves.⁷⁸

CONCLUSIONS



GMAAAC Directors, Community Committee members and WETT members highlighted the following elements as critical to good governance:

- The coming together of Yapa and Kardiya worldviews and ways of knowing and being to draw on the strengths of both worldviews;
- Relational ways of working which centre responsibilities to kin and Country, supporting relationships of trust between governance group members and community;
- Strong community participation in governance groups, with representation of community members from different family groups and communities;
- Strengths-based approaches, which value Aboriginal leadership, knowledge and identity so that everyone can work together smoothly;
- Supporting Indigenous data governance, where communities have control over their data and how and when it is shared.



CD staff identified a number of indicators of strong community level CD governance. This included governance group members having good conversation to inform decision making, having a common vision for their community and taking a more active role in engagement and advocacy work as signs of strong community level governance.



CD staff strongly link the effectiveness of governance processes to their ability to work closely with governance groups. However they note that they need time and space and more organisational incentives to work in this way. They highlighted the need for incentives to prioritise supporting governance group members to lead activities, rather than prioritising spending money and therefore wanting to work quickly, which tends to involve CD staff doing things themselves.



CD staff have identified that governance in the CD program is influenced by a number of contextual factors. These include the level of funding available to a governance group, the level of engagement of CD staff with the governance group, and the presence and strength of local Aboriginal Corporations and local government. They also highlighted that the presence of strong partners who can support program implementation and the presence of Aboriginal Corporations who are able to receive funding as affecting overall program governance. There are particular challenges in the East, with smaller value income streams, fewer Aboriginal Corporations who meet the requirements to receive funding and an increasing number of governance groups being formed, which reduces the amount of time CD staff have to work with each governance group.



There are good examples of governance capacity increasing amongst groups, of that capacity being carried into other community organisations, and of governance work contributing to instances of transformational development. However staff have identified a need to be clearer about what is meant by two-way learning, to have a more intentional approach for this and consider what resourcing is needed to support this. While the GGP is clearly valued by the GMAAAC Directors interviewed, there is a need to consider models which are appropriate for other regions without the same level of resources. Furthermore, CD staff have asked for more opportunities to share their good governance practices and support ongoing learning and program improvement.



There has been some really positive progress around involving youth in governance and good models emerging. Common elements of the approaches across communities include youth attending governance meetings as observers initially and being actively mentored by older governance group members.



Both CD staff and community members have asked for more opportunities for internal learning through sharing practices amongst each other. In the monitoring report reflection workshop, CD staff noted that their resourcing limitations mean they can't work deeply with all communities and instead reflected on wanting to be able to identify the factors to decide where they do direct their resources to work deeply. They also asked for more opportunities to share the learnings and practices more broadly across the CD team, such as those with the GGP being shared more broadly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Revise the MEL framework to capture lessons about successful governance

Introduce more structured approaches to identify, document and share knowledge and experience about governance between CD staff and governance group members.

- Update the MEL plan to better capture higher-level outcomes in governance, advocacy, and systems strengthening;
- Work with community researchers to capture good governance practice stories within community governance groups;
- Ensure these processes capture what is driving success, reflecting the empowerment focus of the CD program, including:
 - a. How community context and history have shaped governance in that community
 - b. How governance models are tailored to local needs
 - c. How CD staff's relational ways of working contribute to outcomes
- Create regular opportunities (e.g. forums, workshops, story-sharing sessions) for learning and exchange of good governance practices, challenges, and innovations between CD officers;
- Support peer learning about strong governance practice among governance group members across communities, drawing on the good governance examples identified.

2. Analyse the stories to determine common lessons

- Once multiple stories are collected about governance practices, analyse them to identify common success factors related to the context, the governance model used and how CD staff have worked with the governance group;
- Use these insights to understand what works, where, and under what conditions and use the findings to improve governance in the program.

3. Strengthen Two-Way Learning Processes about Governance between CDOs and community members

- Allocate dedicated resourcing for ongoing cultural competency and relational practice development for CD staff, including learning local languages and about local cultural protocols during meetings;
- Explore alternative, low-cost models to support building governance capacity in communities not participating in the GGP (e.g. peer-to-peer learning, mentoring);
- Seek external funding (e.g. grants) to support governance capacity building, potentially in partnership with organisations such as APONT.

4. Expand and Formalise Youth Engagement Pathways

- Capture models being used to engage youth in governance in a format which is recommended by community researchers to best support sharing amongst governance group members (eg.Voice recorded stories might work better than a written story);
- Share these models with other governance groups and use this to scale increasing youth participation models across governance groups;
- Consider whether dedicated resourcing for mentoring by senior community governance group members would be helpful to support youth engagement in governance groups.

Community member recommendations to strengthen governance in GMAAAC funded Community Development programs and WETT included:

- Establish a GMAAAC office in CLC (like the ranger space);
- Explore ways to involve more men in the WETT Advisory Committee reflecting men's role as knowledge holders and teachers of culture;
- Fund a regular community feedback BBQ to allow the GMAAAC Directors and committee members to communicate back to the community about GMAAAC decisions and activities;
- Employ a Yapa person to work alongside the CDOs to support the CD work in community;
- Publish the GMAAAC book in languages other than Warlpiri (like Jaru) to support communication with other non-Warlpiri community members.

Local workers at Nyirpi Recreation Hall



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- 8 Includes projects with the income streams of NTP and NTP EPU
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- 53 East CD CLC team reflection notes, 15 September 2025.
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