

The Central Land Council Community Development Program and the Matched Funds Initiative

MATCHED FUNDS INITIATIVE MONITORING REPORT JULY 2022 – JUNE 2024

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Cover photo: Community members and CLC Community Development Program staff stand outside the newly completed church project in Imangara.

Back cover photo: Maison Davis at Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa) outdoor skate park.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Matched Funds Initiative (MFI) was introduced in 2020 and provides co-funding for Aboriginal-led community development work supported by the Central Land Council (CLC) Community Development (CD) program from the Aboriginal Benefits Account (ABA). The MFI 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 disparity between regions. This report provides an overview of MFI implementation and impact for the period July 2022-June 2024.

METHODOLOGY

Development of this report was supported by a mixed methods and participatory approach including primary and secondary data collection and analysis. Data sources include key informant interviews and focus group discussions with community members and project partners, reflection sessions with CD program staff, researcher observations, project reports, and quantitative financial and activity data. Two sense-making workshops were conducted with CD staff on the draft findings facilitated by La Trobe University's Centre for Human Security and Social Change. The report provides two detailed case studies of communities receiving MFI allocations for CD work, together with an initiative wide assessment of overall progress.

FINDINGS

- Since July 2020, Aboriginal-led planning and decision making through the MFI has now supported a total of 183 projects to be prioritised, planned and funded with a total value of \$6.7m.
- As of June 2024, there are now 50 groups participating in the MFI.
- Projects under management almost doubled between 2021/22 and 2022/23, with a growth of 42 projects, and continued growing in 2023/24 with an additional 10 projects under management.
- Community infrastructure projects are the highest funded project type through the MFI, representing almost half of all projects funded. This is followed by church and cemetery projects which make up close to a quarter of projects.
- There is continuing evidence which demonstrates that MFI is acting as an incentive for new groups joining the CD program and existing MFI groups opting to allocate additional funds to CD.
- There is increasing evidence that the MFI is supporting the funding of longer-term or bigger projects in some communities, with indicators including the prevalence of allocations of MFI towards dedicated scoping and/or planning projects, and the pooling of all available CD income sources to contribute towards larger projects.

- The MFI has continued to address the disparity between the amount of income across the three CD program regions, with most funds directed to lower income regions of the East (40 groups) and the South-West (9 groups), and a minority of funds directed to the higher income region of the Tanami (1 group).
- Greater emphasis has been placed on the strategies of Advocacy and Lobbying, and Partnerships and Networks by the CD team, contributing to a greater sense of engagement, ownership and control by Aboriginal communities, as evidenced in the two case study locations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue the MFI's predictable, multi-year approach beyond 2026 to further progress the CLC's CD objectives
- To ensure the MFI remains responsive to the needs and capacities of both the CLC CD program and Aboriginal communities, instigate a review of the MFI *mechanism* 12 months prior to the end of the current funding round (i.e. July 2025). This should include a review of the process of funding allocations, eligibility criteria to receive MFI, timeframes for expenditure and reporting, and an assessment of options for alternative approaches.
- Ensure infrastructure project planning continues to consider budgets, plans and responsibilities for the defects liability period and ongoing asset management to promote sustainability of project benefits.
- Explore potential Aboriginal employment opportunities in initial discussions for projects, particularly infrastructure, to allow for lead times for training and certification and enhanced employment outcomes from MFI funded projects.
- Strengthen and/or formalise linkages between the CD program and Policy teams within the CLC to maximise efforts in Advocacy and Lobbying.
- Consider alternative structures of the CD team to reduce the number of governance groups per CD Officer with the intent to allow more time for delivering the CD strategies of governance, partnerships and advocacy in each MFI site. This could include, for example, division of the East region into two teams, and recruitment of additional CD Officers and a new Regional Coordinator, and/or the recruitment and training of Assistant CD Engagement Officers at the local level.
- Review the eligibility for MFI funding with the intention to further progress MFI Objective three. This could include, for example, lowering the minimum community contribution and/or expanding the sources of funding from which community allocations can be sourced (beyond s19 lease money).
- Dedicate time and resources for wider partner scoping to increase the partner pool and pro-actively assess potential partner quality, timelines and costs.
- Consider the recruitment of technical specialists (such as an additional architect or engineer) to expedite and improve the quality of surveying and quotation processes for infrastructure projects.
- Consider options to strengthen the partnership and networks role of the CD program including training for existing CD Officers, a restructuring of responsibilities or a dedicated partnership role.



Photo: A young boy prepares for a performance at the Artali Festival in Alekarenge.

ACRONYMS

ABA	Aboriginals Benefit Account
CD	Community Development
CHSSC	Centre for Human Security and Social Change
CLC	Central Land Council
CLM	Community Lease Money
GMAAAC	Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation
MEL	Monitoring Evaluation and Learning
MFI	Matched Funds Initiative
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NT	Northern Territory
NP	National Park
TMAAAC	Tanami Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation
TO	Traditional owners
URM	Uluru Kata Tjuta Rent Money Community Development Project
WETT	Warlpiri Education and Training Trust

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Central Land Council (CLC) Community Development (CD) program supports Aboriginal groups to work together to identify and address their development priorities and needs, largely through designing and funding community benefit projects. The *CLC Community Development Framework 2021-2026* articulates the CLC's community development goals, principles and strategies which guide the program.

Figure 1. CLC Community Development Framework 2021-2026

CD PROGRAM OBJECTIVES	
1	Increase Aboriginal engagement, ownership and control over the development of our communities, homelands and futures
2	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
CD PROGRAM PRINCIPLES	
1	Aboriginal Leadership – Aboriginal people in control of planning, decision-making and development with access to clear and relevant information.
2	Supporting everyone in the group – Listening to different voices and thinking about the needs of everyone in the group, especially younger people and women.
3	Respectful relationships – Building equal relationships based on two-way approach and teamwork between everyone involved.
4	New ideas and learning – Trying new ideas, checking things are on track and learning together as we go.
5	Cooperation – Working well together based on mutual respect of diverse cultures and contributions.
CD PROGRAM STRATEGIES	
1	Governance support
2	Planning and project management
3	Partnerships and networks
4	Lobbying and advocacy

The Matched Funds Initiative (MFI) was introduced by the CLC and National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) in 2020. The initiative provides co-funding from the Aboriginal Benefits Account (ABA) for

Aboriginal-led community development work supported by the CLC CD program. The MFI matches dollar-for-dollar funding allocations between \$50,000 - \$150,000 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 disparity between regions (Figure 2). The program commenced in 2020 with a three-year \$9 million (ex GST) commitment from the NIAA (MF1). Following a successful pilot implementation, the NIAA again made a further 3-year \$9 million commitment to the project for the financial years 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 (MF2). This monitoring report provides an assessment of the MFI over a 2-year period comprising the final year of MF1 funding and the first year of MF2 funding.

Figure 2. Objectives of the MFI

1	Incentivise groups to allocate income to undertake community benefit projects
2	Increase the impact of community benefit projects through the increase in available funds by enabling the funding of longer-term or bigger projects
3	Tackle the disparity between the amounts of income from land use agreements available for community development projects across the regions














Photo: A young rider riding over the sun on a depiction of the Aboriginal flag at the Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa) skate park.

2. METHODOLOGY

This report provides monitoring on MFI for the financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24. Progress of the initiative is assessed against the objectives of the CD program, as well as the specific objectives of the MFI.

The monitoring approach includes two detailed case studies together with an initiative wide assessment of overall progress. Data sources include interviews with CD program participants and community members in two locations, interviews with three project partners, reflection sessions conducted with CD staff members, project reports provided by project partners, researcher observation of one CD meeting, quantitative financial and activity data provided by CLC, such as information on funding allocations and project completions, and a sense-making workshop with CD staff on the draft findings facilitated by staff from the Centre for Human Security and Social Change (CHSSC) at La Trobe University.

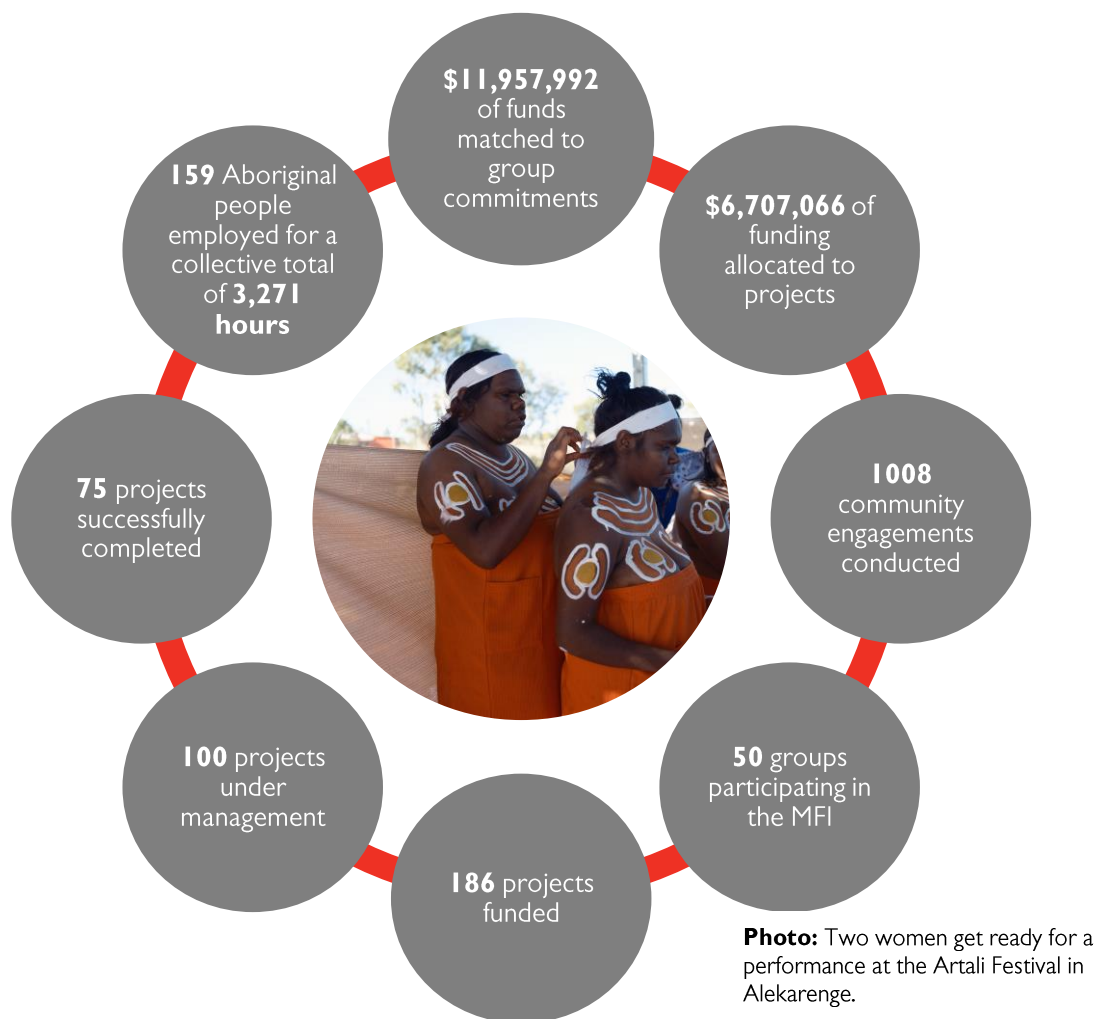
The case study locations chosen for the monitoring period were Alekarenge and neighbouring community Imangara. These communities were selected to investigate the differing impact of Matched Funds in two communities with different historic income profiles and different approaches to implementing CD Strategies 3 'Partnerships and Networks' and 4 'Lobbying and Advocacy'. Alekarenge is a medium-sized community that has been a long-term recipient of CD program funds from multiple income streams and has had significant opportunity to invest across a diverse range of projects. Imangara is a small community that has received very minimal CD income in the past and participating in the MFI has created a unique opportunity for this community to engage in the CD program for the first time.

CD participant interviews were held in the two case study locations. A total of 22 people participated across 15 interviews and one focus group discussion. Key themes explored in interviews included: the types of projects; who has benefited; how the governance process is going and how it could be improved; the benefits of the MFI and it could be strengthened; and the role of the CLC and how it could be improved. This approach of enquiry allows for both monitoring and learning. The questions were designed to elicit views on the CD program and MFI in each location, which included MFI and other income streams. Respondents were free to speak about the projects they had funded across these income streams. The data was analysed by researchers at CHSSC and identified findings are documented in this report.

3. MATCHED FUNDS INITIATIVE PROGRESS

3.1 MFI PROJECT SUMMARY JULY 2020 – JUNE 2024

Figure 3. Summary of MFI quantitative achievements

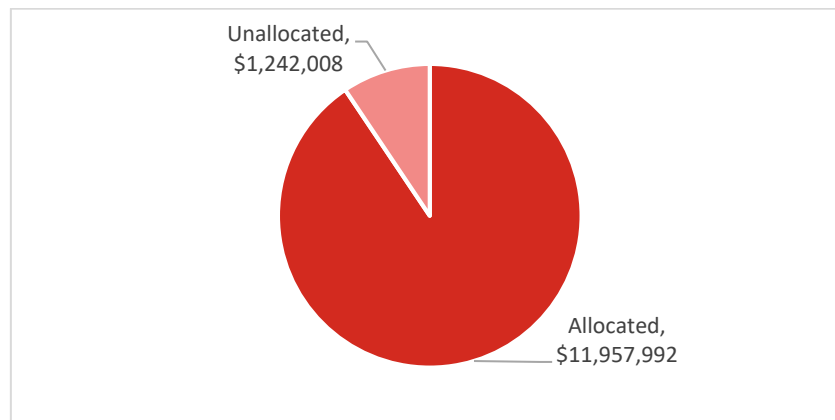


Matched MFI funding

Following the receipt and successful allocation of the first tranche of MFI funding in 2020/21 (equalling \$9.9 million), the NIAA granted a further \$3.3 million per year for three years (MF2 - 2023/24, 2024/25, 2025/26) to the MFI for Aboriginal governance groups to invest in community benefit projects. This brings the total funding available to match to CD group allocations through the MFI to \$19.8 m, and an equivalent of an additional \$6.6m in the two years of focus in this report (2022/23 and 2023/24).

Of the \$13.2 million from the MFI that was available to match at the end of 2023/24, a total of \$11,957,992, or 90% has been matched to governance group allocations to CD.

Figure 4. Available MFI funds matched to CD Governance Groups to June 2024

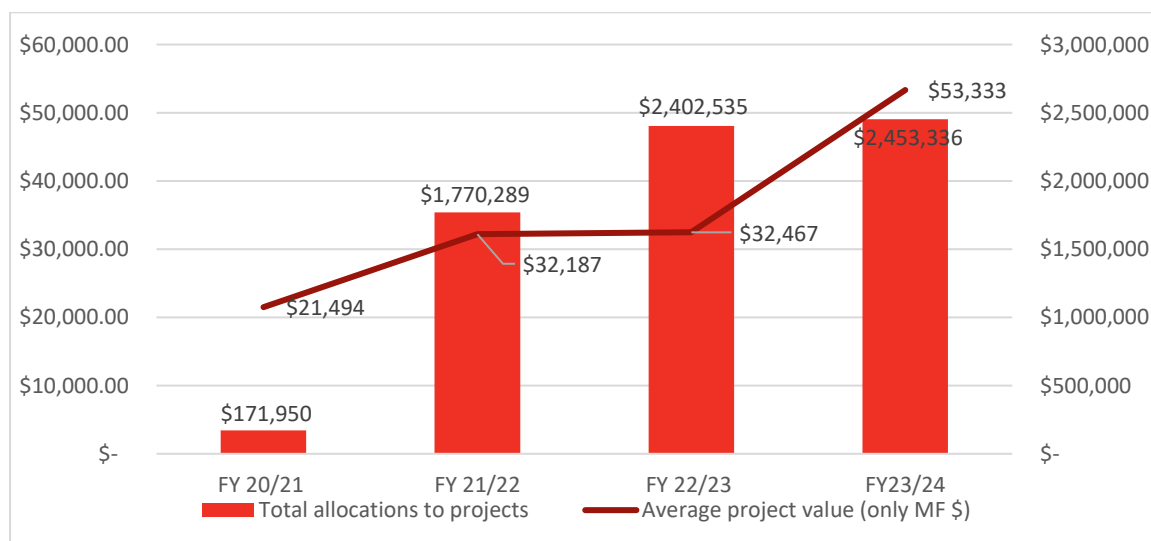


Projects

Since July 2020, Aboriginal-led planning and decision making through the MFI has now supported a total of 186 projects to be prioritised, planned and funded with a total value of \$6.7 million.

Project allocations have demonstrated growth over the reporting period, with allocations reaching \$2.4 million in 2022/23 and \$2.45 million in 2023/24. The difference of only \$50,801 suggests that project allocations from MFI dollars may be plateauing at this annual level after significant year-on-year growth since the MFI commenced in 2020/21. Over the reporting period the average value of projects has also increased with the average project value reaching \$32,467 in 2022/23 (from 71 projects) and \$55,333 in 2023/24 (from 51 projects). Despite the growth, this average project value remains small compared to average project values across other CD income streams where annual income is often significantly higher, with the exception of the NT Parks income stream whose average project value in 2022/23 was \$43,457.

Figure 5. Total allocation of MFI to projects and average project value (MFI only) 2021/22-2023/24



When consideration is given to the total amount of project funding leveraged by the MFI, including co-funding of projects with other CD income streams, MFI has supported a total of \$4.9m in projects and supported a range of projects with a higher average project value of \$107,095.

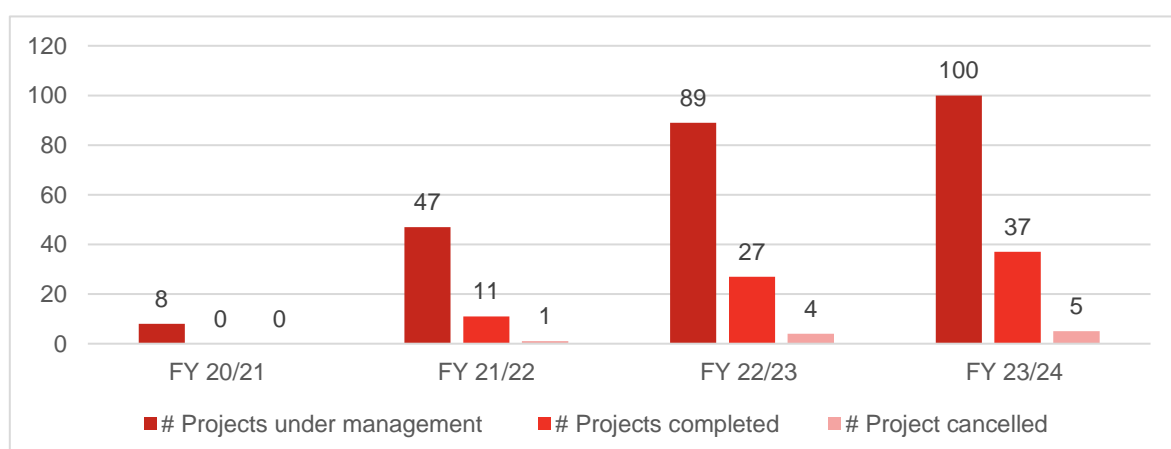


Photo: Inside the renovated Mt Liebig church

The continuing growth of the MFI is also evidenced in the growing number of MFI-funded projects under management by the CD program. Projects under management almost doubled between 2021/22 and 2022/23, with a growth of 42 projects, and continued growing in 2023/24 with an additional 10 projects under management. The number of projects being successfully completed has also increased over this period up to 37 in 2023/24. As active projects have grown there has also been an increase in the number of projects being cancelled, though the numbers remain minimal.

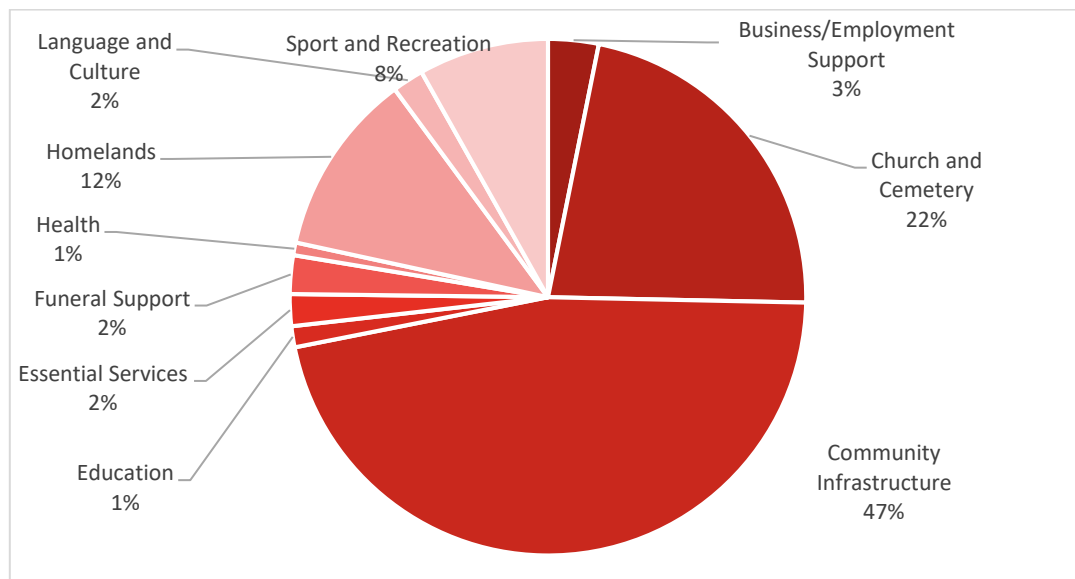
The growth in projects under management and completed projects aligns with the CD program's planning and decision-making process as an increasing number of groups who were engaged in establishing governance arrangements and planning projects in the first two years of the MFI are now seeing an increasing number of projects commenced and completed in the subsequent years.

Figure 6. MFI projects 2020/21-2023/24 (as at June 30 2024)



Community infrastructure projects are the highest value project type to be funded through the MFI, representing almost half of all dollars allocated, followed by church and cemetery projects which make up close to a quarter of dollars allocated. This is followed by homelands projects and sport and recreation.

Figure 7: MFI allocation by objective 2020/21-2023/24 (percentage)

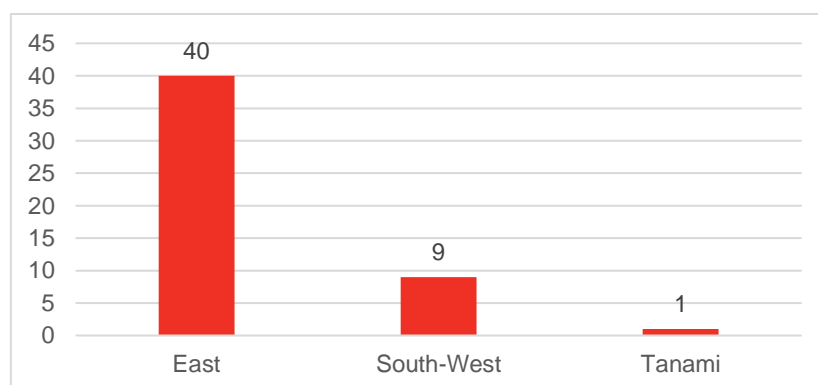


In terms of the number of MFI projects funded, sports and recreation (28%) is the most popular by this calculation, followed by community infrastructure (25%) and church and cemetery (16%).

Groups participating in the MFI

As of June 2024, there are 50 groups participating in the MFI. This comprises 40 Aboriginal governance groups in the East region, 9 groups in the South-West region and one group in the Tanami region. This indicates that the majority of the workload of administering the MFI within the CD program is being delivered by CD Officers in the East team. CD Officers note that in the East this has involved the establishment of a large number of new governance groups engaging with the CD program for the first time, while in the South-West the majority of MFI working groups were previously working with the CD program through other income streams, further increasing the demands on CD officers operating in the East region.

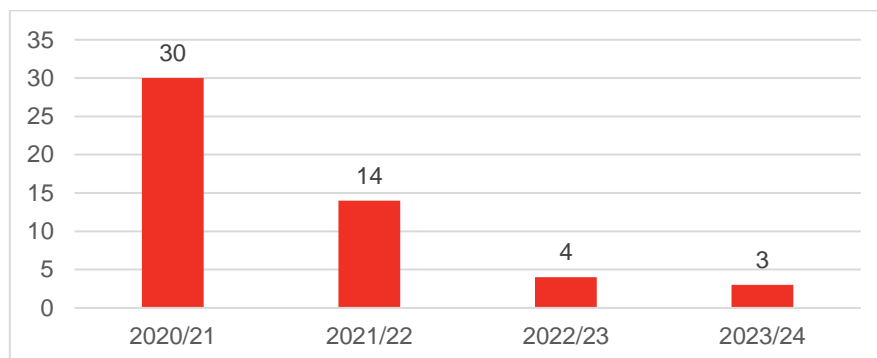
Figure 8. MFI groups by region, at June 2024



In the year 2022/23 five new groups joined the MFI. In 2023/24 three new groups joined the initiative. The slowing rate of new groups joining the MFI aligns with expectations as most groups receiving land-use income who were eligible to access MFI funds opted in to the MFI in the first two-years of operations. Furthermore, this represents a decision made by the CD program at the beginning of MF2 to restrict the number of new groups who could join the program due to staff capacity constraints in meeting the

governance and planning needs of the large number of new groups who joined the program in earlier years of the MFI.

Figure 9. Number of new groups joining the MFI 2020/21-2023/24



**By June 2024 two original governance groups had merged administratively*

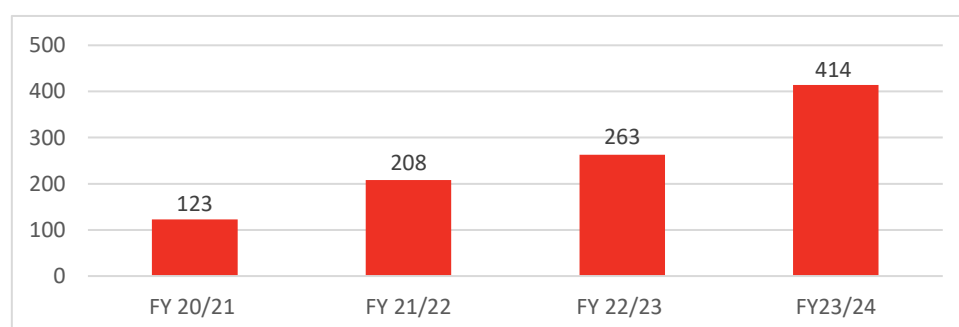
Community and stakeholder engagement

The increasing momentum of the MFI in the reporting period can also be seen in the community and stakeholder engagement activities being undertaken by the CD program for the MFI. Community and stakeholder engagement has continued to increase in the period reaching 263 engagements in 2022/23 and 414 in 2023/24. This is more than three times more meetings and consultations than for any other single income stream in the CD program.

Engagement purposes measured include those in which a traditional owner or community representative is present. This included: presenting the MFI opportunity to eligible Aboriginal groups; establishing governance arrangements with new groups that opted-in; facilitating meetings with Aboriginal governance groups to support priority setting; project planning, project funding and project management; and engaging with stakeholders to plan and implement projects.

During the financial year July 2023 – June 2024 the team conducted 55 meetings with Community Development groups with MFI income, and 359 consults with CD stakeholders in support of project planning. This represents a significant increase in community and stakeholder engagement activity undertaken by the CD team since the start of the MFI.

Figure 10. MFI community and stakeholder engagements 2020/21-2023/24



Aboriginal employment and training

As an increasing number of projects have been completed and reported on, the CD program has been able to access employment outcome data from MFI funded projects for the first time. A total of six projects completed in 2022/23 include Aboriginal employment, which increased slightly to eight in 2023/24. The individual contribution of each project to employment outcomes reduced, however, with a slight reduction in employees and employee hours as seen in the data in Table 1. Most of the employment for Aboriginal people through MFI projects, including both in terms of individuals and collective hours, was for cultural festivals including the Alekarenge Dance/Arts Festivals in 2023 and 2024, and the Memory Mountain Festival in Haasts Bluff.

Infrastructure projects provided the next greatest source of Aboriginal employment in terms of hours, however the number of individuals benefiting was significantly lower due to the need for training and/or qualifications as a prerequisite for participation.

Table 1. MFI Aboriginal employment data 2022/23-2023/24

	FY22/23	FY23/24
Projects with employment	6	8
# Hours worked in MFI projects	2,293	1,329
# Employees in MFI projects	87	79

3.2. INITIATIVE-WIDE DATA AGAINST MFI OBJECTIVES

Incentivise Aboriginal groups to allocate income for community benefit

There is continuing evidence which demonstrates that MFI is acting as an effective incentive for new groups joining, and existing MFI groups opting to allocate additional funds to CD. Examples include:

- Several groups are choosing to allocate \$50,000 per year to the CD to match the threshold for eligibility to receive MFI.
- Other groups are choosing to allocate \$150,000 per year for three years to the CD to maximise the amount of funds available through the MFI.
- When making decisions about allocations of lease money over longer periods of time than the MFI is available (i.e. over 3 years), groups are allocating funds to CD for the MFI eligible years (2023/24, 2024/25, 2025/26 for MF2), and holding off from making decisions about allocations in future years (i.e. 2026/27 onwards) to wait and see if MFI becomes available.
- One working group allocated funds to CD at a distribution meeting when the traditional owners had gathered to allocate individual distribution, rather than the traditional s19 lease money instruction meeting.

- CD Officers report that groups are approaching them requesting an opportunity to work with the CD program because of the availability of MFI.

Enabling the funding of longer-term or bigger projects

There is increasing evidence that the MFI is supporting the funding of longer-term or bigger projects in some communities. One indicator is the increasing average project value of MFI projects (see Figure 5). Another indicator is the prevalence of allocations of MFI towards projects to plan or scope a larger community project. While these are often projects with a small monetary value, they can be a necessary first step when a larger project is identified by the community or working group. Scoping and planning projects that have been funded through MFI allocations in 2022/23 and 2023/24 include:

- Multi-purpose track consultations and design project, Kalkarindji
- Community workshop scoping and design project, Laramba
- Orchard scoping project, Titjikala
- Football oval masterplan, Kalkarindji
- Cemetery research and mapping project, Kalkarindji
- Church and cemetery scoping project, Ampilatwatja
- Scoping for church repairs and renovations, Nturiya
- Greening Papunya and playground masterplan project, Papunya
- Football oval lights feasibility study, Apatula
- Campground scoping and design project, Kintore
- Atyelp Mamp outstation scoping, Nolans Bore traditional owners
- Community centre scoping project, Tara
- Park planning project, Atitjere
- Scoping for new church, Pmara Jutunta

Further examples of where MFI is enabling the funding of bigger or longer-term projects can be seen in a small number of communities where they are pooling all their CD income streams to support a single and more costly project with a shared community vision. Examples of these projects include the Kintore campground project (which combines MFI income with Community Lease Money, 5-year lease money and other income) and the Imangara Church project (which combines MFI income with 5-year lease money, Community Lease Money, Davenport Ranges National Park income and other income).

Increasing equity across the regions

The MFI has continued to address the disparity between the amount of income across the three CD program regions, with most funds directed to lower income regions of the East (40 groups) and the South-West (9 groups), and a minority of funds directed to the higher income region of the Tanami (1 group).

The following maps contrast the allocation of CD funding across all income streams (Figure 11) with the allocation of MFI funding (Figure 12), showing the concentration of MFI funding in the East and South-West, compared with CD whole of program funding which is concentrated in the Tanami.

Figure 11. CD income per location, 2009 to 2024

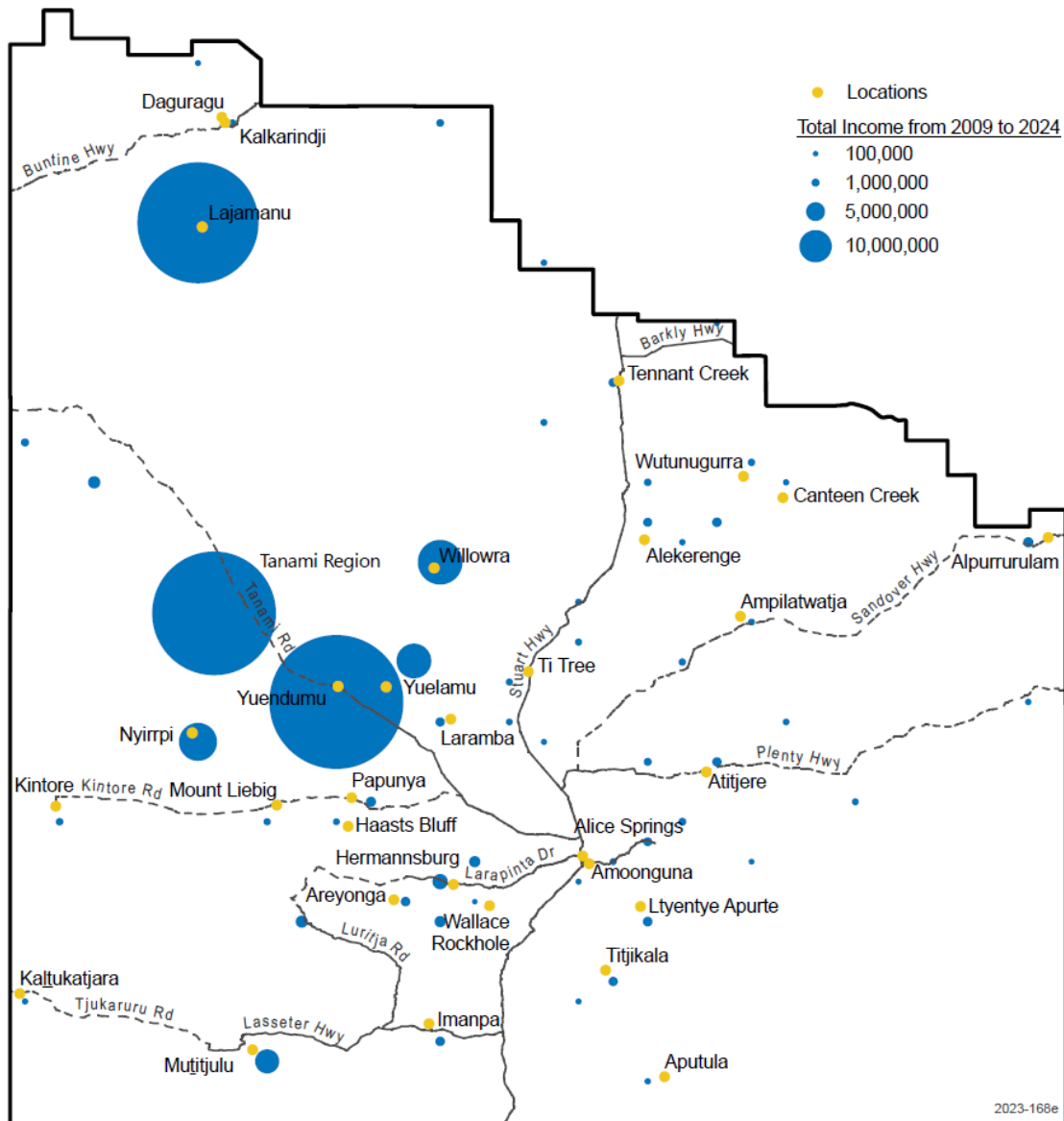
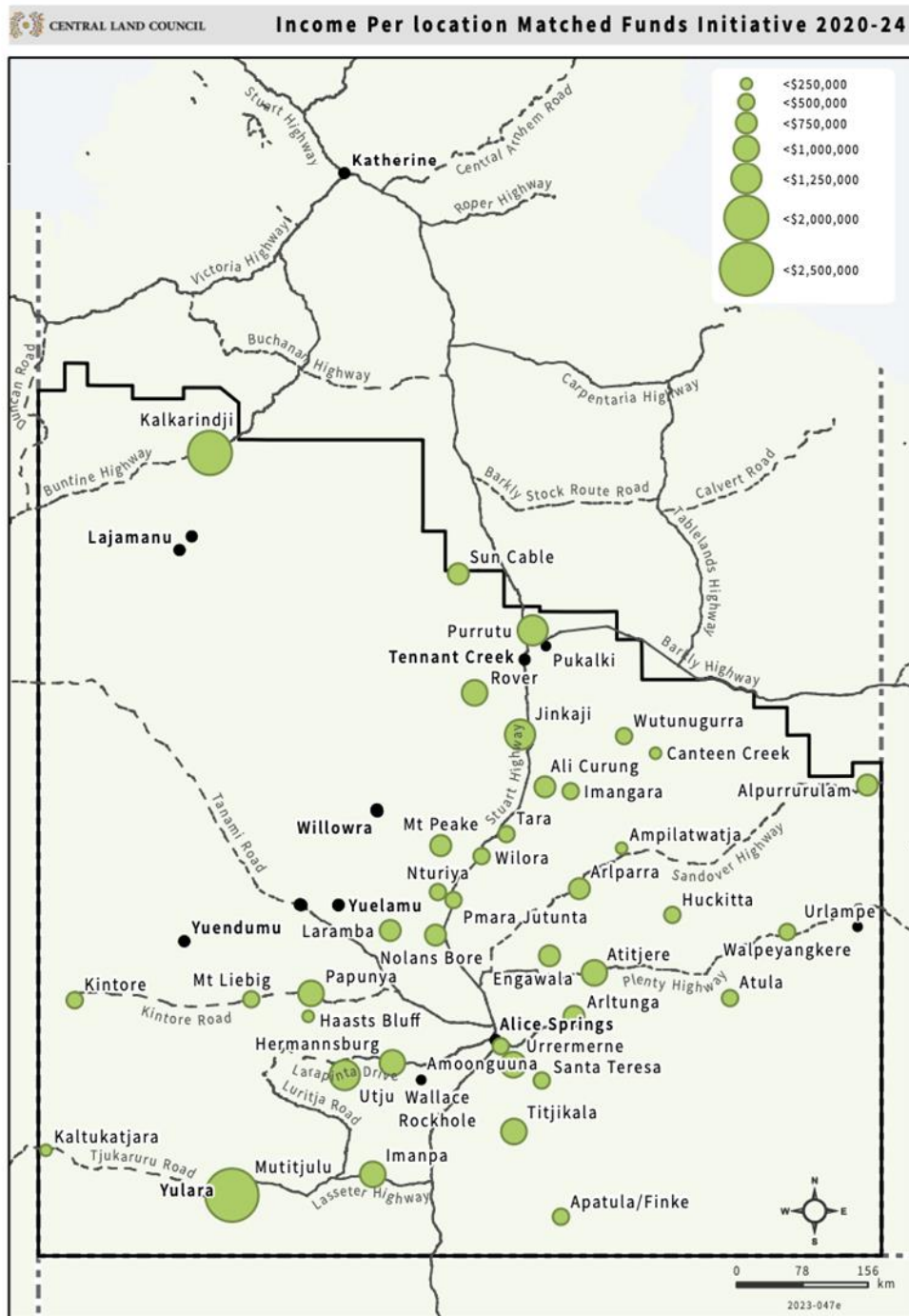


Figure 12. – Matched Funds income per location, 2020/21-2023/24



Despite this progress towards improved equity achieved by the MFI, there remain inequities between and within regions across the CLC CD program footprint. While the average project value of MFI projects is growing, it remains small in comparison to the larger CD income streams such as the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) and the Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation (GMAAAC) operating in the Tanami region. The distribution of exploration and mining licences which provide groups land-use income to be matched also remain uneven, leading to inequities in the distribution of CD projects within and between regions.

4. CASE STUDY | ALEKARENGE

Alekarenge (also known as Ali Curung) is located 170km southeast of Tennant Creek on the Warrabri Aboriginal Land Trust. Alekarenge has a population of over 450 people and offers a range of services including a community store, health centre, art centre and Council Service Centre operated by Barkly Regional Council.

The community has been working with the CD program since 2012 and has completed a wide range of projects, including those in the areas of youth activities, local employment and funeral support. In 2018 the Alekarenge Community Development Working Group was one of three in the national Reconciliation Australia Governance Awards in the unincorporated category for their dedication to controlling their own resources and investing them in projects that help their community.

The introduction of the Matched Funds Initiative in 2021 was a clear factor in the decision made by Alekarenge traditional owners to commit \$50,000 of s19 lease income per year for a period of at least five years towards CD. Since 2021, traditional owners have contributed \$250,000 from s19 lease money to community development which has been matched with \$250,000 of Matched Funds between 2021 and 2024¹. Alekarenge has allocated their Matched Funds to 11 projects to date with an average project value of \$31,447. The highest value project is the Training Centre Renovation Project (\$234,554) and the lowest was the Wi-Fi Hotspot Project (\$4,259).

Table 2. Alekarenge projects funded with MFI income

Project Name	Project Status	MFI Value ²
Alekarenge Wi-Fi Hotspot Project	Complete	\$4,259
Alekarenge Dance Festival 2022	Complete	\$10,000
2022 Alekarenge CAFL Footy Fees Project	Complete	\$7,273
2022 Alekarenge Sports Uniforms Project	Complete	\$14,641
Alekarenge 2023 Football Fees Project	Complete	\$14,000
Alekarenge 2023 Dance Festival Project	Complete	\$20,000
2022 - 2023 Alekarenge Wi-Fi Hotspot Project	In progress	\$15,000
Alekarenge Training Centre Renovation Project*	In progress	\$234,554
2024 Alekarenge Sports Uniforms and Gate Fees Project	In progress	\$6,194
Alekarenge Dance Festival 2024	In progress	\$20,000

¹ Alekarenge have also allocated \$50,000 per year of s19 lease money in future years 2024/25 and 2025/26 to be matched through the MFI.

² Some of the allocated MFI values are returned at the end of a project if not spent

*Project funded by multiple income streams

Progress on Aboriginal engagement, ownership and control over the development of their communities, homelands and futures

Decisions about CD priorities and allocations in Alekarenge are made by an Aboriginal governance group known as a Working Group consisting of 10 members – six male and four female. In 2024 the membership of the Working Group changed to ensure those on the group were active participants and continued to reside in the community.

Respondents to interview questions were overwhelmingly positive about the role of the working group and the ability it gave for community members to identify their own priorities on behalf of the community.

"We use that money for what we need in this community. The working group makes things change in this community, makes things happen." – Female community member

Several respondents commented on the role of the CD program and the Working Group in making decisions to benefit the children and future of Alekarenge.

"I love working with the Working Group, I like being a role model for young people, get them involved." – Female Working Group member

"I like seeing us working together, young and old, so we can pass on to young people, so they can carry on. We tell the community about what's happening and they agree. We're getting young people to come and sit with us and learn from us, they're welcome to come and sit and hear what's going on in meetings." – Female Working Group member

The Training Centre Renovation Project represents both physical and symbolic progress for the community. The existing building earmarked for the new training centre had been under lease to the Barkly Regional Council and not used by the community for around 15 years. Having the ability to identify funding and plan for renovation of the building, and to decide what it is used for, is a significant step for Alekarenge in regaining control of their own community assets and signifying their self-determination. Without MFI, this would not have been possible. Working Group members plan for the training centre to be used for a wide range of activities, for all community members.

"It's been empty for a long time, want to renovate it back. To do it for kids and for young fellas" – Female Working Group member

"It'll be useful for holding meetings, taking kids there. I want to have a fathers' day – for fathers and grandfathers to bring young boys there because young boys are usually with their mothers. It's a big space and they are going to expand it by taking the fence off around the back. Also have drink driving courses there, also for workers at the farm who are driving the tractors." – Male Working Group member

Progress on delivering meaningful and sustainable development outcomes prioritised and valued by Aboriginal people

Interviews with community and Working Group members clearly showed the thought process and meaning behind the prioritisation of CD funding allocations. There is a consistent focus on ensuring projects provide opportunities for children and young people to engage in activities that promote culture and connection.

MFI income has been used to finance the last two editions of the Artali Festival, which brings local and visitors together to celebrate the traditions of the Kaytetye, Alyawarr, Waramungu and Warlpiri language groups.

"Every year we put lease money in the Arts Festival. For children to see and join in the fun. They can dance with their families. It's very important. Other communities come too... 'The Arts Festival is really important for all our future.' – Male Working Group member and Traditional Owner

"The festival lets us share our culture with everyone— white people and other Indigenous people. Everyone is welcome" – Female Working Group member

"It's clear that [the Arts Festival is] important to the community" – CLC CD staff member

Respondents emphasised the importance of supporting sports activities, such as the footy fees and sports uniforms projects, to engage children and youth, encourage positive social behaviour and to connect them with other communities. These two projects funded by MFI complement a larger CD scoping project funded from other sources that will assess the feasibility of the installation of lights at the Alekarenge footy oval to allow for training at night and night games with visiting teams.

"[We need] sports for young people, because they're losing culture... We talk about what we want for the community... Young boys are missing out on initiation – they're not interested... [they] just want to be on their phones. In my time we were sports people, very different from what it is now." – Male Working Group member

"[Kids are] bored and walk around but if they have games – footy & soccer & softball – they'd play and get tired. Other sports as well as footy." – Female Working Group member

The Training Centre Renovation project is a community priority due to its potential to be used for a wide range of purposes and to include the whole community. The renovation is also seen as being a community asset that could draw family members back to Alekarenge.

"My children and grandchildren are at Ampilawitja. Renovate it to make it better... Make it better for them. I want my grandchildren to come back, something for them." – Male Traditional Owner

"Good for kids to play some games with their mothers there [at the training centre]. It's been empty for a long time, want to renovate it back. To do it for kids and for young fellas. Maybe for playing music, studio." – Female Working Group member

"[The training centre] will be good for community meetings, activities, school holidays and Xmas. Invite kids for activities which we'd run by ourselves. We haven't been able to use it for ten or 15 years." - Male Working Group member



Photo: Jimmy Friday (far right) leads a traditional dance at the Atali Festival in Alekarenge.

Feedback on the role of the CLC and the CD approach

Respondents from the Working Group and partner organisations were largely positive about the interactions they have had with CD staff and the CD program approach. Many respondents praised the respectful two-way relationship and the way the CLC and the community support each other. Several partner organisation representatives also described the CD program as being reliable and easy to work with.

"CD work well with the Working Group – we help each other out. We're happy with how CD is working." – Male Working Group member

"I'm happy with them, very happy with them. Whatever they want I help them because they help me" – Male traditional owner

"With consistent staffing and membership of the group the CD [program] acts as reliable, culturally safe leadership – the glue!" – Female partner staff member

One respondent suggested that there could be stronger information sharing between the working group and the community, specifically with young people, to ensure they understand that the working group is the place for free sharing of ideas for projects within the community.

"There has to be a balance between letting people know that's somewhere where people could get money for projects... Part of the problem is that young people aren't maybe aware of the Working Group being the place to go." – Male partner representative

Specific to the strategies of 'Partnerships and Networks' and 'Advocacy and Lobbying', respondents in Alekarenge appreciated the connecting role that CD has played with partners to get projects happening, as well as the advocate role CD has filled to campaign for access to services for the community.

"We wouldn't know where we'd be if we had no one talking on behalf of the community" – Female Working Group member

A valued advocacy effort by CD for the community has been the proposed establishment of a renal dialysis unit in Alekarenge to allow those requiring dialysis to remain on country and with their families while receiving treatment. While not funded by MFI, many respondents commented on the key role that the CD program played in approaching service providers, writing letters to government bodies and progressing conversations. With dialysis services available in the community, families would no longer have to be separated and/or risk children missing school for long periods to travel with their parents.

"The Alekarenge [dialysis] project wouldn't have started without them [CD] approaching us initially to see if we could help" – Representative of Purple House, partner organisation for the dialysis project

Alekarenge was granted funding through the "Better Renal Services for First Nations Peoples" investment, with a press release from the Government specifying that one of the selection criteria for successful communities "strong community support for a local service". This would not have been possible without the support of the CLC CD program.

Views on the MFI

At the 2021 Alekarenge Lease meeting, there was a robust discussion about the allocation of lease money between three options of individual distribution, CD and a funeral fund. Several community members present identified MFI as a good reason for the community to allocate funds to CD. Without the incentivisation of MFI, it appears likely that CD allocations from Alekarenge would have been lower.

Most respondents were aware of MFI and which projects it has contributed to, however given recent changes in Working Group membership there were a few respondents who had yet to attend a Working Group meeting and were not yet aware of how MFI works. Respondents who were aware of MFI expressed their appreciation for the approach of matching community contributions and described how important it has been for community development in Alekarenge.

"We'd be struggling without it. Also it's good because we're showing them that we are putting in money, not just asking for money. We give half the lease money for traditional owners, half for community projects and then it's matched." – Male Traditional Owner

"I think Matched Funds are good. Lease money – traditional owners are going to get a bit of money and the rest going into the community. If we didn't have matched funds we wouldn't have much money for community projects" – Female Working Group member

5. CASE STUDY | IMANGARA

Imangara is a Community Living Area (CLA) within the Murray Downs pastoral property with a recorded population of under 100 people. Located 207km south of Tennant Creek, the community is in the Barkly Regional Council region and has very limited community infrastructure and minimal community service provision. Imangara has only one s19 lease and their income is therefore extremely small. The CLC CD program has been working with Imangara intermittently for a number of years, however due to their low leasing income they found it difficult to get significant projects off the ground. The CD team conducted consultations and planning sessions with Imangara between 2012- 2015 to determine on what community benefit projects the community would like to spend its five-year lease money. Since the MFI trial began the CD program was able to dedicate staff resources and significant guaranteed income to the Imangara community in achieving their priority goals.

Including all income up to July 2024, Imangara had a total of \$734,551 of funding for CD projects, including \$55,917 from 5-year lease money, \$66,391 from community lease money, \$212,244 from Davenport Ranges National Park, \$150,000 from the initial MFI (MFI), a further \$100,000 from MF2 and \$100,000 from other projects. At the time of project inception, the community agreed to save their money over multiple years prioritise the construction of a church using most of the combined funds, which included all matched funding up until that point (\$150,000). The Imangara community worked with CD staff to plan and scope the church project, investing available funds from land use income and the MFI, nominating a contractor they trusted and including a local employment budget. Planning of the church project began in September 2021 and the building was completed in March 2024. The initial 'church design project' was subsequently cancelled as the contractor for the project was able to offer design and build services in a single quotation. The total cost of the church project cost Imangara \$515,904.

Table 3. Imangara projects funded with MFI income

Project Name	Project Status	MFI Value
Church Design Project	Cancelled	\$2,000
Imangara Church project	Completed	\$150,000*

*Project funded by multiple income streams

Progress on Aboriginal engagement, ownership and control over the development of their communities, homelands and futures

To encourage community participation, Imangara does not have a CD Working Group. Instead, all members of Imangara aboriginal Corporation and all traditional owners are welcome to attend meetings and participate in discussions and decision making. Prior to the engagement with the CD program, Imangara faced challenges in finding support for the community, including for basic community services that should be provided by local authorities.

" There is nobody there to hear the community member's voice [in Imangara]. They are so deeply disempowered and disenfranchised...[and] the disfunction of Barkly Regional Council contributes to this disempowerment." – CLC CD staff member

Respondents from Imangara described how the CD project has helped the community in not only accessing funding, but also in understanding processes and approaches that will support Imangara achieve their goals.

[CD staff member], she's really good and the other lady [CD staff member], they both was good for us, help us to live in the community, help building the things we need. We need better changes in this community... We like to work with them [CLC CD], so we understand and do things right. We've been doing that with them". – Male community member

The partner organisation for the church project also commented on the sense of ownership the community has and the feeling of being welcomed into the community for that reason.

"The community is always pleased to see us because they have ownership of the project – there's been consultation, thought and action taken – [it] gives people pride. It's not just a white fella telling them what they need." – Project partner

Progress on delivering meaningful and sustainable development outcomes prioritised and valued by Aboriginal people

The church project has been long-awaited by Imangara community members, and its completion marked a meaningful milestone for residents. As well as being used for funerals, it has also provided a community space for children, youth and adults alike for events including sing-alongs, Sunday school and band practice.

"The church is important to the community. Whenever we have a funeral we would just use the little shed and we'd borrow equipment from other communities. The matched funds has helped us to have our own. Now we have funerals here – band equipment and singing. CD have helped us – after the church we've moved onto the next project, the workshop. In ten years there's only been money for one project – the church." – Female community member

"The old people and grandmothers always wanted the church they were fighting for, and now it's happened for us." – Female community member

Three local workers were employed through the project, including over 100 hours of Aboriginal employment.

"Three young fellas worked on it, that was good". – Male community member

While it was hoped that the project may provide more extensive employment opportunities, the project encountered a series of barriers that stifled engagement. At the time of project implementation only three community members were in possession of valid 'NT white cards' signifying completion of 'NT General Construction Induction Training' and therefore eligibility to work on a construction site.

The need for training for additional community members was identified during the project planning stage, however access to training remained a longstanding issue throughout the duration of the project. Service providers reported budget and resource limitations to deliver trainings and a lack of support for community members to register and participate in trainings – such as transport to Alice Springs, phone/email communication, identification and paperwork – further hindered progress in this area. The CD team recognises that this issue goes beyond the scope of the church project, the community and the broader CD

program, and engaged with the CLC Policy team to further advocate for support around training provision and enabling Aboriginal employment.

The project did however give the community the impetus to check validity of other people's white cards and to continue the process of engaging with service providers to ensure training opportunities are available to increase the number of people in the community who would be eligible for future work of this kind.

The completion of the church in Imangara has inspired the community to now focus on other related projects to further improve the building and surrounds, including paving the external patio area and building a fence for the cemetery.



Photo: Local employee Nathan Campbell working on the construction of the Imangara church.

The Imangara case study provides a good example of a community that has saved up its CD income from multiple income streams over several years to enable it to invest in a meaningful community-building project with long-term impact. This validates this approach as a model for the CD program to consider in working with community or traditional owner groups who have smaller income, in contrast to supporting groups to allocate funds on multiple smaller projects at the time that income becomes available. While this may have an impact on the rate at which MFI gets spent, it would support the goal of delivering meaningful and sustainable development outcomes and supporting bigger and longer-term projects.

Feedback on the role of the CLC and the CD approach

Most respondents identified the positive role CD staff have had in the community since the start of the project and the desire to continue this positive relationship in the future.

"[CD staff member] is always being helpful from the start and we're looking forward to more [help] from [her] next year." – Female community member

Feedback from both the community and partners expressed praise for the patience and communication style used by the CD staff members, including the way they spoke slowly to ensure everyone understood the key messages, felt comfortable to ask for clarification and trusted that concrete actions agreed on in meetings would be followed through.

"CLC CD are very good at communicating with the community – they excel at the cultural engagement side." – Project partner

Feedback from partners also demonstrated how continuous improvement in planning for infrastructure projects has led to savings and efficiencies in project planning for partners and the working groups. For example, the detailed brief provided by the CD program to the selected project partner for the Imangara fence build, which included detailed information about the community and site and included drawings and photos, was estimated by the partner to save \$5,000 in planning costs.

"In my experience in the last three years their (CD program) procedures have really improved" – Project partner

Specific to the strategy 'Advocacy and Lobbying', the CD program has been instrumental in raising issues related to lack of provision of community services and payment of lease money to the Barkly Regional Council.

"We see things going ahead when we talk to her (CD staff member) ... She's been helping us fight for the leasing thing with the Shire." – Female community member

"Sometimes she just helps and lets them know what we need out here." – Female community member

CLC's legal staff have supported Imangara to understand their options in response to proposed back payment of lease money from the Barkly Regional Council for the use of a lot for Night Patrol services. This has included community meetings to explain the definitions and rules about leases and the powers of the Imangara Aboriginal Corporation to make decisions. The CD program has also encouraged community members to represent their own interests at council meetings directly, along with their local authority representative.

"Land Council has been helping by telling them they need to pay. We need backpay and then to start paying rent. They haven't agreed yet. The Land Council lawyer has been following up. If they don't agree at the meeting at the end of the year we'll have more meetings. Land Council helps with that." – Female community member

Regarding the CD program more broadly, respondents clearly acknowledged the need for and impact of this type of funding.

"I think it's really good to help. Without no funds they wouldn't change the community, for the community, for the next generation, the little ones." – Male community member



Photos: Inside the completed Imangara church

Views on the MFI

Several respondents were not aware of MFI and the role it played in the funding of the church. In most cases this was due to individuals having not attending CD meetings regularly or not residing in the community full-time. Those who were aware of MFI were overwhelmingly supportive of the initiative as the funding of the church project allowed them to realise a goal their community had held for a long time.

"Everybody's happy with the church... We wanted the church for a long time – some of our grandmothers wanted it... If we didn't have Matched Funds we wouldn't have been able to build the church." – Female community member

"[Without matched funds] we wouldn't have nothing to do actually, it would be empty, people would be doing nothing." – Female community member

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. CONTRIBUTION TO CD PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Increase Aboriginal engagement, ownership and control over the development of our communities, homelands and futures

Monitoring data and interviews conducted during the development of this report clearly indicate that the processes and projects undertaken through MFI have contributed to the two CD program objectives.

Testament to the CLC CD approach and community-based processes, the year-on-year growth in the number of MFI community and stakeholder engagements and the number of projects successfully completed indicates progress towards an increase in Aboriginal engagement, ownership and control over the development of their communities, homelands and futures. A review of quantitative data and consultations with CD staff emphasised the role of the MFI in providing opportunities for expanded engagement with Aboriginal communities, both in terms of quantity and quality of engagement.

The case study of Imangara provides a strong example of progress in this area. Despite not having a formal CD Working Group, Imangara's CD meetings are regularly well attended and have provided a forum for community members to not only discuss decisions and updates regarding the specific CD-funded projects, but also to raise broader issues and concerns that by all accounts would otherwise go unheard and un-actioned. Specifically employing the CLC strategy of advocacy and lobbying, CD staff have both acted on behalf of Imangara to protect their rights and interests and encouraged community members to represent their own interests directly, along with their local authority representative.

CLC's legal staff have supported Imangara to understand their options in response to proposed back payment of lease money, including community meetings to explain the definitions and rules about leases and the powers of the Imangara Aboriginal Corporation to make decisions. Given the lack of adequate funding to implement CD projects before the allocation of matched funds in Imangara, this high level of engagement and ownership can be directly attributed to their participation in the MFI.

The prioritisation of a community infrastructure project as a manifestation of self-determination in the face of an underperforming council is not unique to Alekarenge. Similar examples can be found in other CD locations where the ability to fund physical infrastructure due to the MFI has resulted in communities regaining ownership of community assets and using them for benefit of the broader community. The sense of empowerment gained by these communities should not be understated.



Photo: Linda Allen and Punta Stockman are happy with the new picnic facilities in Papunya, supported by MFI.

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

The projects funded by MFI are highly valued by the Aboriginal communities in which they are implemented and are designed to make a sustained difference. The most highly funded project type over the 2022-2024 period was infrastructure, providing the opportunity for project benefits to the community to be sustained beyond the life of the project. The extent to which these projects will contribute to sustained difference in practice however will be determined by several factors unique to the context of each community, including budget and personnel for maintenance and upkeep, community ownership and security measures, and satisfaction with the delivered project result. These factors should continue to be considered in the planning stages to promote sustainability of project benefits.

Monitoring data, CD staff reflections and direct feedback from community members emphasise the importance placed on projects that will directly benefit children and youth and foster a sense of culture, community and connection. In Alekarenge, MFI projects have focused on the role of sport and arts to promote positive engagement of youth within and beyond the community for both males and females. In Imangara the church project delivered a meaningful outcome that was prioritised by both current community members and their predecessors. It also provided a space for children and youth to come together to practice music and attend Sunday school, as well as being a symbol of inspiration for the Imangara community to pursue further CD opportunities. The sense of community and pride cultivated

through these projects have strong potential to make a sustained difference to the community if appropriate ongoing maintenance support is provided. For Alekarenge this requires ongoing funding of annual festival and sports team budgets, and in Imangara this will require completion of add-ons to the church project and general maintenance of the building itself.

The potential for local employment in MFI projects is high, however some projects did not meet the employment outcomes that had been anticipated by community at the planning stage. Ongoing challenges with training service providers has restricted Aboriginal employment in projects, particularly those requiring white card certification. This issue was not unique to Imangara during the reporting period. In at least one location where the provision of training was not the issue, other barriers included a lack of support to community members to access the planned training, such as no access to transportation, difficulties in producing or updating formal identification and lack of administrative support to complete the required paperwork. There is evidence that CD Officers, due to their strong community relationships, are called on by community members to fill these gaps in the service system and are required to advocate strongly to partners to proactively address these barriers. More recently, CD Officers have raised concerns with the delivery of Commonwealth funded training programs to the CLC Policy team to try to work towards a practical solution at a policy level. This is critical in addressing the systemic issues that undermine stronger training and employment outcomes across the CLC region, including in MFI projects.

Despite these challenges, it remains important for planning at the earliest stages to maximise Aboriginal employment. This includes, for example, scoping the number of individuals who have valid NT white cards and facilitating the required training for those who are interested ahead of project implementation, alongside consideration of how to address the common barriers that limit participation in training and employment. The successful completion of white card training for Aboriginal people in remote communities provides a sustainable impact through employment not only in projects in their own communities, but in others in the region to supplement positions required by project partners.



Photo: Mt Liebig community celebrated the opening of their community funded facilities

Progress has been made through the CD strategies of partnerships and networks, and advocacy and lobbying over the monitoring period. Data showing the significant increase in community and stakeholder engagement activity within the CD team since the start of the MFI is evidence of this. The CLC operates

under section 23 of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Land Rights Act)* and through this has the mandate to advocate with and on behalf of Aboriginal people, protect their interests, help to resolve land disputes, promote community development and improve service delivery.³ Efforts to this end have been appreciated by communities participating in the MFI, including the identification and contracting of appropriate partners for CD projects, negotiating land use payments, organising training opportunities for white cards and licences, and liaising with Barkly Regional Council to advocate with and on behalf of communities for timely delivery of essential services. Though appreciated by communities, this level of support requires significant time input from various members of the CLC (including CD, legal and policy), and additional staffing would likely further increase the support CLC could provide through these strategies and the potential transformational development that it could enable.

Time and capacity constraints were reported by CD staff members across the East region, where the vast majority of MFI projects were, and continue to be, implemented. This is exacerbated by the number of groups in the East who are engaging with the CD program for the first time, in comparison to the South-West where the majority of MFI groups were previously working with the CD program through different income streams. During the reporting period, CD Officers in the East region were each responsible for an average of more than 12 governance groups – over double that of CD Officers in any other region. While positive that a high number of groups can access MFI income, the downside is that CD Officers often do not have adequate time and capacity to meet the needs of each community, particularly those in which relationships are just being built or additional support is required to build cohesion within governance groups. The time-bound requirements of MFI allocations, implementation and reporting in many cases do not align with the reality of the baseline levels of many Aboriginal communities' capabilities, particularly those new to the CD program and with developing governance mechanisms. To maximise development outcomes, through governance, projects and broader community support, CD Officers need to be able to dedicate adequate time to each group in line with the community's needs and capacities and dedicate time to CD processes, rather than just *projects*.

6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue the MFI's predictable, multi-year approach beyond 2026 to further progress the CLC's CD objectives
- To ensure the MFI remains responsive to the needs and capacities of both the CLC CD program and Aboriginal communities, instigate a review of the MFI *mechanism* 12 months prior to the end of the current funding round (i.e. July 2025). This should include a review of the process of funding allocations, eligibility criteria to receive MFI, timeframes for expenditure and reporting, and an assessment of options for alternative approaches.
- Ensure infrastructure project planning continues to consider budgets, plans and responsibilities for the defects liability period and ongoing asset management to promote sustainability of project benefits.
- Explore potential Aboriginal employment opportunities in initial discussions for projects, particularly infrastructure, to allow for lead times for training and certification and enhanced employment outcomes from MFI funded projects.

³ Central Land Council <https://www.clc.org.au/what-we-do/>

- Strengthen and/or formalise linkages between the CD program and Policy teams within the CLC to maximise efforts in Advocacy and Lobbying.
- Consider alternative structures of the CD team to reduce the number of governance groups per CD Officer with the intent to allow more time for delivering the CD strategies of governance, partnerships and advocacy in each MFI site. This could include, for example, division of the East region into two teams, and recruitment of additional CD Officers and a new Regional Coordinator, and/or the recruitment and training of Assistant CD Engagement Officers at the local level.

6.3. PROGRESS ON MFI OBJECTIVES

Incentivise groups to allocate income to community projects

There is clear evidence from project data and s19 legal instruction meetings from eligible communities that the availability of MFI played a major role in the allocation of funding for CD. Meeting minutes show the willingness of traditional owners to commit funding to the CD program for multiple years in advance given confirmation of MFI availability, however are more hesitant to commit funds to CD without the guarantee of MFI (i.e. 2026-27 onwards). In Imangara, eligibility for MFI gave the community the incentive to save up their land use income until they were able to afford a major project with the help of the MFI. While the number of new groups joining MFI in the monitoring period is relatively small, incentivisation has remained apparent in groups deciding to continue allocating income to CD. The sustained CD program effort working with these same communities is likely to have contributed to progress against the two CD objectives.

Increase the impact of community benefit projects through the increase in available funds by enabling the funding of longer-term or bigger projects

During the monitoring period there were 20 projects out of the total 183 that were allocated over \$100,000 of matched funds income and 14 projects that were dedicated to planning and scoping of longer-term or bigger projects. The MFI has allowed communities to plan longer-term and bigger projects through the multi-year commitment to match funds allocated for CD, which at times groups combine with multiple other income streams to enable funding of higher value projects. The ability to dedicate funding for proper planning of high-value projects indicates a commitment to ensuring projects make a sustained difference in communities, as well as strengthened governance and project planning capabilities. The ability of CD staff to support on project scoping and preparation can be determined by their available capacity. Noting that CD staff manage projects in multiple communities simultaneously, the increase in energy dedicated to planning could outgrow their capacity.

Larger projects can also attract larger challenges, and this is not an issue unique to MFI or even the CLC, especially given the complexities of the context of remote Australia in which the CD program is operating. Projects of high value and with long timeframes often come with high expectations from all sides – community, partner and CLC – which can be challenging to manage and to meet. There are limited partner organisations with expertise operating in the remote central Australian context, and the increasing demand for projects generated through the CD program is one of several factors that at times places pressure on organisations that are already stretched by the complexities of their operating environment. Identifying appropriate local partners who have sufficient capacity to lead on larger projects can be tricky, and at times CD staff need to look further afield for appropriate expertise.

The time it takes to establish contracts for larger projects, including navigating factors beyond the control of the CD program, can lead to delayed engagement of partners, resulting in frustration from project partners, response to quotations after the validity period and higher costs to CD budgets due to market changes. Delays or extended timelines, particularly with infrastructure projects, leads to increased costs over time due to the small number of appropriate partners in Central Australia and the rising cost of materials and transport. The CD program has faced the loss of partners, specifically from Tennant Creek, due to companies withdrawing from the process or closing business, resulting in the need to identify alternative partners, potentially from further afield.

Evidence collected in the case studies demonstrated how the CD program has been continuously improving in project and contract management, and it is critical the program continues refining its approach to project and partner management to ensure sustainable benefits are maximised from the increasing investment in MFI projects. Given the challenges with partners and the time spent by CD staff to identify, negotiate with and contract new partners, as well as re-do quotes, negotiate with funding bodies and keep traditional owners informed, it would also be beneficial for the CD program to continue investing in the skills and capabilities of CD Officers to effectively navigate the complexities of partner negotiation effectively.

There is evidence that CD processes have improved over the period to streamline the request for quotation and contracting procedure, including the provision of additional details to infrastructure project partners. The availability of an architect to support the broader CD portfolio aided in this process, and additional technical specialist positions in the infrastructure sector would likely see further improvements.

While the MFI has enabled some higher-value projects, the monetary value of a project is not necessarily a reliable proxy to how valuable the project is to the community. MFI has been used to fund a wide variety of lower value projects, which indicates the increased choice that communities have with the availability of matched funding. MFI continues to enable smaller and short-term projects that are given high value by the community, as seen through the sports and arts allocation in Alekarenge. The ability of groups to have that choice contributes to the increase in Aboriginal engagement, ownership and control over the development of their communities, homelands and futures.



Photo: Workers from CLC Ranger Works preparing for the construction of the Papunya Picnic Shelters.

Tackle the disparity between the amounts of income from land use agreements available for community development projects across the regions

There is clear evidence to show that the MFI works to reduce the disparity in income available for CD projects across the region, with larger numbers of communities participating in MFI from regions with historically lower CD income (i.e. East, South-West). The Imangara case study provides one example of the impact of this strategy, where a group with historically limited opportunity to participate in the CD program has been able to meaningfully engage for the first time and invested in a high-value infrastructure building project that has received strong community satisfaction and is showing early signs of sustainable community benefit.

Despite this progress towards improved equity achieved by the MFI, there continues to be significant disparity in the amount of income that is available to different communities or traditional owner groups and CD Officer capacity to implement the CD strategies in each location, which limit the equity outcomes made possible through this initiative.

6.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Include in the review of the MFI mechanism an assessment of community or TO groups that may be missing out on the Review the eligibility for MFI funding with the intention to further progress MFI objective three. This could include, for example, lowering the minimum community contribution and/or expanding the sources of funding from which community allocations can be sourced (beyond s19 lease money).
- Dedicate time and resources for wider partner scoping to increase the partner pool and pro-actively assess potential partner quality, timelines and costs.
- Consider the recruitment of technical specialists (such as an additional architect or engineer) to expedite and improve the quality of surveying and quotation processes for infrastructure projects.
- Consider options to strengthen the partnership and networks role of the CD program including training for existing CD Officers, a restructuring of responsibilities or a dedicated partnership role.

6.5. CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE MONITORING OF THE MFI

Future monitoring of the MFI could examine data on the breakdown of funds leveraged by the MFI from other CD income streams to enrich monitoring and analysis.

7. CONCLUSION

The CD program has made substantial progress in delivering the MFI as the initiative has matured through its third and fourth year. Securing a second allocation of \$9 million in funding from NIAA to continue matching the investment of communities and working groups to community benefit projects is clearly acting to incentivise groups to participate in the CD program. Most groups participating in the MFI are from

regions that have historically received a smaller proportion of CD income, helping to address the income disparity across CD regions. The increase in available funds has enabled some groups to fund higher-value and longer-term projects where they have chosen to do so, alongside groups who continue to invest in a range of smaller projects that align with community priorities and enhance community ownership, control and empowerment.

In the case study sites, there is evidence that the CD strategies of partnerships and networking and lobbying and advocacy are making meaningful contributions to the outcomes of CD processes and projects for MFI initiatives and that these are valued by community members and project partners alike. Effective planning that draws on appropriate technical skill is critical to setting up projects for success, while lobbying and advocacy is highly valued by communities for its role in protecting Aboriginal rights and enhancing community voice, as well as the project benefits that can be realised when efforts are successful. Further partnership and networking activity supported by the CD program could help address the challenges faced by communities and working groups in sourcing appropriate partners to deliver on the potential added benefits of the MFI funds.

Given the significant achievements of the MFI in 2022/23 and 2023/24 and the benefits being generated for Aboriginal people and communities, it is strongly recommended that the MFI is continued beyond 2026. Restructuring and securing additional resourcing for the role of the CLC in facilitating detailed and effective community engagement and planning, building partnerships and networks, and undertaking critical lobbying and advocacy efforts will assist the CD program to enhance the transformational development outcomes of the MFI in years to come.



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