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OCHRE

The Continuing Conversation

Evaluation | Stage 1: Implementation and early outcomes

OCHRE Evaluation Synthesis Report

Stage 1 Final Report

Prepared for members of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances – NCARA

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This report belongs to members of NCARA.

SPRC
Social Policy Research Centre

The research team from the Social Policy Research Centre acknowledges the Bedegal people, the traditional custodians of the land we work on and pay our respect to Elders past, present and future and all Aboriginal peoples in the region.

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Glossary

AH&MRC	Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council
AMS	Aboriginal Medical Service
IWAAC	Illawarra-Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council
MPRA	Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly
NCARA	NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances
Nest	Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest
NGO	Non-government organisation
NSW AECG Inc.	NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.
OCHRE	Opportunity Choice Healing Responsibility Empowerment
SPRC	Social Policy Research Centre
UNSW	University of New South Wales

Summary: *OCHRE* Evaluation Synthesis Report

Research questions

The NSW Government wants to know:

1. Is *OCHRE* being implemented as intended? What aspects are working well, and which could be improved [discussed as strengths and challenges]?
2. Do outcomes continue to reflect what the community wants to achieve?
3. What improvements to the design of *OCHRE* could be made to better meet outcomes in the Aboriginal community, and for the future development of *OCHRE*?
4. Do *OCHRE* policies and practices respond to emerging evidence and practice learnings? Is change to policy and practice timely?

Aims of *OCHRE*

The aims of *OCHRE* are to:

> - 'Teach more Aboriginal language and culture to build people's pride and identity
> - Support more Aboriginal students to stay at school
> - Support more Aboriginal young people to get fulfilling and sustainable jobs
> - Grow local Aboriginal leaders', including programs for children and young people, and communities' capacity to drive their own solutions
> - Focus on creating opportunities for economic empowerment
> - Make both government and communities more accountable for the money they spend.' (Aboriginal Affairs, 2013b: 3)

The *OCHRE* Evaluation involved detailed case studies of:

- Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest
- North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest
- Campbelltown Opportunity Hub
- Tamworth Opportunity Hub
- Illawarra-Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (IWAAC)
- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA).

Findings are based on discussions with members of Aboriginal communities in each of these sites and with other stakeholders. In addition, data about *OCHRE* was analysed, and reports and other documents were studied.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to NCARA for NSW Government. The recommendations are made based on overall findings for the three programs evaluated. Specific recommendations from each site evaluated are included in Appendix B.

- Work towards transferring ownership of programs to Aboriginal communities, where not already Aboriginal community owned or controlled.
- Coordinate programs to minimise overlap and gaps.
- Collect better data, ensure local Aboriginal communities have the data, to enable them to act.
- Use data to inform future resourcing model for each program.
- Ensure capacity building is embedded in all programs as well as the evaluation.
- Resource programs appropriately and reduce reliance on good will (including attendance of meetings with government).
- Clarify the role of government in each program to manage expectations of both community and government staff.
- Honour commitment to *continuing conversations* and include community in future developments.

Findings for all *OCHRE* programs

Overall, the three *OCHRE* programs are working as intended in the sites evaluated.

Key strengths:

- There is broad support for *OCHRE* programs within Aboriginal communities, as Aboriginal Affairs NSW works with and listens to Aboriginal communities.
- *OCHRE* program staff are a key and critical part of the successful implementation.
- *OCHRE* is addressing important outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

Challenges and limitations:

- *OCHRE* programs need better data to be collected, including more comprehensive data that focusses on community priorities – such as wellbeing, volunteer participation, and young Aboriginal people's self-esteem.
- *OCHRE* programs need increased resources, including staffing, and more support for capacity building to properly fulfil the aims and objectives.

- It is important to improve coordination between *OCHRE* programs and between *OCHRE* and other Aboriginal programs and governance structures.

Improvements:

- *OCHRE* programs contribute to the wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples, but do not directly address wellbeing as a key aim or objective. Communities recommended that wellbeing should be integrated into the aims of *OCHRE* programs.

Community engagement and community-control:

- All *OCHRE* programs require more support and resources to maintain engagement with the diverse views and needs of Aboriginal communities in each area.
- Capacity building for Aboriginal communities to take control of services in their area should be built into all aspects of *OCHRE* programs.
- Access to *OCHRE* programs should be available to all relevant Aboriginal community members.

Governance:

- Currently there are overly complex governance arrangements, especially for Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests.
- There need to be clearer lines of responsibility between the responsible government department, community governance structures and the *OCHRE* programs, including accountability, and the role of Aboriginal Affairs NSW.
- Communities should have more input into the design and management of *OCHRE* programs. Governance structures and lines of accountability, including mechanisms for ensuring community ownership, should be clearly set out in program guidelines and policies.

Strategic planning (data, reporting and resourcing):

- Information about programs needs to focus on both the priorities of Aboriginal communities and those of government.
- Data should be provided to Aboriginal communities for use.

Coordination between *OCHRE* programs and with other organisations and services:

- *OCHRE* programs could be better coordinated; for example, there is potential for the three programs evaluated to work together to improve community access and involvement.

- *OCHRE* programs should be coordinated with other programs in communities to reduce overlap and gaps.

***OCHRE* policies and other government policies:**

- *Local Schools, Local Decisions* policy impacts on whether Aboriginal students can access *OCHRE* programs in government schools.[1]
- Government procuring processes could further develop capacity with Aboriginal organisations to ensure Aboriginal communities and organisations participate in tenders.

Local Decision Making

Local Decision Making has the potential to deliver a great number of *OCHRE* objectives; however, the program is under-resourced.

- Local decision making's success relies on receiving more resources at the local and regional level (both financial and administrative), in particular for communication processes, capacity building in driving solutions, financial accountability, and to develop economic opportunities in the regions.
- The model is seen by many participants to be very progressive and in some ways the furthest towards actual expression of self-determination in Australia.
- The ongoing open dialogue between Aboriginal communities and government should be viewed as a success.
- The model allows Aboriginal communities', with their nominated representatives, and government to build a relationship and to better understand each other's needs.

Challenges:

- Resources do not match the goals of the Local Decision Making model – particularly given the geographic scale, and Accord priorities, of the regions involved.
- The model is being implemented at a regional scale, which raises concerns that it relates to regional rather than local decision making. This is exacerbated when progress towards implementation of Accords is slow.
- It is important for Aboriginal communities to see meaningful changes locally resulting from the Local Decision Making processes. Improvements in

[1] The policy *Local Schools, Local Decisions* leaves the decision to participate in the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest and in-school Opportunity Hub activities to each school Principal. See NSW Department of Education (2018b).

engagement with government in and of itself will not convince communities that Local Decision Making is effective.

- The model has been criticised by some that it has the potential to overlap or undermine existing Aboriginal governance structures.

Improvements:

A number of improvements to Local Decision Making could be made by NSW Government:

- Increase commitment to the Local Decision Making process by all tiers of government and the NGO sector[2] to ensure the priorities of Aboriginal communities are identified and addressed regionally and locally. The success of Local Decision Making is reliant on engagement and timely participation of government.
- Develop and build cultural capability of government representatives and service providers (including NGOs) in working with NSW Aboriginal peoples – focusing on developing culturally safe and culturally acceptable policies and practices.
- Increase resources to support Assemblies/Alliances in the delivery of their obligations. For example, the work of Regional Assemblies/Alliances goes beyond the regional forum and out to local communities. This would improve representation, build awareness of the opportunities from Local Decision Making, and also build relationships between local communities and government services locally.
- Provide support for succession planning activities, to ensure there are future generations of community leaders.
- Consider renaming Local Decision Making to something that better reflects the regional model.
- Provide support for local (as well as regional) decision making.
- Improve links and clarify roles of Local Decision Making in relation to other Aboriginal governance structures.

Opportunity Hubs

The two **Opportunity Hub** sites evaluated:

- Have strong relationships and networks with Aboriginal communities and local schools and are able to access employment opportunities in the area. They have positive support from non-government and business sectors, mentors and tertiary education.

[2] Recognising NGOs role in delivering services under contract to government.

- Benefit from committed staff, and strong and supportive Consortium or Advisory Group leadership, expertise and knowledge, and members of the local Aboriginal community volunteering.
- Appear to provide great value for money.

Challenges:

- There is a narrow focus in the policy and data collection on education and employment. Hub activities are not focused on broader and more holistic needs of young Aboriginal people – which need to be addressed.
- Capacity building within the Hub, including staff development and job security.

Improvements:

The success of an Opportunity Hub relies on the strengths of personnel involved, the resources available, partnerships in the community, and consent to operate in schools. A number of improvements could be made to the Opportunity Hub model:

For new sites:

- As shown by the two sites evaluated, for new Opportunity Hub sites, considerable work needs to be done prior to going to tender to engage stakeholders (including schools) and build the capacity of local Aboriginal organisations (or organisations with Aboriginal staff) to ensure the program's success.

For new and existing Opportunity Hub sites:

- Conduct a thorough needs and assets mapping. Use this to plan and resource the program to meet the needs identified (without relying on unpaid work).
- Improve the capture and use of program data to respond to opportunities and needs.
- Allow flexibility in the contract to respond to local needs identified by local Aboriginal communities, including meeting requests to provide Opportunity Hub programs to neighbouring schools, and meeting the diverse needs of young Aboriginal people.
- Look for, build and sustain opportunities for employment of Aboriginal Hub staff. This includes providing longer-term financing to the program to sustain staff, providing resources to develop and invest in Opportunity Hub staff, and providing internships, work placements or secondments in the Opportunity Hub for young Aboriginal people.
- Respond to local needs and strengths, including taking a more holistic approach, looking at young Aboriginal people's wellbeing within the Hub or developing close working relationships with other Aboriginal services which can help young people and their families.

- Facilitate community control – provide mechanisms for the community to have a say in such matters as the geographic footprint of the Opportunity Hubs and the range of activities they provide.

Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests

We heard that for Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests (Nests):

- There is broad support from members of Aboriginal communities for teaching and learning Aboriginal culture and languages. Nests are generally seen as a positive development.
- There are diverse opinions in each community about who can teach, who can learn, and where Aboriginal Languages and Culture are taught.
- Students participating in Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests are enthusiastic about learning. The program also provides job opportunities for tutors (although as casual and sessional, not ongoing permanent positions).

Challenges:

- Locating Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests in government schools restricts access for members of broader Aboriginal communities and community control.
- Language and Culture classes compete with an already busy school timetable.
- *Local Schools, Local Decisions* impacts of whether students in government schools can have access to Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest classes.
- Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests are not easily available to children in Catholic and Independent schools.

Improvements:

- The Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests need to be accessible to Aboriginal communities across the region, including government and non-government school students, families and carers, and the broader Aboriginal communities. This issue requires resolution to ensure the Nest is properly community-based and community driven.
- Issues about teaching and learning Aboriginal languages in each area need to be addressed, with cultural sensitivity, in conversation with members of Aboriginal communities in the area.
- Manage expectations about the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest, on practical matters such as: the number of tutor hours that are funded; the requirements for Aboriginal Language and Culture teachers and tutors to work in schools; and the resources available for training, capacity building and resource development to support teachers and tutors.

- Financial security to ensure the long-term sustainability of the program. This allows for ongoing resource development working with Elders, tutor support and job security.
- Collect data about tutor hours, and school and student participation, to help evaluate the program and to identify future resource requirements.
- Clarify governance and accountability structures to enable growth of the program. For example, the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests are perceived by many community members to be part of the education system, and not community-controlled.

Report structure

This synthesis report presents the findings from the Stage 1 Evaluation of *OCHRE* – Implementation and early outcomes.

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 1 begins with a brief **overview of the evaluation**. This includes the research questions provided by Aboriginal Affairs NSW, measures of success, evaluation methods, and strengths and limitations to the evaluation.
- Section 2 is the **findings for each program** – what we have understood from conversations with the communities about Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, Local Decision Making, and Opportunity Hubs.
- Section 3 is the discussion of **findings across all programs**. This includes how they meet the overall objectives of OCHRE.
- Section 4 describes the **practice learnings**. This includes learnings about best practice in Aboriginal research, learnings about the impact the evaluation has had on OCHRE, as well as learnings about what has worked well, what can be improved and other considerations for the next stage of the evaluation.
- Section 5 is the **conclusions and recommendations for NCARA to NSW Government** drawn from the findings and practice learnings.
- Section 6 identifies **next steps**, including the final steps for Stage 1 of the evaluation and the potential direction for Stage 2.

A summary of *OCHRE* and the different *OCHRE* programs subject to the evaluation is presented in Appendix A. Recommendations from each site evaluated, where reports have been approved by community for publication, are presented in Appendix B.

1 The *Continuing Conversations*

1.1 About the *OCHRE* Evaluation

University researchers from UNSW's Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) have been contracted by the NSW Government to continue the conversations that commenced with the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs to see how *OCHRE* – the NSW Government's plan for Aboriginal affairs – is working. The evaluation is planned to continue for 10 years and will occur in three stages:

- Stage 1 (this report) (2015/16 to 2017/18) focuses on implementation, any short-term outcomes, and recommendations for improvements to *OCHRE*.
- Stage 2 (2018/19 to 2020/21) will focus on identifying changes experienced by participants and stakeholders, outcomes, and recommendations for improvements to the programs.
- Stage 3 (2021/22 to 2023/24) will focus on assessing the contribution each *OCHRE* program has had on meeting long-term goals, and recommendations for improvements.

The NSW Government wants to know:

1. Is the *OCHRE* being implemented as intended? What aspects are working well, and which could be improved [discussed as strengths and challenges]?
2. Do outcomes continue to reflect what the community wants to achieve?
3. What improvements to the design of *OCHRE* could be made to better meet outcomes in the Aboriginal community, and for the future development of *OCHRE*?

It will also contribute to a question about the overall *OCHRE* plan:

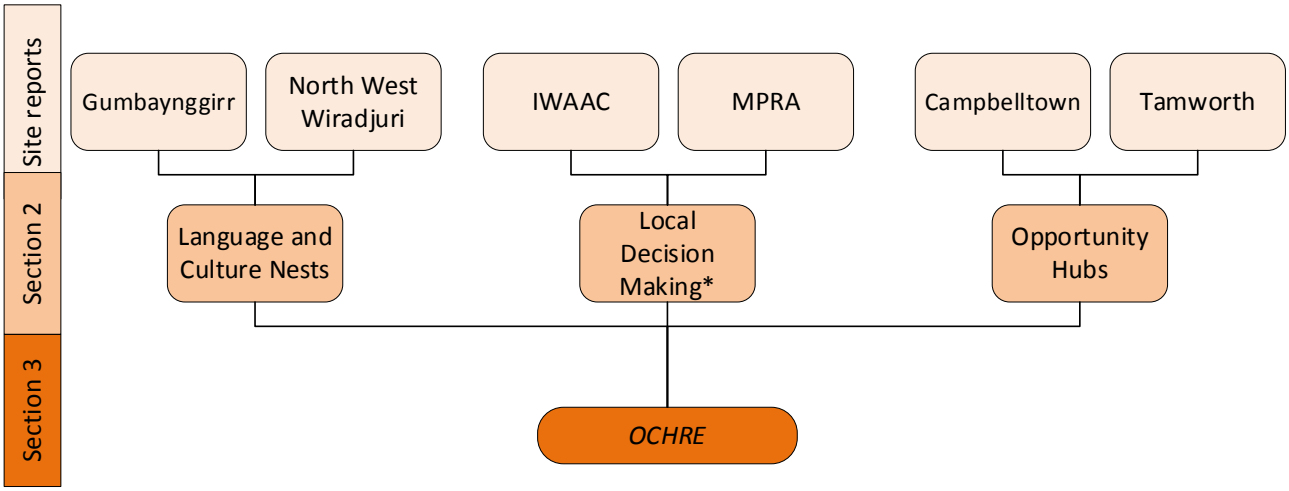
4. Do the *OCHRE* policies and practices respond to emerging evidence and practice learnings? Is change to policy and practice timely?

The approach to this evaluation is to have a *Continuing Conversation* with members of Aboriginal communities about *OCHRE* (see Section 1.3for more detail). Three of the *OCHRE* programs are being evaluated – Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, Local Decision Making, and Opportunity Hubs. Each program is being evaluated in two sites (locations).[3] Conversations are based around the evaluation questions and on the measures of success identified by each of the communities. The evaluation findings for each site are reported separately – the reports are subject to community ownership and control. Section 2 of this report, based on what we heard in each community, answers the evaluation questions for each program (Aboriginal Language and Culture

[3] See Evaluation Plan for detail on why each site was chosen (Katz I, Newton BJ, Bates S, 2017). Available at: https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/OCHRE_Evaluation_Plan_overview__stage_1.pdf, accessed 1 June 2018

Nests, Local Decision Making, and Opportunity Hubs). Section 3 describes the findings across all programs. Figure 1 below describes the reporting process.

Figure 1 Summary of *OCHRE* reporting process



*Note: Three Rivers Regional Assembly (TRRA) was originally identified as a Local Decision Making site to be evaluated. However, the Assembly decided not to participate in co-design and therefore did not participate in this Stage of the evaluation post community consent. TRAA will participate in the next stage of the evaluation.

1.2 Measures of success

The success of all *OCHRE* initiatives is understood through program objectives developed following the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2013b).

> The aim of the [*OCHRE*] plan should be to support strong *Aboriginal communities where Aboriginal people actively influence and fully participate in social, economic and cultural life*. (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2013a)

The *OCHRE* programs need to address the following areas to achieve this aim:

1. Strengthened mutual accountability for delivering services and achieving outcomes
2. Strengthened role of Aboriginal people in local decision making
3. Strengthened support for Aboriginal Language and Culture
4. Strengthened economic participation, including making sure Aboriginal people get the education and training they need to fulfil their economic potential. (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2013a)

The aims of *OCHRE* are to:

- Teach more Aboriginal Language and Culture to build people's pride and identity
- Support more Aboriginal students to stay at school
- Support more Aboriginal young people to get fulfilling and sustainable jobs
- Grow local Aboriginal leaders', including programs for children and young people, and communities' capacity to drive their own solutions
- Focus on creating opportunities for economic empowerment
- Make both government and communities more accountable for the money they spend. (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2013b)

Measures of success for Local Decision Making, Opportunity Hub and Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests are outlined in the *OCHRE*: Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment, NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal Affairs: Education, employment & accountability (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2013b). The objectives for each program are outlined in Section 2.

Members of Aboriginal communities determined the measures of success for local individual *OCHRE* programs, and these are reported in each site report. Communities have similar and additional expectations from the *OCHRE* programs relative to government program objectives.

What community and government view as success, and how it might be assessed, will change throughout the evaluation. Each *OCHRE* program will need to respond to change, and success measures will need to adapt accordingly. In addition, government and community measures of success include both short and long-term outcomes such as cultural identity, individual and community wellbeing, and self-determination. These long-term goals will be realised over time and we will work with communities to identify how these can be measured and described.

Success in Phase 1 of the evaluation was mainly described by communities in each site in terms of implementation processes and issues such as Aboriginal ownership and cultural identity, and not quantifiable outcomes.

1.3 Summary of methods

The research has been approved by the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) ethics committee for research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and complies with the key principles of research in Aboriginal health:

- To provide a net benefit for Aboriginal people and communities
- To provide Aboriginal community control of the research
- To be culturally sensitive
- To reimburse costs incurred by research participants
- To enhance Aboriginal skills and knowledge.

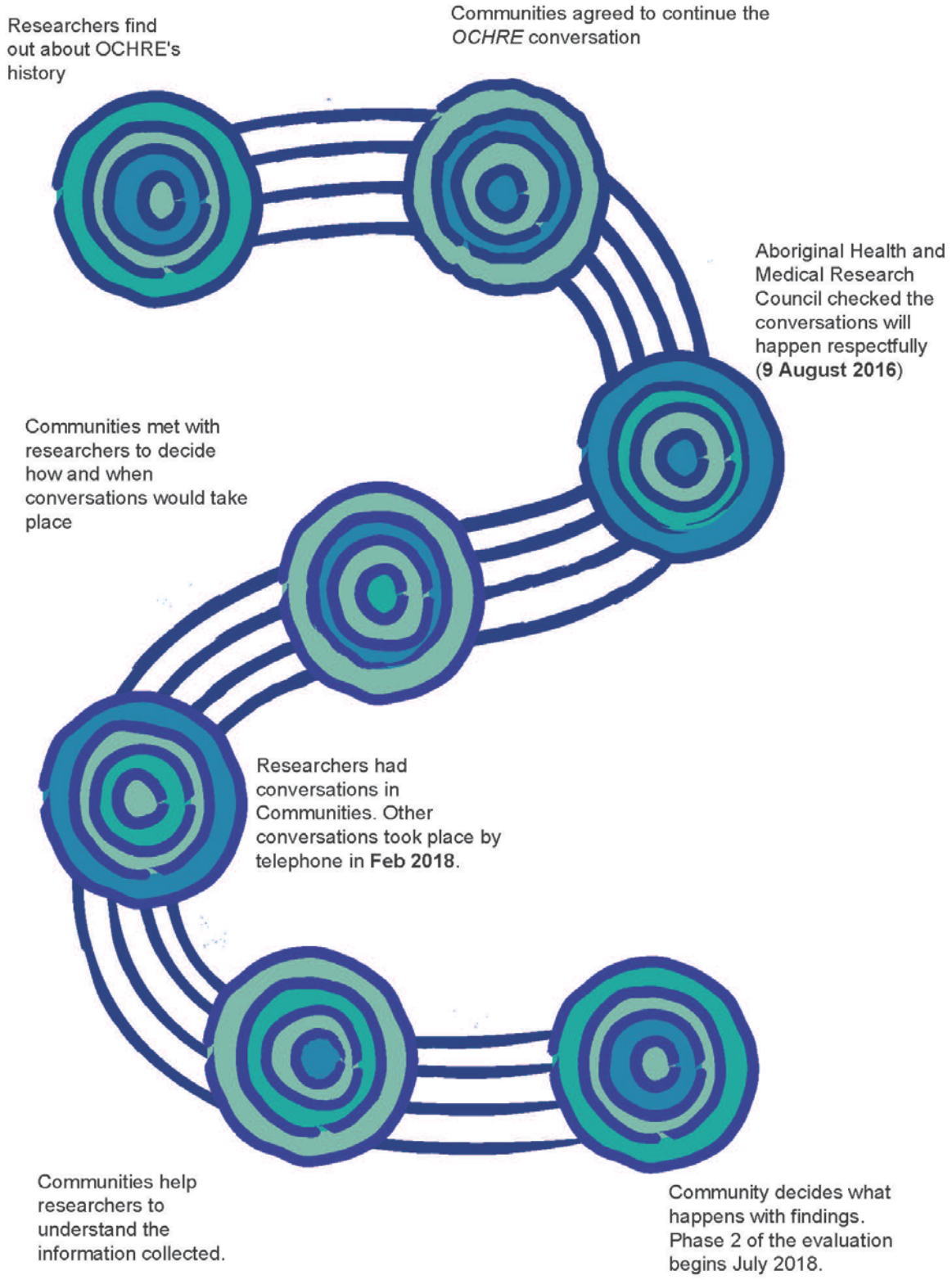
The evaluation team has used Aboriginal culturally acceptable methods as much as possible and facilitated community-control of the research.

Community-controlled research involves co-design – this is a way of conducting research **with,** and **not on,** communities. The evaluation team asked communities how they would like information collected, what they think would be a measure of the program's success, who researchers should talk to, and what is the best approach to contact people to be a part of the research. We trained local community members to be researchers to have conversations. As part of co-design we also returned a draft version of this report to research participants in communities and asked for their feedback (validation of findings), which has been added to this final report.

The SPRC evaluation team were introduced to Aboriginal communities as potential participants in the evaluation by Aboriginal Affairs NSW. In some sites governance structures for *OCHRE* were still in the early stages of being established, and the evaluation itself promoted local knowledge of *OCHRE* programs. The evaluation commenced following co-design and communities' consent, supported by ongoing liaison from Aboriginal Affairs NSW. This created an additional step for researchers working with communities than anticipated.

Figure 2 shows a summary of the conversation process.

Figure 2 Summary of the *OCHRE Continuing Conversation*



All research and evaluation with Aboriginal communities in NSW must comply with the ethics requirements of the AH&MRC. The key principles underpinning this requirement are fundamental to, and strengthen, the evaluation process. These are demonstrated through:

Net benefit for Aboriginal people and communities:

- This evaluation will inform communities and government about the effectiveness of *OCHRE* programs and will inform the future development of *OCHRE* programs. The aims of *OCHRE* are to provide opportunities for Aboriginal communities to move towards self-determination and to have increased control of their situations, people and communities.

Aboriginal community control of the research:

- Community control of the research means members of Aboriginal communities are part of designing how the research is conducted and make the final decision about whether and how the report is released.
- Researchers worked with a group of Aboriginal community representatives in each site to co-design what the evaluation would look at, and how and when it would be carried out. Community representatives also helped identify key people to have conversations with and identify (and approve the appointment of) community researchers.[4]
- SPRC circulated a draft report and researchers returned to communities to check the findings and recommendations about the implementation and evaluation of the *OCHRE* program. Feedback from these conversations was incorporated into the final report for each site.
- Members of Aboriginal communities (and their representatives) in each site own the report and will decide what to do with the report.

Cultural sensitivity of the research:

- Culturally accepted methods have been developed through conversations with members of each of the Aboriginal communities participating in the research. These methods are in keeping with the approval provided by the AH&MRC ethics committee.
- Consent to have a continuing conversation on Country was sought from each community. This was provided by Local Aboriginal Land Councils, Aboriginal Corporations, and Community groups with oversight of *OCHRE* programs.[5]
- The conversations were led by an Aboriginal researcher – Michael Barnes, a Ngunnawal man from the Canberra region, working with four local Aboriginal community-based researchers. Wendy Jopson joined the SPRC team in March 2018 as an Aboriginal research advisor to review each site report and contribute to

[4] Community researchers are locally trained members of Aboriginal communities employed during the evaluation to have conversations with research participants.
[5] The term 'consent' is used in the report to ensure accountability for the AH&MRC ethics approval for this evaluation. The term 'permission' is sometimes used.

the synthesis report. All reports were also reviewed by Tony Dreise and Dr Lynette Riley – both members of the Evaluation Steering Committee.

Reimbursement of costs incurred by research participants:

- Research participants were reimbursed for their time where they were not taking part through paid employment.

Enhance Aboriginal skills and knowledge in community-based research:

- In four sites, researchers trained local Aboriginal people to be Aboriginal community-based researchers to have conversations with local Aboriginal people. Each researcher received training on how to conduct research and received support during the research period. They were also debriefed at the end of the research. Researchers were paid for their time, including training.
- Research in schools also requires ethics permission through the NSW Department of Education (SERAP), as well as permission from individual Principals. Parental consent was required for students under the age of 16 to participate.

1.4 Who we listened to

The main source of data for this evaluation has been from listening to members of Aboriginal communities about their experiences of *OCHRE* programs.

- Our researcher and community researchers listened to students, parents, carers, Elders, members of Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal people involved in both the delivery of and participation in *OCHRE* programs.
- An online survey was also made available to people to complete at their convenience; for example, people who were not available during the data collection period, people who had more to say, and people who preferred to complete a survey rather than talk face to face.
- We also listened to what communities thought of the *OCHRE* programs during co-design workshops and the community validation meetings.
- Where available, we analysed administrative data from the program. This was used to see how each program was being used.
- The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis based on the research questions in the program NVivo.

In addition, we had conversations with NSW Government staff to understand how each program was established, operates and is used. We also reviewed government policies and reports.

During the evaluation the role of NSW Government has been to provide information, resources and support as needed. Aboriginal Affairs NSW also facilitated introductions and conversations with Aboriginal communities.

Fieldwork is ongoing in the Illawarra (IWAAC) Local Decision Making site. Any additional learnings from that site will be provided as an addendum to this report. The

synthesis report also draws from a separate evaluation of the Accord process in the Illawarra.

1.5 Strengths and limitations to the evaluation methods

This report synthesises the findings and recommendations drawn from the evaluation of the Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest, the Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest, Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly Local Decision Making, the Campbelltown Opportunity Hub, and the Tamworth Opportunity Hub. One other site decided not to participate in this stage of the evaluation.

Compliance with AH&MRC ethics guidelines for conducting research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are founded in ethical structures of inclusion and community-control of the research. This is a critical strength of the evaluation. Other strengths to the evaluation method include:

- Aboriginal community control of research through co-design.
- Measures of success determined by Aboriginal communities.
- Listening to different members of community, including parents and carers, students, teachers, service providers, Aboriginal organisations and others.
- Working with community researchers wherever possible.
- Checking our findings with community.
- Community having control of the final report.
- Using existing networks to facilitate conversations; for example, through Aboriginal Affairs NSW, and other Aboriginal organisations and corporations.
- The Synthesis Report can be used by NCARA to ‘influence public discourse and cultural capability of the public service’ (NCARA minutes, May 14, 2018).

There were a number of limitations to the method. For example:

- Fieldwork was arranged to suit the community while also meeting government reporting timeframes. In some cases, this lead to researchers having little time between site visits. Ideally, more time is required to identify, prepare and support community researchers.
- Researchers require consent from the Principal to go into schools, prior to working out the best time and way to listen to students in each school.
- Data about participation in *OCHRE* programs provided to the evaluation was limited.
- Findings in this report are generalised from the two sites evaluated for each program.
- Each program has been piloted in areas they were most likely to succeed; sites selected for the evaluation were more advanced than others and therefore the findings may not be representative of all *OCHRE* sites in the three programs.

- The resources available for the evaluation limited the time we had to listen to people in community.
- Although we tried to speak to a range of people in communities, most people we heard from had been involved with *OCHRE* and were very positive about it. People we did not hear from could have other views.
- One challenge for research is addressing and acknowledging, with sensitivity, the experiences of members of Aboriginal communities who have been 'forever researched' and been repeatedly disappointed.

2 Findings for *each* program

The reports on each *OCHRE* site evaluated are controlled by each respective Aboriginal community. To date, communities have approved the publication of and presentation to government of the following reports:

- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly Local Decision Making
- Campbelltown Opportunity Hub
- Tamworth Opportunity Hub
- Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest
- Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest.

At the time of writing this report, no reports had been publicly released. This section therefore presents findings across each of the *OCHRE* initiatives, evaluated against the evaluation questions, without reference to the community-controlled data contained in each site report. The recommendations from each site evaluated, where since approved for publication, are presented in Appendix B.

2.1 Local Decision Making (includes Accords negotiation and Industry Based Agreements)

Local Decision Making

Strengths

- The model is seen by many participants to be very progressive and in some ways the furthest towards actual expression of self-determination in Australia.
- The ongoing open dialogue between Aboriginal communities and government should be viewed as a success.
- The model allows Aboriginal communities', with their nominated representatives, and government to build a relationship and to better understand each other's needs.

Challenges

- Resources do not match the goals of the Local Decision Making model – particularly given the geographic scale, and Accord priorities, of the regions involved.
- The model is being implemented at a regional scale, which raises concerns that it relates to regional rather than local decision making. This is exacerbated when progress towards implementation of Accords is slow.
- It is important for Aboriginal communities to perceive meaningful changes locally resulting from the Local Decision Making processes. Improvements in engagement

with government in and of itself will not convince communities that Local Decision Making is effective.

- The model has been criticised by some that it has the potential to overlap or undermine existing Aboriginal governance structures.

See Section 2.1.4 for Improvements.

Local Decision Making is a three-phase decision-making process. It is designed to 'give Aboriginal community-based regional decision-making groups (regional alliances) an increased say in government service delivery', 'placing Aboriginal people at the centre of service design, planning and delivery' (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2013b: 5). Local Decision Making enables 'staged devolution of decision-making and accountability to the local level' (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2013b: 10). In Phase 1 the Accord is first negotiated and long-term goals established. Following this, the Phase 2 Accord and funding arrangements are negotiated through Boards of Management, and through to Phase 3 where Boards of Management oversee agreed government resources and services.

This staged process enables the introduction of ‘power sharing mechanisms while simultaneously building community leadership skills and capacity’. Local Decision Making aims to:

- Decrease the duplication of services
- Increase the effectiveness of service delivery to better meet local needs
- Increase the skill and capacity of local governance bodies. (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2013b: 25)

A more detailed description of the aims and governance of Local Decision Making is provided in Appendix A. This evaluation has focused on how Local Decision Making has been implemented by the Illawarra-Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (IWAAC) and the Murdi Paaki Regional Alliance (MPRA) and draws on the evaluation of the IWAAC Accord negotiation process, as well as the evaluation of both IWAAC and MPRA Local Decision Making.

2.1.1 Is Local Decision Making being implemented as intended?

As described above, Local Decision Making is a process of ongoing negotiation that will take time to fully implement. Each Regional Assembly/Alliance will go through the staged process in its own time. Progress through each stage will depend on all stakeholders involved in the process of negotiation. The dynamic between the Assembly/Alliance and the government is likely to change as they progress through the phases.

At the time of reporting, both Local Decision Making sites have signed Phase 1 Accord. We also recognise that the signing of this first Accord is just one part of a much longer process; the evaluation recognises that the ongoing conversation between the Assembly/Alliance and government representatives is a key measure of success.

Strengths and challenges of Local Decision Making model

The Local Decision Making model is seen by many participants to be very progressive and in some ways is the furthest towards actual expression of self-determination in Australia. The model allows regional priorities for Aboriginal communities to be decided by representatives from communities. The model allows community representatives to meet directly with senior government representatives to discuss regional issues and hold government services to account.

This NSW model is addressing local priorities and consulting local communities. It potentially provides a template for negotiations with Aboriginal peoples throughout Australia. While the time taken to progress through the Phases of Local Decision Making may be perceived as slow, this pace is realistic given the complexity of issues and the significant change in the way government works with communities. However, the process is largely government driven and the government still 'holds the purse strings'. The model is being implemented at a regional scale, which has been accepted by most, but raises concerns that it relates to regional rather than local decision making and can be misleading. The term 'Local Decision Making' has therefore caused some dissatisfaction for some Aboriginal community members.

The model allows Aboriginal communities', with their nominated representatives, and government to build a relationship and to better understand each other's needs. The intended outcomes of Local Decision Making may not be visible for some time; however, the ongoing open dialogue between Aboriginal communities and government should be viewed as a success.

Local Decision Making has identified opportunities for government service providers and representatives to further develop and build cultural capability within their organisations – and provided a way for local communities to help identify particular areas to focus on and ways this may be achieved.

There are also many challenges to the Local Decision Making model. The process of Local Decision Making is inherently unequal in that it is being led by government – it is very difficult for Aboriginal communities to get what they want and engage in discussion on an equal footing. Government departments and services engage with Local Decision Making and the Assembly/Alliance at different levels.

There is criticism that the resources do not match the goals of the Local Decision Making model – particularly given the geographic scale and the Accord priorities of the regions involved.

While the issue of resources has been raised many times, there is also concern about the structure of the process and the power in the relationship. For example, the NSW Government sets the parameters of the discussion and process – the strongest power an Assembly/Alliance has is to say 'no'. The NSW Government also has policies which are well developed, endorsed by Parliament and embedded in various agencies. Local Decision Making has the potential to make a difference at the margins but is unlikely to be able to change or influence core policies.

The model has been criticised by some that it has the potential to overlap or undermine existing Aboriginal governance structures – for example, Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALC), the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (NSW AECG Inc.), Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO), etc. There was concern by communities about how Local Decision Making Assemblies/Alliances interface with other Aboriginal governance structures locally, regionally or state-wide. These relationships work very well in some communities and regions but in others there is tension between these bodies.

There is criticism that local communities are not all adequately or equally represented at the regional level (see Section 4 – Practice learnings). The LDM model is dependent on Aboriginal people in communities trusting that the regional assembly/alliance represents their interests. The evaluation found that keeping open the lines of communication between local communities and regions is a significant challenge for the model and requires adequate resourcing.

2.1.2 Do outcomes reflect what community wants?

Communities want to feel heard by government – they want to have more control of the services provided and how they are delivered. Community members and Assembly/Alliance members do not perceive that, as yet, the negotiations with government at a regional level are making a real difference on the ground. There is particular concern that many of the services in community are not provided by the NSW Government, but are either provided by other tiers of government or by NGOs (often on behalf of government) who are not party to the Accords. The Assembly and Alliance participating in this evaluation are still actively engaged in Local Decision Making and engaging with government; however, only time will tell whether this delivers what Aboriginal communities want.

Ultimately, communities will need to become more involved in managing services. However, they need to be adequately resourced to do so – if they are not ready to manage services, Government and other service providers will continue to provide services on their behalf. The steps needed between now and Phase 3 are likely to be substantial.

2.1.3 Is policy and practice responding to emerging evidence?

The NSW Government has committed to evaluating the Accords negotiation process in, to date, three of the initial sites (MPRA – complete, IWAAC – in progress, TRRA – about to commence). The NSW Government recognises that all stakeholders can learn from those Assemblies and Alliances that have commenced Accord negotiations. Information learned from these experiences can help future negotiations about what supports, and resources are required to establish an Accord. While no other Assembly or Alliance has replicated the MPRA model – they have drawn from the experience of MPRA to develop representative bodies that meet their own needs. The NSW Government recognises this is a very different way of doing business and wants to learn from each Accord negotiation to enable improvements to be made in subsequent negotiations – both in subsequent negotiations (Phase 2 and 3) and also in other sites.

While many of the learnings from Accord negotiations may be site specific, the evaluation of the IWAAC Accord process has demonstrated how both parties learned from the MPRA Accord process. From a government perspective, this included involving senior government staff who had the authority to make decisions and could attend meetings, providing comprehensive briefings to senior staff prior to the meetings, allowing sufficient time for the negotiations, and providing resources to the Alliance/Assembly to develop their negotiation (with government) skills.

During the evaluation period, Aboriginal Affairs NSW developed a Minimum Data Set to collect data about Local Decision Making – this will identify the inputs (and therefore the cost) of Local Decision Making for the Assemblies and Alliances, the process, any decisions and actions arising during meetings between the Assembly/Alliance and government, and potentially outcomes. The size of this dataset is quite large and will require time (and resources) to complete. While the data were not available to the evaluation during this period, it will be useful to review these data in future years – not just to see the information collected, but also how it is used by government to inform decisions about program design and resourcing. This information will be empowering to Regional Assemblies and Alliances and enable them to influence the process, rather than just respond to government.

Another innovation in the policy has been the development of regional Industry Based Agreements. Originally, Industry Based Agreements were designed to be state-wide agreements between the peak bodies of specific industries (two initial agreements related to the mining and construction industries). However, it was realised that:

- The Industry Based Agreements were made between the NSW Government and non-Indigenous organisations, with little input from Aboriginal communities.
- Employment was a local issue and was best managed on a regional basis rather than state-wide.
- The remit of the Industry Based Agreements overlapped with the Accord being negotiated with Regional Assemblies and Alliances. The Accord process also considered employment opportunities in Aboriginal communities.

In response to these concerns the NSW Government decided that Industry Based Agreements should become part of the Accord process and should be included as part of the Local Decision Making process. This is an example of how policy has responded to evidence, although the evidence did not in this instance come from the evaluation but arose from ongoing discussions with Regional Alliances and others.

2.1.4 What improvements could be made to Local Decision Making?

A number of improvements to Local Decision Making could be made by NSW Government:

- Increase commitment to the Local Decision Making process by all tiers of government and the NGO sector to ensure the priorities of Aboriginal communities

are identified and addressed regionally and locally. The success of Local Decision Making is reliant on engagement and timely participation of government.

- Develop and build cultural capability of government representatives and service providers (including NGOs) in working with NSW Aboriginal peoples – focusing on developing culturally safe and culturally acceptable policies and practices.
- Increase resources to support Assemblies/Alliances in the delivery of their obligations. For example, the work of Regional Assemblies/Alliances goes beyond the regional forum and out to local communities. This would improve representation, build awareness of the opportunities from Local Decision Making, and also build relationships between local communities and government services locally.
- Provide support for succession planning activities, to ensure there are future generations of community leaders.
- Consider renaming Local Decision Making to something that better reflects the regional model.
- Provide support for local (as well as regional) decision making.
- Improve links and clarify roles of Local Decision Making in relation to other Aboriginal governance structures.

Local Decision Making has the potential to deliver a great number of *OCHRE* objectives; however, the program is under-resourced. Its success relies on receiving more resources, in particular for capacity building in driving solutions, financial accountability, and to develop economic opportunities in the regions.

2.2 Opportunity Hubs

Strengths

The Opportunity Hubs:

- Have strong relationships and networks with Aboriginal communities, local schools and are able to access employment opportunities in the area. Have positive support from non-government and business sectors, mentors and tertiary education.
- Benefit from committed staff, and strong and supportive Consortium or Advisory Group leadership, expertise and knowledge, and members of the local Aboriginal community volunteering.
- Appear to provide great value for money.

Challenges

- There is a narrow focus in the policy and data collection on education and employment. Hub activities are not focused on broader and more holistic needs of young Aboriginal people – which need to be addressed.
- Capacity building within the Hub, including staff development and job security.

See Section 2.2.4 for Improvements

Opportunity Hubs provide young Aboriginal people with supported pathways and incentives to stay at school, transition into employment, or to take up training opportunities or further education. Opportunity Hubs 'will:

- Provide Aboriginal young people with clear pathways and incentives to stay at school and transition to real jobs or tertiary education.
- Coordinate local opportunities, mentoring programs and resources to identify secure job placements and match opportunities to Aboriginal students' career aspirations.
- Build skills and capacity within the local Aboriginal community and drive employment and leadership expectations among Aboriginal young people.
- Build local *Hub* partnerships with businesses, tertiary education and training providers and NGOs.
- Connect Aboriginal students and their families to tertiary education, training and potential employers early, and continue to support transitions.
- Support students through individualised career planning, mentoring and support services and the engagement of family and community members.
- Monitor and track Aboriginal students and their transition pathways following the completion of secondary school'. (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2013b: 16-17)

Opportunity Hubs were initially established in four locations: Upper Hunter, Campbelltown, Dubbo and Tamworth. The evaluation focusses on Campbelltown and Tamworth Opportunity Hubs. Further information about the aims and governance of Opportunity Hubs is provided in Appendix A.

2.2.1 Are Opportunity Hubs being implemented as intended?

Opportunity Hubs are based on relatively 'traditional' programs to address specific issues and populations – in this case, school engagement and transition from school to the workforce or further education of young Aboriginal people. We heard from government representatives the Opportunity Hub model is a hybrid from other models used in NZ and the US, used to respond to local communities' needs. The program is 'in-reach' in that it goes into schools to provide Aboriginal students with clear pathways and incentives to stay at school and transition into employment, training or further education.

The Opportunity Hubs in this evaluation have been implemented in different ways. The differences reflect local community requirements – such as whether the organisation delivering the Opportunity Hub can deliver cultural activities. The differences also reflect the strengths of the organisation delivering services – including their capacity, particular skills and experience, and community connections and also the different community contexts. Opportunity Hubs were established through a process of open tender common to most government funding programs.

As identified in the evaluation plan, important questions for the Opportunity Hubs are:

- Whether the Hubs are well conceived?
- What are the barriers and facilitators to implementation?
- What are the short-term impacts of the Hub?[6]

Overall, based on conversations in communities and a review of program data provided, the Hub model appears very successful and has been well-conceived in both locations. However, the evaluation findings confirm the view that the Opportunity Hub's successful operation is dependent on contextual factors, including:

- School participation and engagement with the Hub (see NSW Department of Education, 2018b).
- Local opportunities and the labour market.
- Having a critical number of Aboriginal students in the community.

Additionally, other factors include whether local Aboriginal communities express a need for and support the Opportunity Hub services, the capacity of the organisation tasked to deliver the Opportunity Hub program, and what other services are available in the area.

These factors reflect the selection criteria used by the NSW Government to identify potential sites for Opportunity Hubs and aspects of the tender process.[7] Given these conditional factors for selection of the Hub location and its potential success, we suggest that the model could potentially be expanded to a limited number of additional communities in NSW.

Strengths and challenges of the Opportunity Hub model

The site selection criteria for the Opportunity Hub model were appropriate for the two sites involved in the evaluation. The two sites evaluated clearly benefit from having strong Aboriginal leadership, a significant number of Aboriginal students, employment opportunities in the area, non-government and business sector support, mentors and tertiary education providers. These Hubs also have highly committed staff and the support of an effective Advisory Group or Consortium. One issue which emerged in both sites is that there are a number of similar programs operating in the areas, and some schools prefer not to work with the Opportunity Hub.

The way in which the Opportunity Hub model has been implemented in the two sites we looked at suggests it is providing great value for money – reaching a large number of students and schools for the funding it receives. However, the model is also constrained in what it can achieve with the resources available to it. Resource constraints relate to:

- The short-term funding cycle, with funding renewed annually.

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[6] See *OCHRE* Evaluation Plan 2016 available at: https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/OCHRE_Evaluation_Plan_overview__stage_1.pdf Section 2.2.

[7] Source: Correspondence with Training Services NSW.

- The lack of job security for staff because of the short-term funding cycle.
- Not enough resources to build staff capacity – the focus is on student engagement rather than development of the Opportunity Hub as a stable program.
- Opportunity Hubs relying on staff and community members volunteering their time.
- The numbers of students and schools that can be supported is limited – some miss out.
- The narrow focus on school attendance and attainment, and transition to employment does not do justice either to the range of activities provided by the Opportunity Hubs, nor Aboriginal young people's needs for holistic services, including support for wellbeing and mental health.

Strengths and challenges of Opportunity Hubs are determined by the both the model, the way services have been procured, as well as the organisation operating the program. For example, the way an organisation contracted to deliver the Opportunity Hub responds to the needs of the local communities may depend on:

- Whether the organisation has existing relationships with:
    - members of local Aboriginal communities
    - local training, further education or employment agencies
    - local schools.
- Whether there is widespread 'buy-in' to Opportunity Hub programs by Aboriginal communities and schools.
- Whether the contract allows flexibility to respond to local needs.

One of the key strengths observed in both Opportunity Hubs is the local governance of the Opportunity Hub. Both Opportunity Hubs have diverse and active Advisory Groups or Consortiums that:

- Provide oversight of the operation of the Opportunity Hub for government.
- Support and advise the management of the Opportunity Hubs.
- Build connections between services and organisations in the community with a focus on young Aboriginal people.
- Help identify and/or provide opportunities for Aboriginal students, including mentoring, work experience/internships, and employment opportunities.
- Liaise with wider Aboriginal communities' networks for the benefit of young Aboriginal people participating in the Hub.

Another key strength is the commitment and hard work of Opportunity Hub staff. We heard their relationships with young people, with members of local Aboriginal communities, and with schools are vital aspects of the success of Opportunity Hubs.

2.2.2 Do outcomes reflect what community wants?

At this early stage of the implementation it is not possible to quantify the extent to which Opportunity Hub programs are providing the outcomes local Aboriginal communities want. What is clear is that young Aboriginal people need support and Opportunity Hubs are providing or facilitating this support. A general view, particularly from students, is that Opportunity Hubs are working for them in positive ways.

The Opportunity Hubs are well-regarded in the Aboriginal communities where they have been implemented. As evidenced by this evaluation, demand for services currently exceeds supply (relying on volunteers and staff exceeding their hours to provide services). Communities are also requesting services be extended to schools outside of the current area and for Opportunity Hubs to provide a wider range of services.

The *Local Schools, Local Decisions* policy for schools has devolved decision-making to principals (NSW Department of Education, 2018b). Each school must be approached individually and invited to participate in the program and may participate in different ways. This requires significant resources from the Opportunity Hub. From conversations we had, there appears to be little involvement by the Department of Education or Regional School Directors in supporting or promoting the program in schools. Parents may influence the school's decision making through school community consultation on strategic plans.

2.2.3 Is policy and practice responding to emerging evidence?

At this point, the NSW Government has indicated that it will respond to emerging evidence from this evaluation by extending the contracts until end of March 2019.[8] This will allow contract renewal to be informed by the findings of this evaluation and allow time for any changes to be made in consultation with the community.

The NSW Government has also recently announced the expansion of Opportunity Hubs as part of the Western Sydney City deal – creating a new Opportunity Hub in Liverpool and an expansion of the Campbelltown Opportunity Hub (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018). It is unclear whether this is based on the success of the model, evidence of outcomes, or political considerations.

There will also be an overhaul of the data collection processes which should better reflect the full range of services provided by the Opportunity Hubs. At present, data collected is used only for compliance purposes, not to measure or improve the effectiveness of the Opportunity Hubs in meeting their objectives.

2.2.4 What improvements could be made to Opportunity Hubs?

Evident in both sites, the success of an Opportunity Hub relies on the strengths of personnel involved, the resources available, partnerships in the community, and

[8] Source: Correspondence with Training Services NSW

consent to operate in schools. A number of improvements could be made to the Opportunity Hub model:

For new sites:

- As shown by the two sites evaluated, for new Opportunity Hub sites, considerable work needs to be done prior to going to tender to engage stakeholders (including schools) and build the capacity of local Aboriginal organisations (or organisations with Aboriginal staff) to ensure the program's success.

For new and existing Opportunity Hub sites:

- Conduct a thorough needs assessment. Use this to plan and resource the program to meet the needs identified (without relying on unpaid work).
- Improve the capture and use of program data to respond to opportunities and needs.
- Allow flexibility in the contract to respond to local needs identified by local Aboriginal communities, including meeting requests to provide Opportunity Hub programs to neighbouring schools, and meeting the diverse needs of young Aboriginal people.
- Look to build and sustain opportunities for employment of Aboriginal Hub staff. This includes providing longer-term financing to the program to support staff, providing resources to develop and invest in Opportunity Hub staff, and providing internships, work placements or secondments in the Opportunity Hub for young Aboriginal people.
- Respond to local needs and strengths, including taking a more holistic approach, looking at young Aboriginal people's wellbeing within the Hub or developing close working relationships with other Aboriginal services that can help young people and their families.
- Facilitate community control – provide mechanisms for the community to have a say in such matters as the geographic footprint of the Opportunity Hubs and the range of activities they provide.

2.3 Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests

Strengths:

- There is broad support from members of Aboriginal communities for teaching and learning Aboriginal cultures and languages. Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests are generally seen as a positive development.
- There are diverse opinions in each community about who can teach, who can learn and where Aboriginal Languages and Culture are taught.
- Students participating in Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests are enthusiastic about learning. The program also provides job opportunities for tutors (although as casual and sessional, not ongoing permanent positions).

Challenges:

- Locating Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests in government schools restricts access for members of broader Aboriginal communities and community control.
- Language and Culture classes compete with an already busy school timetable.
- *Local Schools, Local Decisions* impacts of whether students in government schools can have access to Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest classes.
- Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests are not easily available to children in Catholic and Independent schools.

See Section 2.3.4 for improvements

A core feature of Aboriginal Language and Cultural regeneration in NSW is the teaching of Aboriginal Language and Culture of a geographical area in the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest program of that region (on Country).

> Country is a term that we Indigenous peoples, particularly here in Australia, use as a single word expression to denote our spiritual inter-being with the land, the sea, the sky, and all life and geologic forms therein. Country, in the cultural context of our language meanings, infers far more than the physical land or environment, it carries a profound psychological context. When we use the word country we are without doubt referring to our lands, but we are also simultaneously acknowledging the presence of our spirit Elders who gave us these lands and who now dwell within them. We are referring then to our own psycho-spiritual mind. The idea of country is enmeshed with the idea of culture, identity and land, and they are extrapolated together so powerfully that one is inseparable from the other. (Williams, 2011: 4)

Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests is a program designed to revitalise and maintain languages as an integral part of culture and identity. Nests aim to:

- 'Improve knowledge of, and competency in, local Aboriginal languages
- Strengthen Aboriginal identity, pride and community resilience
- Increase the number of language learners
- Increase the number of language teachers
- Contribute to increased school attendance and retention.' (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2013b: 21)

A description of Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest program aims, and governance is provided in Appendix A. This evaluation focuses on the Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest and the North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest.

We heard there are some key philosophical concerns about who has community recognised cultural knowledge to teach Aboriginal Languages, where they can be taught, and the priority for who can learn Language. A further concern is whether students can access the Language of their Aboriginal culture and not of another. Box 1

below provides an overview of Aboriginal Language and Culture in the context of Australian history.

Box 1 Regeneration of Aboriginal Language and Culture

Language is a key part of cultural regeneration, and community wellbeing. Shayne Williams, referring to Dr Marika's work, said 'our languages are embedded within the very spirit of Country, so that each word that we have, and use keeps us in spiritual harmony with Country' (Williams, 2011: 6).

Teaching Aboriginal language and culture based on geography to Aboriginal peoples in the region is not straightforward. Due to previous government policies and directives of removing Aboriginal peoples from their families and traditional country, and current economic realities, not all Aboriginal peoples in NSW are able to live in the country of their traditional ancestors and cultures. In any one place, at any one time, there will be Aboriginal peoples who are direct descendants of the Traditional Aboriginal peoples of that place, for example, Native Title holders and/or claimants; Aboriginal peoples who are not direct descendants of the Traditional Aboriginal peoples, but whose families have lived in an area for several generations and have strong social and family relationships and ties; there will be Aboriginal peoples who have moved to an area in recent more contemporary times, and do not have family backgrounds, support or extended relationships in an area; and also Aboriginal peoples from the Stolen Generations**,** removed and disconnected from their birth families and who may have no or little knowledge of their traditional or historical ancestries.

This cultural mix of Aboriginal peoples in any one place, can be highlighted when Language and Culture regeneration programs and initiatives develop and progress. If not acknowledged, this may cause Aboriginal peoples to 'compete' for their identity and belonging in a specific place. This is not the intent of cultural regeneration but can be divisive in communities if not understood nor accommodated.

Aboriginal peoples are very aware of and still angry about the previous policies of the NSW Government which deliberately suppressed Aboriginal languages and forbade Aboriginal people from talking Language, particularly in schools. Communities are therefore suspicious of attempts by government to revive and, through locating Nests in government schools, control Aboriginal languages. These historical realities mean that there are many challenges for both government and communities in the process of language revival, irrespective of the specific model the program uses. Nevertheless, there are important lessons to be learned from the implementation of the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests.

2.3.1 Are Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests being implemented as intended?

The evaluation has identified deep and broad support from Aboriginal communities for Language revitalisation and regeneration as a critical aspect of Aboriginal cultures and self-determination. The need and desire to strengthen and develop Aboriginal languages and culture across the life course has been clearly identified by Aboriginal

peoples. Nests are generally seen as a positive development. The Nests also illustrate a government commitment to Aboriginal Culture and Language regeneration. The recent *Aboriginal Languages Bill 2017* (Parliament of NSW, 2017: 59-77*)* is a further example of this commitment.[9] However, members of Aboriginal communities have expressed diverse views, including a range of concerns about the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest program and how it is being implemented. These are outlined below.

Strengths and challenges of the Nest model

Views on the strengths of the Nest program are diverse – in particular, what is seen as a strength by some participants may be seen as a limitation by others. The implementation of the program is such that the Nest is flexible enough to respond to the local context in many ways – but not in all ways.

Some participants view teaching Language in schools as essential, suggesting Language be more embedded in the curriculum. Others believe Language taught in schools takes away community ownership and instead, Language needs to be taught in the community. Locating the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests in government schools (and other places of education), governed by the NSW Department of Education, raises the issue of community-wide access. Language and Culture programs become subject to 'Westcentric' (government) rules. For example, anyone going into a school classroom must meet certain requirements or be accompanied by a qualified teacher at all times. This applies equally to Aboriginal Language tutors and Elders.

Language and Culture programs must also compete for time in a very busy school curriculum (whether primary or secondary school). Student school commitments can impact on consistent and continuous learning of Language – students may dip in and out of learning Language due to other commitments at school. While there are several limitations to teaching Language and Culture in schools, this approach ensures that Language and Culture programs reach more Aboriginal students. However, there was a strong belief that even if schools are the most appropriate base for the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, they (and to some extent Aboriginal Language and Culture itself) are seen as rather peripheral in many schools. In particular, although schools are required to produce School Plans, Aboriginal Language and Culture may not be a key component or priority of that plan. There was a strong feeling amongst all participants that Aboriginal Language and Culture are inseparable. It is not appropriate to teach language outside of the context of culture, and therefore schools need to link with communities to provide holistic language and cultural experiences for young people.

We heard contrasting views about learning Aboriginal Language. Some people we listened to said that learning and exposure to any Aboriginal Language is positive,

[9] Available at https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/bills/Pages/bill-details.aspx?pk=3446 p 59-77. Accessed June 1, 2018.

while others thought it was important for young Aboriginal people to learn the Aboriginal Language of their own heritage.

Aboriginal students learning Aboriginal Languages in schools are enthusiastic learners and describe an increased sense of identity and belonging. Non-Aboriginal students also express an enthusiasm for learning Aboriginal Language and Culture. Students want more knowledge about Aboriginal Languages and Cultures.

Strengths of the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests:

- Participation in Language and Culture builds young Aboriginal people's positive cultural identity and shares knowledge, increasing their wellbeing.
- The Nests provide (casual) employment for tutors.
- The Language teacher and Language tutors build community relationships and their commitment ensures the success of the program.

Challenges to the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests:

- Locating the Nests in government schools restricts access to Language and Culture. For example, the program is not available to students in non-participating schools[10], in non-government schools, or to families or other members of the community. There is limited availability in pre-schools.
- Locating the Nests in schools can separate (de-contextualise) Language and Culture from Aboriginal Country and cultural environments.
- The program relies on local Aboriginal people to have sufficient language to work as tutors and be available to work in schools. It also relies on tutors staying with insecure employment and not taking up fulltime opportunities elsewhere.
- The Aboriginal Language and Culture program is geographically specific and does not account for the diversity of Aboriginal peoples living in the area.
- In addition, each Nest has a community reference group. NSW AECG Inc. and the NSW Department of Education provide support to the Nests. The lines of accountability between the different government agencies, schools and community representatives are not clear and there is no definitive program guidance as to how these lines of accountability operate.

The program was intended to provide Language and Culture from preschool to adult – this has not been the case in the two sites we observed. Language resources, tutor availability to teach Language and Culture, and financial support for adequate number of classes has been a barrier to achieve this goal.

There are also philosophical concerns and protocols about who can teach and learn Language and Culture, where it can be taught, as well as whether it is appropriate for

[10] As earlier, the policy *Local Schools, Local Decisions* leaves the decision to participate in the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest to each school Principal. See https://education.nsw.gov.au/our-priorities/work-more-effectively/local-schools-local-decisions Accessed June 1, 2018.

young Aboriginal people to learn Language before Elders, or young non-Aboriginal people to learn before members of Aboriginal communities.

2.3.2 Do outcomes reflect what community wants?

This question is difficult to answer. Aboriginal communities are enthusiastic about teaching and learning Aboriginal Language and Culture and support the regeneration and revitalisation of Language. Many of the success measures discussed by Aboriginal communities in the evaluation are concerned with long-term outcomes, which cannot be assessed at this stage of the implementation.

Some issues about what community wants, must be considered through the nature of who makes up Aboriginal 'community'. As mentioned earlier, there is no single group in any region and therefore no single vision of how Language and Culture might be revitalised. Given this, do outcomes reflect a community vision? On the one hand, people with direct involvement with the Nest, such as students, school stakeholders, and community members, see it as working towards what they would like to see in their communities. On the other hand, some members of Aboriginal communities, due to the limitations identified, do not think the Nests will achieve the goals.

Whether based in schools or elsewhere, communities were unanimous in their view that the Nests should be controlled by community, in partnership with, rather than controlled by schools and government bureaucrats.

2.3.3 Is policy and practice responding to emerging evidence?

Aboriginal communities in this study want to access Language and Culture. The recent Languages Bill provides confidence of the NSW Government's commitment to the regeneration of Aboriginal Languages. This has been accompanied by expansion of the Nest program and additional resourcing.

The Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests teach the Language and Culture that belong to Country. However, many families want to be able to access their Language and Culture – but that may be different to the Language taught in schools. Programs such as Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests need to support members of Aboriginal Communities to access their own Language.

Communities were clear that Language and Culture must be accessible to everyone. This program cannot be relied upon in isolation to provide Language and/or Culture to broader Aboriginal communities. This program will be successful if it provides one mechanism community members may access Language and is part of a larger jigsaw of Language and Culture programs and activities in community.

Data are currently collected relating to the number of hours by tutor, school and school class/year; however, data is only available for 2017 with no data from previous years to make any comparison or assumptions. The absence of data for Nests for the evaluation period has limited the evaluation to hearing from the experiences and opinion of community members, rather than assessing who the program has reached.

In May 2018, the NSW Department of Education committed to the development of a Minimum Data Set that should help inform the next Stage of the evaluation and enable the Department to respond to changing needs in the community in the future.

2.3.4 What improvements could be made to Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests?

For cultural and historic reasons, Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest programs need to be owned and controlled by the local Aboriginal community. The Nest program also needs to be flexible – to adapt to local communities' needs. The evaluation found that Nests respond to their local contexts as far as possible.

Improvements for Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests:

- The Nests need to be accessible to Aboriginal communities across the region, including Government and non-government school students, families and carers, and the broader Aboriginal communities. This issue requires resolution to ensure the Nests are properly community-based and community driven.
- Issues about teaching and learning Aboriginal languages in each local area need to be addressed, with cultural sensitivity, in conversation with members of Aboriginal communities in the region.
- Manage expectations about the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest, on practical matters such as: the number of tutor hours that are funded; the requirements for Aboriginal Language and Culture teachers and tutors to work in schools; and the resources available for training, capacity building and resource development to support teachers and tutors.
- Financial security to ensure the long-term sustainability of the program. This allows for ongoing resource development working with Elders, tutor support and job security.
- Collect data about tutor hours, and school and student participation, to help evaluate the program and to identify future resource requirements.
- Clarify governance and accountability structures to enable growth of the program. For example, the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests are perceived by many community members to be part of the education system, and not community-controlled.

3 Findings and discussion across *all* three *OCHRE* programs in this evaluation

The *OCHRE* plan consists of more programs than the three programs in this evaluation. This section considers each of the research questions across all programs included in the evaluation, and then considers how the programs meet the overall objectives of *OCHRE*.

3.1 Is *OCHRE* being implemented as intended?

Overall, the three *OCHRE* programs are working as intended.

Key strengths

- There is broad support for *OCHRE* programs within Aboriginal communities, as Aboriginal Affairs NSW *works with* and *listens* to Aboriginal communities.
- *OCHRE* program staff are a key and critical part of the successful implementation.
- *OCHRE* is addressing important outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

Challenges and limitations

- *OCHRE* programs need better data to be collected, including more comprehensive data that focusses on community priorities – such as wellbeing, volunteer participation, young Aboriginal people's self-esteem.
- *OCHRE* programs need increased resources, including staffing, and more support for capacity building to properly fulfil the aims and objectives.
- It is important to improve coordination between *OCHRE* programs and between *OCHRE* and other Aboriginal programs and governance structures.

The three *OCHRE* programs are, to some extent, being implemented as intended. The initial stage of *OCHRE* implementation demonstrates that the NSW Government is engaging with local Aboriginal communities in progressive ways. Prior to implementation, the NSW Government had conversations with many Aboriginal people and key stakeholders to find out what they want. Different programs were developed or identified to meet those needs, and these were checked with communities as part of the *Continuing Conversation*.

Aboriginal Communities want better ways to work with government, to decide what they need and want. This is possible through co-design, and implementation through existing relationships rather than going out to tender. The Regional Assemblies/Alliances appear to be in a position to facilitate this. We heard there is some hope that *OCHRE* reinstates the role of communities and puts them 'back in the driving seat'.

A more traditional procurement process was used to implement some programs – in particular, the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and the Opportunity Hubs. In doing so, the NSW Government may have missed an opportunity to continue to

engage communities in the process, to co-design the programs in greater detail with communities, while at the same time building capacity in communities in the procurement process and program delivery. Community engagement is not static – it is an ongoing process and it was notable during the evaluation where community engagement had continued (and, the extent of that engagement) and where it had not. It is important that during implementation the NSW Government continues to listen to communities' needs and priorities.

At the time of the evaluation, some program data was available for Opportunity Hubs and for one Local Decision Making site. To better understand each program, it is important to have more detailed information about the reach of each program. Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and Local Decision Making programs are in the process of either designing or implementing minimum data sets that could better inform those involved in program planning, delivery and resourcing. We also heard Opportunity Hubs are working to capture data that reflects communities' priorities.

We heard that data captured at this time does not adequately record what programs are achieving. The current focus of data collection is on government rather than communities' priorities. It is important that programs capture data to reflect communities' priorities and those of government. This task is undoubtedly challenging – data needs to be meaningful and inform decision making processes. There is also an opportunity to involve communities in the process of identifying data requirements – what data does community need, both to provide oversight of programs as well as to identify future needs or support advocacy and negotiation processes. Providing this data back to communities can contribute to empowerment and self-determination.

In this first stage of the evaluation we have relied on qualitative data – what people tell us. However, there are limitations to this approach. We cannot have conversations with everyone in community and most people we heard from are connected with the *OCHRE* program in some way.

We heard that *OCHRE* programs rely on relationships working across organisations and government departments. At times there are challenges for programs to engage with peak representative Aboriginal organisations and government departments. Peak Aboriginal organisations have suggested that their membership and organisational structures are one way that *OCHRE* programs can engage with local Aboriginal communities. For program-specific strengths and challenges, see Section 2 above.

3.1.1 Strengths and challenges across all *OCHRE* programs

OCHRE is an innovative approach to Aboriginal policy and program delivery – not just in how each program is delivered, but also in how *OCHRE* was conceived, implemented and evaluated.

The evaluation has found broad support for *OCHRE* programs (and overall approach) as a better way for the NSW Government to work with Aboriginal communities and to identify and address the local needs of Aboriginal peoples. We heard widespread support from communities for Opportunity Hubs. There was general community support

for Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, with some concerns about community control and access to Language. There was also support from those involved in Local Decision Making (with the impression that there is little knowledge outside of those directly involved at this time).

NSW Government *working with* and *listening to* local Aboriginal communities to identify and respond to their needs has been critical to the success of the *OCHRE* model. The evaluation also contributes to this process through providing Aboriginal control of the evaluation. The evaluation has also increased knowledge of the programs in communities and sparked discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the programs in communities. Continual engagement and consultation has led to a positive 'buy-in' to Opportunity Hubs and Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests from members of Aboriginal communities. Young Aboriginal people, other members of Aboriginal communities, and stakeholders in schools and training, view the programs as responsive and flexible, addressing the needs of local young Aboriginal people.

A key strength of *OCHRE* is the commitment and work of local Aboriginal and other staff to ensure the success of each program. Staff working in these programs are highly valued in their communities. One concern regarding staffing is the high demand of programs (and under resourcing) and the possibility of 'burn-out' – particularly for key members of staff.

Challenges identified in our conversations include:

- Aboriginal communities' concern about, and belief in, the long-term commitment of the NSW Government to *OCHRE* programs.
- The inclusive and acceptable representation for Aboriginal communities in conversations about the implementation and delivery of programs.
- Inadequate resources, including the level of staffing in each program, resources for training and support of staff, and resources to provide greater job security. The current level of resources allocated to *OCHRE* do not meet Aboriginal Communities' goals and needs.
- The need for capacity building for local Aboriginal communities and organisations to engage in negotiations with government, procurement processes and management of service delivery.
- The difficulty engaging schools in programs (Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, Opportunity Hubs) that are not directly curriculum activities and therefore may be low priority for schools, despite supporting school engagement and potentially increasing the wellbeing of Aboriginal students.
- Community control of programs, particularly the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests located in Government Schools, is a challenge and source of ongoing discussion among Aboriginal communities. Communities should have more ways to influence education programs.

- Community consultation occurs prior to the implementation of programs; however, there is little evidence of ongoing consultation in setting up and maintaining the programs.

OCHRE operates as a set of discrete programs and there was very little coordination between them. This issue is being addressed to some extent by Aboriginal Affairs NSW and there are closer working relationships in some locations; however, there are still significant gaps in how the different programs cohere to form a more strategic cross-government plan. At the policy level there are also some anomalies which are confusing to stakeholders. For example, Opportunity Hubs are allowed to operate across State, Catholic and Independent sectors, whereas Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests are only mandated to work in Government Schools. While this may reflect bureaucratic realities and funding streams, it does not reflect community control of programs nor of *OCHRE* as a coherent plan.

Each *OCHRE* program is aimed at discrete and specific outcomes: self-determination (Local Decision Making), education and employment (Opportunity Hubs) and Language and Culture (Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests). Data collected for the programs reflect these objectives. However, many participants did not see the issues in program terms – rather they focused on the connections between these issues. For example, Language and Culture were seen by many as being closely aligned with young people's engagement in education and employment. In its next phases of development, the *OCHRE* plan will need to reflect this more holistic view of Aboriginal self-determination and revival. This includes areas of wellbeing not covered by the programs subject to this evaluation, including housing, connection to Country, child protection, early years, transport and justice. While these areas may not be part of *OCHRE* itself (other than being included in Local Decision Making Accords), communities are looking for closer links to them in government programs.

Across all *OCHRE* programs resources are limited. For the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and Opportunity Hubs this is both a strength and a weakness. In terms of strength, it appears the programs being delivered offer great value for money and demonstrate that engagement with Aboriginal communities is working well. However, this is not sustainable – there are insufficient program resources (including staff), and program capacity, to meet community demand. Staff are also at risk of burn out with many working beyond their job description, developing resources and volunteering to ensure the program's success. The reliance on staff goodwill to ensure the programs' success fails to value their contribution and is not sustainable in the long-term for either the individual or the program.

Organisations delivering programs need increased resources to protect staff and ensure programs can continue should there be unforeseen illness or other staff changes. Limited resources for Local Decision Making is clearly a challenge – communities may feel they (and the process) are a low priority to the NSW Government. In addition, more resources are needed to properly run the program and enable regional representatives to work with local communities and Local Government staff.

3.2 Do outcomes continue to reflect what community wants to achieve?

- Aboriginal communities agree that Aboriginal Language and Culture, education and employment, are all very important outcomes for Aboriginal communities.
- Equally important are Aboriginal people's and communities' wellbeing, along with community control and self-determination.
- It is important to address the (overlooked) issue of wellbeing within *OCHRE* programs.

Communities' goals for *OCHRE* programs align with those identified through *OCHRE* with some additions. There is some difference between what government wants to achieve and what each community wants in specific program objectives and data collection processes. We heard that Aboriginal people's wellbeing, community control and self-determination is an important priority, along with Aboriginal Language and Culture, education and employment.

Aboriginal communities' goals through *OCHRE* programs are both short and long-term, and many community measures of success are aspirational. Identifying measures of success with communities will be a continual process throughout the evaluation. This reflects the different steps in program implementation, as well as different perspectives and expectations based on experiences with the program. We will check that those identified during this Stage of the evaluation are still relevant in the next.

Community members, students and stakeholders told us about many instances of successful program achievements in our conversations (see individual site reports). We also heard that long-term successes, such as the impacts of the Opportunity Hubs and Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, on positive self-esteem, increased cultural identity, and program ownership and control, will become evident over time. The achievements of programs for young Aboriginal people may not be known for more than a decade.

In many ways, the implementation of *OCHRE* has shown some level of self-determination within the rules set by government. Communities are deciding whether to implement programs – they are determining how to proceed and when. This is evident particularly in Local Decision Making. Although achievements within the Accords are still in process, we heard there was some success in bringing government representatives to the table for discussions about communities' priorities.

Members of Aboriginal communities hold a wide spectrum of opinions about how programs should be operating and who should operate them. While there appeared to be positive consensus about the aims of *OCHRE* within Aboriginal communities, different people have different views on whether something is a success, and there was a diversity of views about the extent to which the programs were successful and what would be considered a success. Overwhelmingly though, communities agreed that Aboriginal education, employment, language and culture are all very important

outcomes for communities. However, community control and self-determination are considered to be equally important, as well as the broader wellbeing of Aboriginal people and communities.

Without better resourcing and more community engagement and control, it is unlikely that *OCHRE* will deliver what the community wants. Communities need more input to future changes and the direction of *OCHRE* overall. This could be achieved through Local Decision Making as well as other established Aboriginal organisations and their engagement with *OCHRE* programs.

3.3 How do the programs meet the overall objectives of *OCHRE?*

- Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and Opportunity Hubs contribute to the regeneration of Aboriginal Language and Culture in communities.
- Opportunity Hubs are working with young Aboriginal people from an early age (Year 5) and this was a positive way to encourage and support them to stay engaged with education.
- At this stage, Local Decision Making, and Accords are working toward the aims of *OCHRE.*

Each of the programs in this evaluation contribute to the aims of *OCHRE* identified in Section 1.2 above, either directly or indirectly (see Table 1, below). Green (with **bold text**) identifies where the program directly contributes to the *OCHRE* aims. Amber (with *italic text*) identifies indirect contributions to the *OCHRE* aims. White (with normal text) identifies possible contributions the program may make (but not currently) to the *OCHRE* aims.

Table 1 Contribution of three programs to *OCHRE* aims

OCHRE aim	Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest	Local Decision Making	Opportunity Hub
Teach more Aboriginal language and culture to build people's pride and identity	**Directly provides Language and Culture and builds pride and identity of young Aboriginal people**	Possibly if part of an Accord priority.	**Directly teaches culture or works with other programs to do so and helps build pride and identity of young Aboriginal people.**
Support more Aboriginal students to stay at school	*Indirectly through providing programs in school that may increase Aboriginal student wellbeing and engagement*	Possibly – if part of an Accord priority	**Directly through in-reach programs**
Support more Aboriginal young people to get fulfilling and sustainable jobs	*Indirectly by employing Language teachers and tutors.*	**Potential – depending on the priorities identified in the Accord (economy is a key area identified).**	**Directly by helping students identify pathways to employment. Indirectly by employing Aboriginal staff to deliver services.**
Grow local Aboriginal leaders', including programs for children and young people, and communities' capacity to drive their own solutions	Possibly - through increased sense of identity and wellbeing.	**Potential – at this stage, communities have identified priorities.**	*Possibly – depending on how flexible the model is and the level of student engagement in the program.*
Focus on creating opportunities for economic empowerment	*Jobs for language tutors.*	**Potential – depending on the priorities identified in the Accord.**	*Indirectly by encouraging Aboriginal students to develop pathways to employment.* *Directly through the provision of employment.*
Make both government and communities more accountable for the money they spend	*Accountability is currently low for both government and communities (represented by NSW AECG Inc.) on money spent on the program.*	**Potential in the future – but currently very little resources attached to the program.**	**The Opportunity Hubs report quarterly data on inputs and outcomes and provide additional reports on activities periodically.**

Note: Green (bold text) highlights core contributions to overall aims of *OCHRE*. Amber (italics) represents other contributions.

Importantly each program works to improve and develop government capacity to work with Aboriginal communities and organisations. While each one demonstrates successes, there are also some overarching factors that support or hinder implementation.

We heard that Aboriginal communities feel it is important for each program to maintain and develop widespread community involvement and control, and maintain *continuing conversations* with communities about the programs. The strength of each program relies on these relationships and the capacity for programs to respond to local communities' needs. We also heard that programs rely on positive engagement and relationships with government agencies, particularly with local schools. In the case of Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, with Government Schools. Balancing community involvement and government accountability is an ongoing challenge for *OCHRE* programs, requiring significant resources for program managers and staff.

Programs fulfilled the aims:

- **To teach more Aboriginal language and culture to build people's pride and identity**

The *OCHRE* programs, Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and Opportunity Hubs, contribute to the regeneration of Aboriginal Language and Culture in communities. We heard many positive examples from staff working with young Aboriginal people, young people themselves and parents and careers that programs were helping develop pride and identity. Research participants were positive about cultural programs being run and wanted more.

- **To support more Aboriginal students to stay at school**

We heard that Opportunity Hubs are working with young Aboriginal people from an early age (year 5) and this was a positive way to encourage and support them to stay engaged with education.

To establish the direct impact of *OCHRE* programs on school retention it is important that data be collected at the local school level.

- **To support more Aboriginal young people to get fulfilling and sustainable jobs**

The three *OCHRE* programs are well-placed to help support young people – through increased school participation, direct employment at the Hubs, indirect employment through work experience, and community connections to employers.

Programs can help focus government investment in regional employment opportunities through Accord priorities

- **To grow local Aboriginal leaders', including programs for children and young people, and communities' capacity to drive their own solutions**

There are opportunities through Local Decision Making and Opportunity Hubs for growing leadership. Increased community participation in all programs will lead to community-based decision making and control.

We have seen through the evaluation some increased community participation by Aboriginal communities to provide local solutions to local concerns.

- **To focus on creating opportunities for economic empowerment**

Programs through Local Decision Making are critical to this aim. There are direct positive impacts from the Accords process and with governments looking to these to respond to local concerns.

Job opportunities for Aboriginal people through the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and Opportunity Hubs and employment and training opportunities support this aim.

- **To make both government and communities more accountable for the money they spend**

Accountability for expenditure and outcomes is an ongoing challenge for *OCHRE* and is a work in progress. The lack of clear accountability structures in some of the programs and deficits in the quality and transparency of data collected mean that it is difficult to know how money is being spent and whether this has been done in the most efficient way. This issue is being addressed in relation to Opportunity Hubs and Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, and it is expected that transparency will improve over the next phase of *OCHRE* implementation. This is less of an issue for Local Decision Making, where there is more accountability and transparency. However, even there, data on outcomes is still rather minimal.

Community accountability is a greater challenge. As discussed above, communities are under resourced in their capacity to manage programs and to provide robust accountability structures to do so. Communities require more capacity building to enable them to step up and take accountability for money spent in the community.

3.4 Do the *OCHRE* policies and practices respond to emerging evidence and practice learnings? Is change to policy and practice timely?

The programs that have been implemented to date have remained relatively static in the sites we observed. Minor adjustments had been made to reporting requirements and funding. Policy staff told us that they are waiting for the results of this evaluation to inform how the program may change in the short-term.

During the evaluation, a number of practice learnings have been noted in conducting evaluations in Aboriginal communities in NSW. This has influenced the way this evaluation has been conducted. In particular, the research team has employed community researchers and we have listened to more community members than originally planned. Further practice learnings are described in Section 4.

To date there is little emerging evidence on the impact of the programs on Aboriginal communities. Minimum datasets are now being developed for Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and being implemented for Local Decision Making. Opportunity Hub data is being used to check organisations are complying with the terms of their contracts; however, it is unclear whether this data is used for any other purpose.

Changes have been made to program roll out, but it is not clear whether these have resulted from evidence. For example, they may reflect observations, experience in

working with the *OCHRE* programs, or community feedback (rather than program data).

The *NSW Language Bill (2017)* has been well received by communities as a commitment to Aboriginal Language and Culture. However, people we heard from in community were uncertain about what the Bill would mean in practice.

In all sites, we heard listening to communities (community consultation) and community control were priorities for Aboriginal communities. We also heard members of Aboriginal communities were keen for programs to be delivered through culturally sensitive organisations. At this stage, the NSW Government still controls each program.

3.5 What improvements to the design of *OCHRE* could be made to better meet outcomes in the Aboriginal community, and for the future development of *OCHRE*?

Improvements to *OCHRE:*

- *OCHRE* programs contribute to the wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples, but do not address wellbeing as a key aim or objective. Communities recommended that wellbeing should be integrated into the aims of *OCHRE* programs.

Community engagement and community control:

- All *OCHRE* programs require more support and resources to maintain engagement with the diverse views and needs of Aboriginal communities in each area.
- Capacity building for Aboriginal communities to take control of services in their area should be built into all aspects of *OCHRE* programs.
- Access to *OCHRE* programs should be available to all relevant Aboriginal community members.
- Need for local accountability and oversight of programs.
- Data needs to be specific to community, owned by communities, and available to communities to work for communities' agenda.
- Working with the Accords through the Community Working Parties will support communities to have a voice and influence government.
- Any local services (provided directly or contracted) should include working with communities to ensure they have a voice.

Governance:

- Currently there are complex governance arrangements, especially for Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests.
- There need to be clearer lines of responsibility between the responsible government department, community governance structures and the *OCHRE* programs, including accountability, and the role of Aboriginal Affairs NSW.

- Communities should have more input into the design and management of *OCHRE* programs. Governance structures and lines of accountability, including mechanisms for ensuring community ownership, should be clearly set out in program guidelines and policies.

Strategic planning (data, reporting and resourcing):

- Information about programs needs to focus on both the priorities of Aboriginal communities and those of government. Specifically, there is a need for localised evidence to look at community driven outcomes.
- Data collection should support communities to influence leaders and government, and accessible to Aboriginal communities for use.
- NSW Government need to have good performance indicators based on local frameworks.

Coordination between *OCHRE* programs and with other organisations and services:

- *OCHRE* programs could be better coordinated; for example, there is potential for the three programs evaluated to work together to improve community access and involvement.
- *OCHRE* programs should be coordinated with other programs in communities to reduce overlap and gaps.

***OCHRE* policies and other government policies:**

- *Local Schools, Local Decisions* policy impacts on whether Aboriginal students can access *OCHRE* programs in Government Schools. Communities need to have more input into educational programs.
- Government procuring processes could further develop capacity of Aboriginal organisations to ensure Aboriginal communities' and organisations participation in tenders.

Improvements to specific programs are identified in Section 2 above. Improvements identified in this section relate to all three programs (unless specified) and to improvements in implementation and operation.

Wellbeing is an area not addressed through *OCHRE* programs and was repeatedly raised by Aboriginal communities through the Evaluation. The aims of *OCHRE* contribute to and develop aspects of wellbeing, such as development of cultural identity, pride, access to fulfilling employment, education and empowerment. However, we heard from many participants the wellbeing needs of Aboriginal communities continue to impact their capacity to participate in employment and education through *OCHRE* programs. Addressing issues of wellbeing across all programs is an important factor for Aboriginal communities.

We note that in *OCHRE* sites evaluated, programs are operating well due to the commitment of a few key individuals. Consideration should be given to increasing the

size of programs to develop sustainable organisations. This would ensure job security for staff within the program.

Capacity building is a key area for improvement in the *OCHRE* programs evaluated. There are some opportunities for engagement with individual Aboriginal people; however, there needs more support for building capacity within Aboriginal organisations, including from the evaluation.

3.5.1 Community engagement and community control

OCHRE programs rely on community engagement and to some extent a level of community control. Each program operates through their ongoing relationships with Aboriginal communities and capacity to adapt to local concerns and issues. It is important for organisations responsible for programs, government agencies, members of Aboriginal communities, including Aboriginal organisations to continue their conversations to ensure the stability of the programs.

As discussed earlier, there is successful engagement across all programs. However, there needs to be improved support to maintain engagement with the diverse views of Aboriginal communities in each area. We heard some concerns about access and information being provided to the broader Aboriginal communities.

Community control and engagement in Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and Local Decision Making is critical to ensure community 'buy-in' to each program. Each model requires more consultation and capacity building, and support for communities' participation prior to implementation, to enable delivery of programs.

Local Decision Making is reliant on widespread community engagement and the timely participation of government. In this program there is concern about representation, reporting and local community voices being heard at the level of government.

Data collection and evidence needs to be community driven and accessible to communities. This will help communities influence government policy.

3.5.2 Governance

Each program could have more clarity about governance. Currently, there are complex and unclear governance arrangements.

Each of the *OCHRE* programs is the responsibility of different government departments. This governance arrangement plays to the strengths of the departments in relation to each program; for example, the similarities between Opportunity Hubs and other vocational programs makes it logical for Training Services NSW to manage the program; Languages being taught in schools appears to align with NSW Department of Education oversight, supported by NSW AECG Inc.; and Local Decision Making sits under Aboriginal Affairs NSW.

Role of Aboriginal Affairs NSW

The role of Aboriginal Affairs NSW in each program (in particular for Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and Opportunity Hubs) is somewhat ambiguous and is different in different locations. This is in some ways a strength. Aboriginal Affairs NSW staff are embedded in the communities and have worked hard to facilitate the implementation of the different *OCHRE* programs. They have been very important in legitimising *OCHRE* in communities, and also conveying community concerns back to government. They have also been crucial for facilitating the evaluation and engaging communities in the evaluation process. On the other hand, there is potential for this model to cause tension between departments and confusion at the community level (and front-line staff), adding to the uncertainty about where ultimate decision-making authority lies for the delivery of *OCHRE* programs.

While there is an *OCHRE* Accountability Structure, clearer lines of responsibility are needed for each program and between each Department responsible.

Aboriginal Affairs NSW are active in relation to the Accords, although it is worth noting Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly was an existing and functioning operation prior to Local Decision Making and are able to function independently. Aboriginal Affairs NSW has supported Community Working Parties to participate in Local Decision Making.

The role of Aboriginal Affairs NSW regarding the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and Opportunity Hubs is less transparent and appears to depend on the regional or local Aboriginal Affairs NSW staff member. In some areas, Aboriginal Affairs NSW staff are quite involved and in other cases they are quite remote from *OCHRE* initiatives. Aboriginal Affairs NSW staff involvement can influence the engagement of other agencies and organisations (State Training NSW, Department of Education, NSW AECG Inc.), and their diffuse role is in some ways beneficial. We also heard that some staff members themselves are not clear of their roles or involvement in *OCHRE*.

3.5.3 Strategic planning (data, reporting and resourcing)

Each model requires simple, regular and effective reporting and for Aboriginal communities to access this information, identify their priorities, and influence government agencies. Data collection and reporting can support Aboriginal communities in achieving self-determination and community control of policy decisions that affect them. It can also support local Aboriginal communities to access resources to fulfil the needs of their programs

Currently there is limited information collected across all agencies, and not enough transparency about how it is collected and how it is used by policy makers and funding bodies. Information being collected is also focussed on government priorities and not necessarily those of Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal Communities need to own data for the services they use, and data collection needs to reflect their priorities. Aboriginal Communities also need to be able to access and use this data to address their needs and influence Government and service providers.

3.5.4 Coordination between *OCHRE* programs and other programs

In addition to specific improvements for each program (see Section 2), the evaluation has identified an overlap and disjoint between the three *OCHRE* programs (see Table 2) evaluated. While in some areas, only one program is being implemented; in other areas, a number of programs are being implemented. As *OCHRE* programs are introduced in other communities, areas with more than one program are likely to increase.

As Table 2 highlights, target populations and activities of Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and Opportunity Hubs are similar. There appears to be little direct engagement across different *OCHRE* programs. This may be in part due to different government departments being responsible for each or organisational priorities.

However, there is potential for key *OCHRE* programs to work together in a coordinated approach, which may strengthen community involvement, and help engage schools and students in the programs. Where Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests and Opportunity Hubs are operating in the same area there is potential for the two models to work together. On one site there may be shared interest with Connected Communities (not part of this evaluation).

Table 2 Key activities and key stakeholders for three *OCHRE* programs

	Activities and key stakeholders	Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest	Local Decision Making	Opportunity Hub
Core activities	Language	■		
	Culture	■		▒
	Identity and wellbeing	▒		▒
	School engagement	▒		■
	Community engagement		■	▒
	Employment		▒	■
	Local Decision Making		■	
Key stakeholders	Students	■		■
	Aboriginal communities		■	▒
	Schools	■		■
	Government		■	▒
	Employers			▒

Note: Black shading highlights primary focus each *OCHRE* program has in relation to core *OCHRE* activities and stakeholders. Grey shading highlights secondary focus or contribution.

OCHRE programs are also working alongside a number of other programs for Aboriginal communities funded by Commonwealth, NSW and Local Governments. These programs – often with similar objectives – appear to be competing. While this offers choice to Aboriginal communities, it also indicates a lack of strategic approach and of overall community control of these initiatives. For schools, this lack of coordination of services may seem overwhelming. We heard that a number of other successful programs are working with young Aboriginal people, including after school Language and Culture programs, sports programs, Clontarf and Girls Academy.

Many Aboriginal organisations are working in communities that have established networks and connections – in some sites, programs appear to be ignoring established networks and organisations. Local Decision Making has established regional Assemblies or Alliances to provide an economy of scale on which to engage with government on regional issues. However, the program is inadequately funded to bring *local* organisations into this decision-making process.

Each program uses considerable resources (both through the government agencies accountable for the programs as well as the program directly) on engagement. This should be recognised as a core component of *OCHRE* programs.

Some government departments and service providers (including NGOs) engage better than others. We heard that to improve services for Aboriginal communities, government service providers (Health, FACS, Housing, among others) need to work closely with *OCHRE* programs. Opportunity Hubs and Local Decision Making are key access points for Aboriginal communities, which can support the work of service providers.

3.5.5 *OCHRE* policies and other government policies

There is some tension between *OCHRE* programs, working with young Aboriginal people in schools, and the NSW Government policy *Local Schools, Local Decisions*. This policy gives power to the School Principal to make local decisions. Community members can influence School priorities either through representation to the School Principal or by contributing to community consultations on the School's strategic plan. This requires advocacy by the parents and carers of children at the school and by Aboriginal organisations. We heard that young Aboriginal people can only access *OCHRE* programs in schools with the support of their school Principal. Principals can, and some do make decisions to exclude *OCHRE* programs for different reasons, including program overload or too many other demands on students.

Government procurement policies often exclude Aboriginal communities, and in particular potential service providers, from input and engagement in the procurement process.[11] For probity reasons, government departments may be unable to build the capacity of specific community organisations to enable their participation in the

[11] This has been identified by many stakeholders in the recent Productivity Commission inquiry into Human Services (2016).

procurement process or delivery of government services. In policy areas where the program objective is to empower Aboriginal communities and facilitate their economic development, a different approach to procurement may be required. This approach would be one that enables Aboriginal communities and their organisations to be prepared for the procurement process, be involved with program design, and receive training as required.

Government procurement of human services is also shifting towards outcomes contracting. However, as demonstrated above, outcomes are particularly difficult to identify in this policy area as they are likely to be long-term. For communities, the process of commissioning and implementing these programs are as important as the outcomes.

Aboriginal communities' influence over government policy is limited. It is possible through collecting wellbeing data, along with education and employment data through *OCHRE* programs, there is potential to have a more informed discussion about community needs with government. This information can support Aboriginal communities to achieve long-term aims of self-determination and influence over government policy.

4 Practice learnings

The evaluation of *OCHRE* programs, with culturally acceptable evaluation practice and community-control at the centre of the methodology, allows increased learning about engaging with Aboriginal peoples in research. The original design for the evaluation, based on the requirements from Aboriginal Affairs NSW and the resources available, involved gaining consent to work on Country in each site, and then qualitative research by UNSW researchers and analysis of quantitative data provided by the programs and other sources.

While this basic framework is in keeping with AH&MRC Ethics (see Section 1.3)[12], the evaluation methods have also responded to communities' wishes and expectations. This included:

- Co-design (with Aboriginal Communities) of the evaluation methods and success criteria in each site.
- Employment, training and support of community researchers (in most sites) to have conversations.
- Development of inclusive methods for collective community consultation and consent, including the validation of findings, the sign-off of the final report, asking communities what they want to happen to the report next – facilitating communities control of the evaluation and the data collected.

Each step required negotiation with each community, as well as Aboriginal Affairs NSW as the funding agency. We have learned a great deal from communities in this evaluation. For example, consent under a collective framework must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal community memberships – this is in line with the requirements of the AH&MRC ethics.[13] Also, the engagement of community researchers to have *Continuing Conversations* also contributed to providing a safe and productive research context and builds Aboriginal capacity as part of the research process. Specific lessons are described below.

4.1 Aboriginal community-controlled research

Several activities involved in these evaluations raise urgent and highly relevant questions related to how Aboriginal 'community' consultation is undertaken. More importantly, community-controlled research requires recognition and inclusion of the

[12] Key elements include: to provide a net benefit for Aboriginal people and communities; to provide Aboriginal community control of the research; to be culturally sensitive; to reimburse costs incurred by research participants; and to enhance Aboriginal skills and knowledge (AH&MRC, 2016).

[13] It is noteworthy here that guidelines and procedures such as those of the AH&MRC require researchers to obtain community consent before they submit an ethics application and require researchers to maintain community consent throughout the course of the research project. (Dreise, 2018: 11). Critically, in the evaluation, researchers need to be accountable and respect 'that participatory processes take place within an ongoing power dynamic of colonising and colonised people'. (Walden, 2016: 53)

diversity of Aboriginal peoples' identity and agency, collective and individual consent, cultural knowledge and agency. Tony Dreise (2018: 5) writes that – 'Obtaining community consent is, often, the bedrock of Aboriginal social research'.

Importantly, research methods need to acknowledge local traditional cultural knowledge and employ open processes for inclusive community consent to be meaningful, productive and accountable to Aboriginal communities and individuals involved. This contributes directly to community determined improvements for the *OCHRE* initiatives involved and contributes to knowledge in Aboriginal research and Aboriginal community development in NSW (see Section 4.3.4).

Aboriginal Traditional societies identity, belonging and custodianship have endured persistent laws and policies aimed directly at weakening the social capital of Aboriginal individuals and collectives. Since the beginnings of European settlement in Australia governments have used approximately 67 different descriptions or definitions to determine Aboriginality (Aboriginal Affairs NSW, 2015: 10).

Approaches which are now focusing on building Aboriginal self-determination and the building of Aboriginal individual and collective social capital, such as the *OCHRE* Plan in NSW, unearth the inherited complications of multiple contemporary Aboriginal identity and representation. Raising the resultant reality that there are multiple individual and collective representative voices to be identified and included, and that any collective representation needs to be locally negotiated rather than assumed.

Inclusive research practices – collective community consent and co-design

Ongoing conversations about the implementation and evaluation of *OCHRE* programs need to include questions for researchers to ensure collective community and individual consent, agency, inclusion, and decision-making. Collective community consent is best based in an inclusive rather than representative framework and discourse. Consent needs to be ongoing and revisited to address the existing marginalisation of the differing social and cultural positions held by Aboriginal peoples with traditional, historical, contemporary, and Stolen Generation backgrounds and identities. In contrast to consent processes in mainstream research, therefore, research and evaluation with Aboriginal communities is not a one-off process conducted with a single community representative. Rather it is an ongoing process involving multiple people over the course of the project. This applies both to community consent but also to individual consent to participate.

The diversity of Aboriginal communities in NSW include:

- Descendants of the **Traditional** Aboriginal Peoples of a geographically identified place – often represented collectively through Native Title registered party/ies, and or legal entity where membership requires local traditional ancestry, Traditional Elders organisations, Aboriginal Cultural Advisory groups and through some Local Aboriginal Land Councils.
- Descendants of Aboriginal peoples who were relocated to a specific geographical area in previous **Historic** generations, yet still maintain strong associations and

bonding to the place/region, often represented through Local Aboriginal Land Councils, family entities, NGOs, Registered Aboriginal Organisations.

- **Contemporary** members of a geographical identity – Aboriginal individuals and/or families who have moved to a place in recent times and whose families do not have either historical or traditional relationships to place, represented through Local Aboriginal Land Councils, family entities, NGOs, Registered Aboriginal Organisations.
- Aboriginal persons who were **Stolen,** removed and disconnected from their birth families and who have no or little knowledge of their traditional or historical ancestries. Often not locally collectively represented and represented through Local Aboriginal Land Councils, collective concerns represented by Link Up.

Questions for future engagement:

- How to include voices/s of cultural authority, knowledge and perspectives and needs of local Traditional Aboriginal knowledge?
- How to the include voices/s of experience, knowledge, perspectives and needs of local historical Aboriginal knowledge?
- How to the include voices/s of experience, knowledge, perspectives of contemporary local Aboriginal knowledge?
- How to the include voices/s of experience, knowledge and perspectives of Stolen Generations Aboriginal knowledge?
- How to the include voices/s of experience, knowledge, perspectives of young Aboriginal people?
- How to the include voices/s of experience, knowledge, perspectives of older Aboriginal people?
- How are the voices of diverse communities facilitated through government process of program implementation and evaluation?

Listening to members of Aboriginal communities has highlighted the diverse nature of Aboriginal people's voices. For some communities there are clear governance structures, and representative bodies such a Local Aboriginal Land Council Native Title Claimant organisations, Aboriginal Corporations, NGOs and Aboriginal Medical Services. In other communities there are two or three different bodies including working parties, Elders groups, multiple Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Aboriginal Medical Services. In some Aboriginal communities there are no organisations recognised by community members as representing their interests, or specific interests such as language or young people. The notion of representative voices within communities is problematic, and 'even community organisations can have their representativeness challenged' (Dreise, 2018: 7).

Linked to this is that different people or groups can be present in community meetings at different times. It is not always possible to have the same group of people providing consent to work on Country, co-designing the evaluation methodology, and validating and accepting the findings.

Overall, from a practice point of view, we have learned that evaluators need to spend time understanding each community's governance structures before commencing the fieldwork. Each community has its own unique way of working and it may not be possible to know in advance how each function, relative to the evaluation questions, before the fieldwork starts. Greater understanding can facilitate the inclusion of multiple and diverse voices with support of local Aboriginal organisations and communities' members. Spending time with members of Aboriginal communities to identify relationships of accountability, as well as researcher's own accountability to the community, is a critical part of conducting inclusive and community-controlled research. Dreise explains 'for (Aboriginal social) research to be effective, it needs to ideally embrace grassroots relationships as the foundation stone of its methodology' (Dreise, 2018: 7). In addition, it is important to recognise that these processes and positions are sometimes fluid and changeable. Research needs to be flexible to ensure all Aboriginal population groups or individuals in a geographically identified community or region have a voice in the project.

The role of young people's voices in making decisions that affect them has also proved to be a challenge. Several participants indicated that there are significant challenges in relation to succession planning for community leadership in some communities. Young people are reluctant to take the lead unless they are encouraged to do so by Elders. In addition, many young people have personal commitments to jobs and families and do not have the time to volunteer or sit on representative bodies. It is culturally appropriate for Elders to speak for communities. However, the voices of children and young people are often not represented in discussions of policies which affect them. This in turn affects program design and implementation, and any subsequent evaluation process.

4.2 Impact of the evaluation on *OCHRE* programs

Continuing Conversations with communities through the evaluation has resulted in some impacts on program implementation.

We heard from several participants that the evaluation itself, through the *Continuing Conversations*, has had a positive impact on the programs and on the communities, even though involvement in the evaluation was resource intensive for participants. The processes of co-design and community sign-off have resulted in increased levels of local Aboriginal community control and engagement and have helped to continue the conversation around self-determination. For some people, involvement with the evaluation offered an opportunity to become much more engaged with the *OCHRE* program in their local area and to discuss this with other community members.

The conversations with the evaluation team and members of Aboriginal communities about co-design, consent to work on Country, validation of findings and deciding what should happen with the reports, were also helpful for some communities. These meetings presented opportunities for wide-ranging discussion about community representation and governance and provided a forum for increased participation for Aboriginal communities and stakeholders.

Employing, training and supporting community researchers also provided communities with greater insight into the research process and for some, the potential benefits of research to the community. The engagement of community researchers during the evaluation strengthens the research and drew further interest in *OCHRE* programs.

4.3 Evaluation practice learnings

4.3.1 What has worked well?

The evaluation has been a very positive learning experience for the evaluation team in working closely with Aboriginal communities throughout the design, fieldwork and reporting process.

The original plan was to talk with Aboriginal organisations. The evaluation changed to consider more expanded understandings of diversity, experience and authority of Aboriginal community and cultural voice. This was critical and has enabled us to describe implementation and early outcomes – important where data is lacking or where data does not capture the nuance of the impacts each of the programs has had.

As mentioned above, researchers listened to members of Aboriginal communities in the evaluation. Research methods of co-design, including community feedback and sign-off, and employing, training and supporting community researchers facilitate community participation and voice are a positive example of community-controlled research.

The engagement of community researchers was a key strength to the evaluation. As members of the local Aboriginal communities, the community researchers were able to access members of the community and were able to extend the time and availability of the evaluation team within the communities. The training provided those individuals with new skills which could potentially be used for other projects or in other contexts. While engaging community researchers supports capacity building, their participation as Tony Dreise has noted, also positively impacts on the quality of the research.

> The Ochre [sic] evaluation has been strengthened through an investment in community capacity building measures, including the employment of Aboriginal research assistants living and working in the field. (Dreise, 2018: 7)

4.3.2 What can be improved (scope)?

Language, Culture and Land all affect wellbeing. Australian Aboriginal cultures are built on a relational worldview, and this has been impressed into the research by Aboriginal participants. Aboriginal individual and collective wellbeing is a sought-after success measure for any Aboriginal community development program or initiative. This finding emerged from the data; particularly from the young Aboriginal people who participated in the research. *OCHRE* has the potential to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples, but wellbeing outcomes are not being measured or tracked in current *OCHRE* programs. Currently, wellbeing is not specifically identified in the objectives of *OCHRE* (although may be implicit). This could be considered in any review of the program objectives and then in the next stage of the evaluation.

Social, cultural and emotional wellbeing is identified as the foundation for physical and mental health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

> It is a holistic concept which results from a network of relationships between individuals, family, kin and community. It also recognises the importance of connection to land, culture, spirituality and ancestry, and how these affect the individual. (Gee et al. 2014: 13, 55)

It is also a reality that wellbeing needs, and standards, are not static in a person's life or during any one stage in life. For example, social and emotional wellbeing may change across the life course: what is important to a child's social and emotional wellbeing may be quite different to what is important to an Elder.

The importance of linking and including social and cultural determinants of wellbeing for Aboriginal peoples into areas of education and employment support programs should not be underestimated. Links between community social processes, individual empowerment and improved health and wellbeing are well acknowledged and are outcomes sought from Aboriginal focused initiatives.

Wellbeing is part of an Aboriginal holistic understanding of life.

> Social and emotional wellbeing is a holistic concept based on connections to country, culture, community, family, spirit and physical and mental health. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, health is not just the physical wellbeing of the individual but the 'social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community' (SHRG 2004). Social and economic disadvantage is interconnected with historical loss of land (which was the economic and spiritual base for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities); damage to traditional social and political structures and languages; child removals; incarceration rates and inter-generational trauma (NPHP 2006). Experience of discrimination also leads to psychological distress and has a negative impact on health (Paradies et al. 2008). Indigenous Australians experience higher levels of morbidity and mortality from mental illness, psychological distress, assault, self-harm and suicide than other Australians. (Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014)

The *Social and Emotional Well Being Framework* details the nine guiding principles that emphasises the holistic and whole of life definition of health held by Aboriginal peoples. (Commonwealth of Australia, 22017: 8)

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is viewed in a holistic context, that encompasses mental health and physical, cultural and spiritual health. Land is central to wellbeing. Crucially, it must be understood that when the harmony of these interrelations is disrupted, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ill health will persist.

2. Self-determination is central to the provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services.

3. Culturally valid understandings must shape the provision of services and must guide assessment, care and management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health problems generally, and mental health problems, in particular.

4. It must be recognised that the experiences of trauma and loss, present since European invasion, are a direct outcome of the disruption to cultural wellbeing. Trauma and loss of this magnitude continues to have inter-generational effects.

5. The human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be recognised and respected. Failure to respect these human rights constitutes continuous disruption to mental health. Human rights relevant to mental illness must be specifically addressed.

6. Racism, stigma, environmental adversity and social disadvantage constitute ongoing stressors and have negative impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' mental health and wellbeing.

7. The centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and kinship must be recognised as well as the broader concepts of family and the bonds of reciprocal affection, responsibility and sharing.

8. There is no single Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture or group, but numerous groupings, languages, kinships, and tribes, as well as ways of living. Furthermore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may currently live in urban, rural or remote settings, in traditional or other lifestyles, and frequently move between these ways of living.

9. It must be recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have great strengths, creativity and endurance and a deep understanding of the relationships between human beings and their environment.

4.3.3 What can be improved (evaluation practice)?

Community researcher model

The community researcher model was developed as an adaptation of a model which had previously been used by our Aboriginal fieldworker and researcher Michael Barnes. Overall, this model was successful.

This model of research could be further extended to more meaningfully build capacity in Aboriginal communities for engaging with research. The community researchers were employed on a casual basis for a few days. This arrangement narrowed the range of people who could become community researchers and meant that their availability for the feedback and follow up sessions was restricted. Thus, the amount of capacity building of communities was limited.

A strategic approach to community capacity building would also benefit other government agencies. Ideally community members could become fully trained researchers over the long-term and could be involved not only in data collection but also in research design and analysis. The strength of this model is that it allows communities to have much greater control of research conducted with them. It will, however, take some time and resources to develop and importantly it would involve working with communities to identify suitable community researchers and a commitment of time and resources to train and support them.

Consent, co-design and community ownership of data

Consent, co-design and community ownership of data are all principles for Aboriginal research set out by the AH&MRC (2016). Processes to implement these principles in practice require time and resources of communities, the evaluation team and Aboriginal Affairs NSW to engage fully. Important lessons have been learned through the course of this phase of the evaluation which have relevance not only for inclusive and community-controlled research practice, but also for program implementation – as reported above.

Table 3 provides a summary of the key learnings about the conduct of evaluations. We will use these learnings to improve practice in the next stages of the evaluation and for other research in Aboriginal communities.

Table 3 Summary of learnings for evaluation practice

Practice learning	How this has been managed
Community controlled research requires time and resources for communities, researchers and government to fully engage	Facilitating community control of the evaluation produced significant learnings about both research methods and expectations of those involved. The initial allocation of time and resources was inadequate to properly ensure community-control of the evaluation. This was recognised early in the evaluation and community members, the evaluation team and Aboriginal Affairs NSW have supported the additional time and resources needed. There is now a much clearer understanding by all stakeholders

Practice learning	How this has been managed
	about what is required in each site and across the State (in relation to the Synthesis Report). We anticipate research processes to facilitate community agency and inclusion will continue to improve.
Need to recognise the different roles of stakeholders in the evaluation	The evaluation recognises that many Aboriginal people have more than one role in communities – they may be involved in an Aboriginal organisation, have a leadership role, be a parent or carer, and work for government. Aboriginal Affairs NSW have helped to identify and engage key community and policy stakeholders in the evaluation, while also enabling staff to be part of the conversation.
Need for flexibility to ensure communities are engaged throughout the evaluation	The evaluation team and Aboriginal Affairs NSW have been flexible to ensure communities have been engaged throughout the evaluation. Flexibility needs to be built in to community-controlled research to allow for contingencies and additions requested by communities. Throughout the process, plans have been adjusted to enable communities to control and participate in the evaluation. This needs to be communicated to all stakeholders to manage expectations. This flexibility needs to be managed within the government contractual requirements of the evaluation.
Need for Aboriginal researchers to lead the evaluation	The evaluation has been conducted with a team of Aboriginal fieldworkers, Aboriginal academic researchers, and non-Aboriginal academic researchers. The evaluation has also benefited from cultural advice and support from the Evaluation Steering Committee.
Need for clear governance processes in communities to provide community consent	Good practice in Aboriginal research is to seek community consent prior to conducting any research. This is a requirement of the AH&MRC ethics process who rely on Aboriginal Medical Services to provide community consent in health-related research. However, this process needs to be adapted for social policy research to facilitate collective community consent across Aboriginal organisations and members of Aboriginal communities. Researchers and government have worked with communities to understand how community consent needs to be inclusive and encompass the diversity of Aboriginal communities. Researchers need to recognise the importance of collective and individual consent, and that consent may be required from multiple groups.
Recognise community consent is an ongoing process and includes collective and multiple opportunities for communities to consent (or not)	Researchers continue to check in with communities to ensure consent remains valid and that communities, evaluators and Aboriginal Affairs NSW have a shared understanding of the task and the roles. In one site we had consent to have conversations on Country but at co-design, the community decided not to proceed. This also demonstrates the exercise of and respect of community-control.

Practice learning	How this has been managed
Need to identify processes, such as how to get feedback and validation of reports, with community, as early as possible	Processes to sign-off co-design summaries, data collection plans and final reports were developed as the evaluation progressed. More efficient processes need to be developed early in the research to meet the needs of communities, researchers, government sponsors and ethics committees – noting that requirements and processes may be different for each community.
Need an approach that works for both communities and government	During the research it was noted that communities often have a preference to provide verbal feedback and sign-off which is very different to government preferences. Transparency of process is also important to all parties.
Need to respect community business and priorities	The evaluation needs to be flexible with timing and expectations of communities and acknowledge that participating in research is not necessarily the priority of communities or government staff in the sites. The research team has worked around communities' other priorities (e.g. Accord negotiations), Sorry business, and other policy consultations (e.g. the Languages Bill) in a flexible way.
Need to be inclusive	Individual conversations were more successful than group conversations. However, holding community events is important – even if few people show up. Multiple and inclusive opportunities to participate in the evaluation sends a clear message to communities that the conversations are open to all and every voice is welcome.
Importance of the community researcher model	The community researchers who worked with us were able to reach into the community and hear from people that may not have spoken to our Aboriginal researchers. The model needs to be adapted to each community to ensure community researchers are representative and inclusive of the community. The model also needs to be supported, recognising that community researchers have a range of skills and experience, different networks in the community, and different availability to conduct the research.
Method of communication	Different stakeholders have different preferred means of communication. As the research progressed and we developed relationships in communities, we have come to understand the communication preferences of individuals and groups. For example, we have not used PowerPoint presentations in co-design or community feedback workshops. We have used face to face interviews wherever possible and provided an online survey for those who preferred responding in that way.
Importance of stakeholder engagement (in this research, government) at start and end of fieldwork period	We recognise that research processes can be disruptive and may raise issues or be impacted by what is happening in the local community. It is important for researchers to meet with stakeholders (in this case government staff) at the beginning and end of the fieldwork to ensure both are aware of any local issues that may affect or arise from the evaluation.

Practice learning	How this has been managed
Importance of building relationships and accountability in the evaluation process	Aboriginal communities have had poor prior experience of research and evaluations. While the requirements under ethics should address many of the historic issues of research in Aboriginal communities, researchers still need to develop relationships and demonstrate accountability with communities during the research process. Taking time to facilitate community control throughout the evaluation should help build relationships of respect and accountability.
Need to allow more time to engage schools and students in the evaluation	The *Local Schools, Local Decisions* policy enables greater control by Principals about what happens in their schools. To conduct research with schools, researchers need to engage the School Principal and then work with them to decide the best way to have conversations with students to minimise disruption to the students and the school. This requires time and resources and should commence as early as possible. Consideration might be given in future Stages to engage young people outside of schools if opportunities exist and to develop their skills as peer researchers. Note that many of the students engaged in the Opportunity Hub and Nest programs were under the age (12) permitted by ethics approval. Their experience of the program may be captured in conversations in later stages of the evaluation.
Need to recognise other priorities in the community, as well as research/consultation fatigue	In addition to community business, there were a number of other consultations in communities during the evaluation; for example, related to the Aboriginal Languages Bill and the Cultural Heritage Reforms. Some schools were also experiencing research fatigue due to receiving many requests from researchers to come in to schools. Where possible the evaluation processes were timed to avoid these other events.

4.3.4 Considerations for next stage

The next stage of the *OCHRE* Evaluation will focus on outcomes rather than implementation. Discussed above, communities have a clear view that outcomes should not be confined to the specific quantitative objectives of each of the programs; school engagement, transition to employment, knowledge of language, etc. Rather the measures should be more holistic and also include consideration of Aboriginal self-determination and community control.

Aboriginal control should also extend to the evaluation itself, and further discussion with Aboriginal communities (possibly represented through NCARA) should include such matters as:

- How can the evaluation questions be improved to better reflect the needs of communities?

This report belongs to members of NCARA.

- Should the evaluation continue to focus on the sites already engaged, or should other sites be included?
- How can the community researcher model be improved?
- Are there better ways of ensuring community ownership of data?

5 Conclusion and recommendations

Recommendations for each of the *OCHRE* programs for each site are presented in each site report and are reflected in Section 2. Tables of recommendations from community approved reports can be found in Appendix B.

5.1 Implementation of *OCHRE*

Overall *OCHRE* has been remarkably successful. It has a relatively low level of resourcing compared to many government programs in Aboriginal policy, and yet it has strong positive recognition in the Aboriginal communities of NSW. Implementation of the *OCHRE* plan has begun to help in the process of improving trust in the NSW Government's commitment to Aboriginal communities' economic advancement and self-determination. Nevertheless, change in communities has been slow to eventuate, and communities are still very sceptical of the government's long-term commitment to the ideals of *OCHRE. OCHRE* is a cross-government plan, but it is strongly associated with Aboriginal Affairs NSW.

OCHRE consists of a range of discrete programs and initiatives. Aboriginal Affairs NSW has worked hard to better integrate these different components of the plan. However, there is still a long way to go for *OCHRE* to become part of an integrated strategic plan to address the issues which communities had identified in the task force consultations. Community feedback also indicated that, ideally, Aboriginal programs should have a more holistic approach, and not be narrowly focused on government identified priorities or aligned with particular government services or agencies. Communities also indicated that there is still a long way to go in terms of community control and self-determination. A high priority for all communities involved in the *OCHRE* Evaluation was to build the capacity and resources (human and financial) of communities to better control the services and programs in their community. *OCHRE* is seen as a good start in this respect, and certainly a departure from previous practice, but it is the beginning of a long journey towards self-determination.

5.2 *OCHRE* Evaluation process

In Section 1.5 of the report we set out the strengths and limitations of the methodology for this evaluation. As indicated in this report, the methodology has adapted over time to the concerns of communities, and the ethical requirements to facilitate greater community control over all the evaluation components. Overall, we believe that the findings from the evaluation are robust, despite the limitations in the methodology. Communities have all had the opportunity to validate draft reports for their sites giving confidence that the report represents the views of communities about the different *OCHRE* programs. However, as discussed above in Section 4.3, there are several ways the next stage of the evaluation could build on the learnings from this stage.

In summary, these involve the following:

- Improve the quality of program data, particularly relating to outcomes.
- Improve co-design, feedback and sign-off processes.
- Ensure community ownership of data, including what program data is collected.
- Employ local community researchers.

5.3 Recommendations to NCARA for the NSW Government

The following recommendations are made to NCARA for the NSW Government and are based on overall findings from the three programs evaluated.

- Work towards transferring ownership of programs to Aboriginal communities, where not already Aboriginal community owned or controlled.
- Coordinate programs to minimise overlap and gaps.
- Collect better data, and ensure local Aboriginal communities have the data to enable them to act.
- Use data to inform the future resourcing model for each program.
- Ensure capacity building is embedded in all programs, including the evaluation.
- Resource programs appropriately and reduce reliance on good will (including attendance of meetings with government).
- Clarify role of government in each program to manage expectations of both community and government staff.
- Honour commitment to *continuing conversation* and include community in future development.

6 Next steps

This section identifies the next steps for site reports and this synthesis report, as well as the next stage of the evaluation.

6.1 Next steps with Stage 1 reports

This final Synthesis Report contains recommendations to NCARA for the NSW Government. As part of maintaining community control of the evaluation, researchers have listened to feedback from NCARA on the draft Synthesis Report. We have provided additional information where required and have sought to address any concerns in this final report. This has been done in a way to ensure NCARA are comfortable with what has been written, without compromising the independent findings of the report. The synthesis report was accepted by NCARA and they will present it to NSW Government.

Finalised site reports for Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly: Local Decision Making, North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest, Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest, Tamworth Opportunity Hub and Campbelltown Opportunity Hub, including communities' feedback, have been presented to members or nominated representatives of Aboriginal communities involved in the evaluation. Each report has been accepted and will be provided to Aboriginal Affairs NSW (on 30 June 2018) and will then be presented formally to the Minister on 15 August 2018.

6.2 Direction of next conversations – Stage 2

There are two more stages to the evaluation:

- Stage 2, from July 2018 to June 2021, will identify changes experienced by communities, outcomes and make recommendations for improving the initiatives.
- Stage 3, from July 2021 to June 2024, will assess the contribution the initiative has made in meeting long-term goals and make recommendations for improving the initiative.

The direction of the next Stage of the evaluation will be guided by the *OCHRE* Evaluation Steering Committee and may consider:

- Community feedback and action on the Stage 1 report.
- The report of the NSW Ombudsman.
- Any feedback from Aboriginal Affairs NSW and the NSW Ombudsman.
- Best practice for conducting inclusive and community-controlled research.

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Appendix A About *OCHRE*

OCHRE (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment) is a community-focused plan for Aboriginal people in NSW. *OCHRE* was developed by the NSW Government in response to conversations with over 2,700 Aboriginal people in NSW who identified Aboriginal language and culture, education and employment, and accountability as priorities for Aboriginal communities.

OCHRE includes a number of different programs and supports – with four components subject to this evaluation (marked in **bold***):

- **Connected Communities** where schools work in partnership with Aboriginal leaders in the local community to improve education outcomes for young Aboriginal people
- **Opportunity Hubs*** which provide young Aboriginal people with clear pathways and incentives to stay at school and transition into employment, training or further education
- **Industry Based Agreements*** (supplemented with Regional Based Agreements to be implemented through Local Decision Making sites) with industry to support Aboriginal employment and enterprise
- **Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests*** to revitalise and maintain languages as an integral part of culture and identity
- **Local Decision Making*** where Aboriginal communities are given a progressively bigger say in what services are delivered in their communities, and how they are delivered.
- An **Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework** that drives the long-term and sustainable economic prosperity of Aboriginal people and their communities across NSW
- A **Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Programs)** to improve transparency and accountability in the provision of services to Aboriginal communities and the outcomes they deliver.

The overall objective of *OCHRE* is to transform the NSW Government's relationship with Aboriginal communities in NSW, allowing Aboriginal communities to increase ownership of the policies and programs that affect them, and to ensure that government services are coordinated and effective.

The aims of *OCHRE* are to:

- Teach more Aboriginal language and culture to build people's pride and identity
- Support more Aboriginal students to stay at school
- Support more Aboriginal young people to get fulfilling and sustainable jobs

- Grow local Aboriginal leaders' and communities' capacity to drive their own solutions
- Focus on creating opportunities for economic empowerment
- Make both government and communities more accountable for the money they spend. (Aboriginal Affairs, 2013b: 3)

Evaluation is a key component of *OCHRE*, providing ongoing evidence to improve the effectiveness of *OCHRE* projects and outcomes into the future, and informing the NSW Government about the future expansion of *OCHRE*.

About Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests

Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests (Nests) are an initiative designed to revitalise and maintain languages as an integral part of culture and identity. '*OCHRE* recognises Aboriginal languages and cultures as a unique component of Australia's heritage. It is a fundamental element of Aboriginal culture which reaffirms Aboriginal identity, spirituality and connection to Country' (NSW Department of Education, 2018a).

> An Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest is a network of communities bound together by their connection to an Aboriginal language. The Nests bring communities together around their traditional languages and link to schools, TAFE NSW, universities and other community language programs and/or groups.
>
> Each Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest has a base school which receives funding each year for administrative support and to employ Aboriginal language tutors at schools within the Nest.
>
> Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests are designed to **provide a continuous learning pathway for Aboriginal students**. The language skills and knowledge of Aboriginal Language and Culture holders and speakers from local Aboriginal communities are critical to the continuing development and support of teaching and learning in the Nests. (emphasis added, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, n.d.)

NSW Government, in partnership with NSW AECG Inc. and the Centre for Aboriginal Languages Coordination and Development, identified locations in each of the identified language areas to implement the Nests. In doing so, they considered:

- The number of language speakers
- The availability of language teachers
- The availability of language resources
- The level of commitment and activity around language revitalisation within local schools
- The proximity to the resources, infrastructure and support available through local communities and regional NSW AECG Inc. networks, TAFEs, universities and schools. (Aboriginal Affairs, 2013b: 20)

The North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest was established in October 2013, Paakantji in April 2014, Gamilaraay/Yuwaalawaay/Yuwaalayaay in May 2014, and both Gumbaynggirr and Bundjalung in February 2014. For each Nest, a formal agreement was signed by the then Minister, Local and Regional Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, as well as representatives from communities, TAFE, relevant universities and schools. This has recently been extended by the *Aboriginal Languages Bill 2017* (Hansard, 2017); during the Government announcement, two satellite Nests were announced in the Moree and Kempsey areas, as well as additional funding.

Nests are funded by the NSW Government Department of Education; their implementation is being supported by NSW AECG Inc.. Nests are different to the Connected Communities program as they focus on Language and Culture across the life course, from early years to older generations, whereas Connected Communities targets early and school years.

Each Nest is aligned to a 'base school' which receives funding for administrative support and the employment of Aboriginal Language tutors for schools within the Nest area. The Nests provide continuous learning pathways for Aboriginal students by Aboriginal Language and Culture holders. The Nest teacher collaborates with schools, local Aboriginal Language holders and speakers, and supports the teaching and learning in the Nest.

Nest teachers develop Aboriginal Language Programs and supports the engagement and professional development of Aboriginal Language tutors. **Tutors are employed in accordance with the NSW Department of Education's policies and procedures**. The teaching and learning of Aboriginal Languages in schools is also supported by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) through a syllabus. Formal guidelines covering how the Nests work will be formally released in 2018. [14]

The NSW Department of Education, Aboriginal Education and Communities (AEC) is leading the implementation of the Nests in partnership with NSW AECG Inc. and local Aboriginal language and community groups. The Department identified three key features of governance:

- 'A state-wide Steering Committee, consisting of AEC and [NSW] AECG [Inc.] representatives
- Aboriginal Affairs NSW, conducting monitoring and evaluation
- Local Nest Reference Groups, with an elected chair.'[15]

Communication between the groups is coordinated by the AEC. Aboriginal Affairs NSW, part of Department of Education, compiles regular reports based on information provided by AEC as part of the overall *OCHRE* Accountability Structure.

From 2016, each Nest has a reference group which includes representation from NSW AECG Inc. (local, regional and State), the Department of Education's Aboriginal

[14] Source: Correspondence with the Department of Education.
[15] Source: Correspondence with Department of Education.

Education and Communities (AEC) Directorate, the Nest Teacher/Tutor, local Elders and community representatives. The AEC identified the purpose of the groups is to:

- 'Develop local engagement with and input into Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests.
- Ascertain local priorities for the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests.
- Facilitate coordination and development of local Language and Culture resources and processes for recovering, revoicing and repractising Aboriginal Language and Culture.
- Facilitate data collection and ongoing evaluation/performance measurements processes'.[16]

The Nests are not the only program available to schools – engagement in the program is at the discretion of the School Principal. Participating schools may also determine what Year students the program is available to. Non-participating schools may be (but not always) accessing other Language and Culture programs from other local providers at their discretion.

About Local Decision Making (and Regional IBAs)

Local Decision Making was developed during the work of the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, based on conversations with Aboriginal people, and has been further developed and reviewed with Local Decision Making Alliances. The program aims to 'fundamentally and positively change the relationship between Aboriginal communities and government. The program aims to enable Aboriginal communities to participate fully in decision making concerning service design and delivery'; ...'sovereignty and self-determination are a fundamental factor in generating sustained socio-economic development and wellbeing in Aboriginal communities' (Aboriginal Affairs, 2017, p 4). This approach recognises that governments also need to reform and develop capacity to enable this to happen.

Aboriginal Affairs NSW is the lead agency for Local Decision Making and provides support and coordination of the process. Other stakeholders are:

- The Regional Alliance, in establishing priorities and making decisions on behalf of the community
- NCARA, in providing advocacy and oversight
- The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, in championing Local Decision Making within government as well as overseeing the implementation of *OCHRE*
- NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, in managing cross-government change
- NSW Treasury, in supporting change and developing flexible funding arrangements
- Secretaries Board, in approving arrangements
- Other government agencies, in providing information and negotiating Accord.

[16]Source: Correspondence with Department of Education.

The purpose of Local Decision Making is to 'give Aboriginal community-based regional decision-making groups (regional alliances) an increased say in government service delivery', 'placing Aboriginal people at the centre of service design, planning and delivery' (Aboriginal Affairs, 2017: 5). The alliance enters into an agreement called the Accord that defines the relationship, identifies priorities for the region, as well as 'key actions to achieve desired outcomes, timeframes, resources, responsibilities and define what success will look like'. The Alliance's decision-making powers will increase over time but will exclude statutory regulation functions such as policing, justice, child protection and environmental regulation.

> The principles of self-determination are embedded in LDM, by the following:
>
> - Aboriginal people have the right to determine their own governance and decision-making structures in accordance with their customs, traditions and in the best interests of their community
> - Aboriginal people have the right to develop and maintain their own tradition, procedures and practices
> - Aboriginal people have the right to recognition and enforcement of any agreements they enter into with the government.
>
> (Aboriginal Affairs, 2017: 6).

Aboriginal Affairs NSW conducted an Expression of Interest process, aiming to pilot Local Decision Making in one urban, one remote, and one country location. The Expression of Interest process, advertised in Aboriginal media, the Aboriginal Affairs website, and notified to key Aboriginal stakeholders and community organisations, was open to new or existing Aboriginal regional partnerships (or alliances) representing more than one town or location within a region. The Expression of Interest was open between 3 July 2013 and closed on 25 September 2013. Interested organisations were asked to complete a form. Support was available in terms of information (online) and staff available to assist communities that wished to apply.

The expressions of interest were evaluated based on the sustainability, robustness and strength of the regional alliance. They had to have satisfy threshold criteria in terms of geographic scope, location (urban, country or remote), and provide informed consent. They were then assessed based on:

- Aboriginal community capacity
- NSW Government engagement
- Commonwealth Government engagement
- Local Government engagement.
- Demographic criteria such as population and disadvantage also informed the evaluation process.

The first sites announced on 4 December 2013 were:

- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (Far West)
- Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (Illawarra South East)
- Regional Aboriginal Development Alliance (Upper North Coast)

Due to high interest, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs expanded Local Decision Making on 8 September 2014 to:

- Barang Regional Alliance (Central Coast)
- Three Rivers Regional Assembly (Central West)

On 5 March 2015 a further site was added:

- Northern Region Aboriginal Alliance (New England North West).
- Finally, in September 2016, the Regional Aboriginal Development Alliance divided into two alliances due to their size, forming:
- Tribal Wave Regional Assembly (Lower North Coast).

The ambition is to have state-wide coverage, although this depends on whether communities want an Alliance in their areas. There are also other initiatives such as the Commonwealth Government's Empowered Communities operating in different locations.

Local Decision Making enables 'staged devolution of decision-making and accountability to the local level' (Aboriginal Affairs, 2017, p. 10). Local Decision Making is implemented through a number of steps:

- Establishment and start up
    - Government must be satisfied Alliance has governance capabilities
    - Alliance must be satisfied that government has institutional arrangements in place
    - This step includes development of the Accord negotiation process for the site
- Accord commencement
    - Both the Alliance and NSW Government demonstrate their readiness for the Accord negotiations through completing an Accord Readiness Self-Assessment document
    - Priorities are identified and agreed through a Statement of Claim identifying priorities, desired outcomes, what should change, and what actions are needed to make that change happen
    - Lead negotiators nominated, data assembled

- Phase 1 (Advisory delegation)
    - Accord negotiated to establish long-term goals, activities and resources, targets and how they will be measured, responsibilities, governance and capacity needs, and the length of the agreement and review process.
    - Phase 1 Accord agreed
- Phase 2 (Planning Delegation)
    - Regional Alliances become Boards of Management
    - Phase 2 Accord negotiated to establish funding arrangements through Boards of Management
    - Phase 2 Accord agreed
- Phase 3 (Implementation Delegation)
    - Boards of Management manage agreed government resources/services
    - Regional alliances progress through the steps in their own time. Each of the phases is presented in detail in Appendix A.
- Local Decision Making Funding Agreements have increased in value over time and provide resources to support each Alliance in establishing Local Decision Making:
- 2013-2014 Funding Agreement
    - Year 1: $47,000 (2013/2014)
- 2014-2016 Funding Agreement
    - Year 2: $68,000, with an additional payment of $20,000
    - Year 3: $79,000, with an additional payment of $21,000
- 2016-2019 Funding Agreement
    - Year 4: $79,000, with an additional payment of $35,000
    - Year 5: $79,000
    - Year 6: $79,000

Funds must be spent on:

- Organisational support and governance
- Talking with community (consultation) and facilitation
- Capacity strengthening
- Accord activities (negotiating or implementing the Accord)

In addition to financial support, Aboriginal Affairs NSW seconds regional officers to the alliances to provide support and build capacity (if required).

In 2017, Aboriginal Affairs developed a minimum dataset for Local Decision Making based on data collected by the Alliances, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, and Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The minimum data set will include:

- Details of the Alliance
- The priorities of each Alliance
- The details of the different meetings that are part of the process, including attendees (and their travel time) and what was discussed
- The number of disputes reported
- Details of government participants

Aboriginal Affairs NSW is looking to capture the information for work completed to date. Data collected will be able to track progress and highlight achievements, as well as improve processes and inform decision making. This data is not currently available.

State-wide oversight is provided by:

- The Local Decision Making Strategic Implementation - made up of Department of Premier and Cabinet NSW, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, along with NSW Government Lead Negotiators for each site
- In addition, the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA), comprising of chairs of each alliance, among other things provide support for participating and emerging regional alliances. NCARA also advocate on issues that relate to application of policy, program delivery and funding for Aboriginal peoples regarding basic essential services; promote discussion and consider common issues; strategically plan needs of Aboriginal communities; and support the aspirations and achievements of regions.

Local Decision Making site governance is provided by:

- An Accord Task Group (name varies by site), comprising agency lead negotiators, the NSW Government lead negotiator, and alliance members.

Each Local Decision Making site has its own governance arrangements in place, including:

- Terms of reference, charter of governance or constitution
- Policy and operating procedures
- Documentation on meeting attendance, agenda items, minutes, business/actions arising, decisions reached, etc.

About Opportunity Hubs

Opportunity Hubs provide young Aboriginal people with clear pathways and incentives to stay at school and transition into employment, training or further education.

> Opportunity Hubs aim to provide Aboriginal young people with the confidence and knowledge to follow a supported pathway between secondary school and further education and/or employment. To achieve this outcome, Opportunity

> Hubs are building partnerships between schools, employers, education and training providers and the local community to coordinate and match employment, training and further education opportunities to individual students' aspirations.
>
> Non-government Opportunity Hub service providers have been contracted to coordinate and broker links with schools, employers, training providers, support services and Aboriginal communities, to deliver improved outcomes for Aboriginal young people, including increased:
>
> - Participation and retention at school
> - Aspiration and expectation of career pathways for Aboriginal students
> - Post-school enrolment in further education and training, and
> - Placement in sustainable jobs. (Aboriginal Affairs website[17])

Opportunity Hubs are funded by the NSW Government; they were established and are managed by Training Services NSW (part of NSW Department of Industry) due to their experience in delivering similar pathway programs across the state and their work in Aboriginal employment and training. While other pathway programs look at re-engaging young people in education or employment, Opportunity Hubs focus on retaining young people in school and directing them towards further education or employment through clear pathways. The Opportunity Hub model was developed in consultation with community members specifically for *OCHRE*, drawing on experience of career education and vocational education placement programs funded by both Commonwealth and State agencies.

The four pilot areas were established to fit within the allocated funding.

While the initiative has overall objectives, and there are expectations of basic activities the Opportunity Hub delivers, how each Hub meets the objectives is not prescribed and is determined locally based on need. The program was conceived as something where '*the organisations managing it would be outside the school reaching in'* where the organisation '*had the relationships with the community and with industry and were reaching into the schools'*. The program is available to students in government, Catholic and independent schools. However, as one government stakeholder noted:

> It became a challenge for each of the service providers to get out, identify the schools they need to work with, and to ensure their active participation.

Opportunity Hubs were initially established in four locations: Upper Hunter, Campbelltown, Dubbo and Tamworth. The government has recently announced the expansion of Opportunity Hubs as part of the Western Sydney City deal – creating a new Opportunity Hub created in Liverpool and an expansion of the Campbelltown Opportunity Hub.[18]

[17] See Economic Prosperity https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/policy-reform/economic-prosperity/opportunity-hubs
[18] See https://cities.infrastructure.gov.au/22446/documents/72483

This report belongs to members of NCARA.

Opportunity Hubs operate within the *OCHRE* Accountability Structure. Twice a year, Training Services NSW convenes a meeting attended by all four Hub operators. Training Services NSW manages the contracts of Opportunity Hubs.

Each Hub has slightly different governance structure depending on their individual circumstances.

Appendix B Recommendations from *OCHRE* sites in the evaluation

Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly Local Decision Making

Recommendations for NSW Government

Theme	Recommendation
Accord Process – Accountability of service providers	• Ensure all service providers work with the Accord process and Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA), including engaging with Community Working Parties (CWPs) at the local level. • Put in place Local Accords or other forms of agreement to ensure that all agencies and service providers attend CWP meetings and to commit services to meeting the needs of local Aboriginal communities. Make attendance at CWPs a contractual requirement for all local service providers.
Communication	• Share Local Decision Making (LDM) process and outcomes more widely with local communities. Clarify the role of MPRA and CWPs in that process. • Communicate and promote LDM priorities and responsibilities under the Accord more widely to local communities. • Provide additional resources – for communication and secretariat support of volunteer members of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. • Increase communications between the MPRA and local communities and organisations to provide information and feedback.
Continuing Professional Development in Cultural competency Aboriginal Cultural competence standards in government services	• NSW Government to continue to improve cultural competence across all departments and services. • All service providers (government and non-government) to continue to develop cultural competence, particularly at a local level.
Leadership – Young Leaders Program	• Provide more structural resources to increase the number of young people accessing the Aboriginal Young Leaders Program.

Theme	Recommendation
	• Provide more resources to expand Young Leaders Coordinators and Project Officer positions to support the Young Leaders Program. • Design and implement a succession plan for Young Leaders – as young leaders age, provide succession planning for the next generation of young leaders.
Representation and inclusion	• Fully engage other Aboriginal representative structures such as NSW AECG Inc., ACCHOs, etc. in the process of LDM.
Representation	• Increase resources and support for all 16 member communities to ensure local participation at the regional level through the MPRA and to enable members to feed back to CWPs. • Provide greater transparency in processes for representation at MPRA. • LDM is not 'local' but regional decision making. It is therefore important that the LDM label is changed to something more representative of the actual model.
Representation and inclusion of NSW Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs)	• Improve relationships between CWPs, MPRA and LALCs. • Better align roles, responsibilities and accountability structures of LDM and LALCs. • Explore options for greater inclusion of LALCs in LDM and MPRA. • Provide mechanisms for communication and representation for LALCs with Aboriginal Affairs NSW at the state level.
Representation and inclusion of local issues	• Provide more time, processes and resources for members to discuss issues with the CWPs and local communities prior to making decisions at the Regional Assembly.
Resources	• Provide better support (financial and administrative) to ensure MPRA LDM and Accords are discussed with all 16 member communities. • Resource the LDM to match the size and diversity of the Murdi Paaki region and the Accord priorities.
Service System – capacity building connected services	• Link local services with local Aboriginal services; for example, train and employ local Aboriginal people to carry out repairs and maintenance on local housing.

Theme	Recommendation
	• Ensure a commitment by all NSW Government services to work with the Assembly to ensure Aboriginal community priorities are addressed.
Service System – connected and responsive	• All levels of government and other service providers to plan and operate a more connected and responsive service system. • All relevant agencies and service providers to attend and participate in CWP meetings as part of their working towards building a connected service system that is responsive to the self-determined needs of local Aboriginal peoples.
Service System – evaluation	• Ensure thorough monitoring and evaluation of services, including service needs and gaps, using local Aboriginal determined indicators.

Campbelltown Opportunity Hub

Recommendations for NSW Government

Theme	Recommendation
Tendering process for *OCHRE* program contracts	• Change the tendering process for *OCHRE* programs to a collaborative capacity building and co-design approach to program operation and commissioning rather than a competitive process.
Governance - Aboriginal ownership and determination of *OCHRE* Programs	• Explore and include options for greater Aboriginal participation and capacity in the operations of the Campbelltown Opportunity Hub and long-term sustainability of the Hub.
Capacity building of Aboriginal organisations	• Provide capacity building support and resources to local Aboriginal organisations.
Governance- clarity on government lines of responsibility	• Improve clarity regarding government lines of responsibility and decision-making about the Opportunity Hub.
Sustainability of the Hub	• Ensure commitment to financial certainty of the Hub for long-term planning. • Secure long-term funding arrangements.
Continuing Professional Development and career pathway support for Aboriginal staff	• Establish career pathways and continuing professional development for Aboriginal staff within the Hub.
Expand the access to the Hub	• Identify and activate strategies to ensure equitable access for all local Aboriginal young people to participate in Campbelltown Opportunity Hub programs and activities. • Increase transport support and provision for students to attend Hub activities. • The Hub would like to provide services to other nearby schools outside the Campbelltown areas where they have relationships and have identified a need. • Hub area boundaries should respond to need and be flexible. • Schools with identified needs outside the designated Campbelltown region should be able to access the Hub.
Need to address wider and systemic barriers of access	• Address the wider barriers to employment in the Campbelltown area, including providing transport

Theme	Recommendation
	options and support for young Aboriginal people in Campbelltown trying to access work and education. • TAFE to establish more free trainee programs and short courses.
Transport	• Increase transport options and support for participants to attend Hub activities, education opportunities and connected services.
Training and education pathways for Aboriginal youth in Campbelltown	• Support local employers to work with young Aboriginal people and provide local opportunities. • Establish, support and resource local employment, training and education pathways in the Campbelltown local areas.
Inclusion of Aboriginal Cultural and Wellbeing outcome indicators into HUB planning and reporting	• Increase programs and activities that focus and support Aboriginal wellbeing, culture and knowledge programs with Aboriginal Elders. • Data should be expanded to address areas such as family relationships, peer relationships, self-esteem and connection to country.
Include long-term outcome indicators into Hub planning and reporting	• Follow up Hub participants in relation to long-term as well as short-term outcomes.

Recommendations for Campbelltown Opportunity Hub programs:

Theme	Recommendation
Expand access to the Hub	• Increase presence in schools, more programs, more often. • Provide weekend activities and programs for children and young people.
Expand range of support services provided by the Hub	• Maintain an understanding and recognition that for many Aboriginal students, many factors need to be addressed that effect their opportunities for education and employment. • Explore options and mechanisms for the Hub to either provide broader services that include counselling and wellbeing support or to develop MOU s or partnerships for referrals and outreach youth services with primary health providers such

Theme	Recommendation
	as the Aboriginal Medical Service, Primary Health Network, Local Health District and headspace. • Provide more Aboriginal social and cultural programs. • Provide more education and career pathways for local Aboriginal young people.
Include service co-ordination	• Need to include service and connected referral pathways development into Hub support for participants. • Explore options as to best staff/site/organisation to provide this. • Most of the young people at the Hub have multiple issues and or needs including family, mental health and substance issues and these needs are integral to Hub support for participants.
Need to incorporate and follow local social and cultural Aboriginal protocols	• Develop a cultural competency framework for all organisations working with the Hub incorporate.

Tamworth Opportunity Hub

Recommendations for NSW Government

Theme	Recommendation
Sustainability	• Increase resource provision from NSW Government. • Resource sustainable and effective staffing levels for the Hub. Staff changes can be very disruptive to the program and to the progress and support of individual students at the Hub. • Identify corporate/business partnerships that could support expanded range of Hub programs.
Role and value of community volunteers to the Hub	• Volunteers are important to the success of Hub programs and their contribution needs to be specifically identified and reflected in the evaluation. • Give official recognition to volunteers and provide more resources to support and train them.
Professional career and training support	• Training Services NSW and NSW Department of Industry to increase training and professional development of Opportunity Hub employees. • Aboriginal Affairs NSW to provide more support and skill development for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal school staff.
Stakeholder engagement	• Government to engage and work more with Aboriginal people, communities and Aboriginal organisations to respond to their identified needs.
Engagement with NSW Government and NSW Government agencies	• Improve, expand and require engagement with the Hub from NSW Government departments other than Aboriginal Affairs NSW – for example, FACS, Juvenile Justice, Local Health Districts (LHDs), Primary Health providers and networks, NSW Department of Education – to support young Aboriginal people.
Access to Tamworth Opportunity Hub programs	• Involve the Regional Director of Education in the Steering Group to facilitate the engagement of more schools in the Tamworth Opportunity Hub. • Increase access to programs by including more schools in the area surrounding Tamworth. • Identify opportunities and mechanisms to increase the number of local schools involved in the program.

Theme	Recommendation
	• Expand the capacity of the Tamworth Opportunity Hub to work with more local schools. • Include young people who have left school and young people who are disengaged from school as eligible participants in Hub programs.
Range of activities conducted by the Hub	• Support increased staff numbers to provide more activities in the community, including one-to-one time with Hub staff.
Promotion of the Hub	• Share information about the Opportunity Hub more widely across the Tamworth region, and with services working with young people.
Data collection and reporting	• Improve data collection (without placing additional administrative burden on Opportunity Hub staff). • Record peoples' stories in visual formats to present to others. • Start capturing individual data earlier, not just from Year 9 but from Year 5 or the moment of first engagement. • Track outcomes over the long-term. • Capture wider Hub activity data and demonstrate student engagement, community involvement and connection to culture. • Improve reporting mechanisms to capture the relationships and conversations. • Improve the reporting and evaluation mechanisms to adequately and meaningfully describe what happens at the Hub and include individual and community capacity outcomes.
Community determined measures of success	• Change reporting to reflect community measures for the success of the Hub. • Measure to include: • Level and type of Aboriginal community involvement. • Level and number of students engagements – identify cohorts. • Connection to Culture. • Specifically identify and include wellbeing indicator outcomes such as building self-esteem and cultural identity into reporting and evaluations.

Theme	Recommendation
Tendering process	• Change and improve the tendering process to provide long-term security to the Tamworth Opportunity Hub and Tamworth Aboriginal community members. • Make tendering more collaborative between government and Aboriginal community members and organisations, focusing on developmental and capacity support for Aboriginal inclusion.

Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest

Recommendations for NSW Government

Themes	Recommendations
Implementation of the Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest (the Nest)	• Implementation should begin with developing relationships and learning from existing programs that teach Aboriginal Languages and Culture run by Aboriginal organisations. • Aboriginal organisations should be funded to do Language and Culture work in the community and then go into schools. • Schools and communities need information and support during the implementation of the Nest, including improved communications about how the Nest will operate and the governance structure of the Nest. • Ensure staff consistency during the implementation stage. • Policy decision-makers (in the Department of Education and Aboriginal Affairs NSW) come together to prioritise and support teaching Aboriginal Languages and Cultures in schools – and not rely on local Aboriginal peoples to fight for inclusion. • Aboriginal Community members and school stakeholders would like more information about the Nest, how it is organised, how decisions are made and how the Nest operates in schools. Including opportunities for ongoing communication with and input from members of Aboriginal communities.
Aboriginal cultural conflicts with the appropriateness of locating a Nest in NSW School environment	• Include mechanisms to ensure that Gumbaynggirr peoples and community members should have more input into the design and management of the Nest. • Aboriginal Language and Culture classes should be based on Aboriginal traditional ways of teaching and learning - focus on oral not a written language. • Build cultural respect and cultural acceptability of Nest programs through greater inclusion of Gumbaynggirr Elders into content and teaching.
NSW Government support for existing Aboriginal organisations to provide activities and content for the Nest	• NSW Government to provide more resources and funding to existing Aboriginal organisations that include Muurrbay and Yarrawarra Cultural Centre.

Themes	Recommendations
Access to the Nest is not available for all Aboriginal people in the region	• Opportunities to learn Gumbaynggirr Language should be prioritised for young Aboriginal peoples in the region. • The broader Gumbaynggirr community should be able to access resources and classes provided. Classes should be available across all schools and all years, not only for some children in some government schools. • There need to be improved pathways for members of Aboriginal communities to learn Language and Culture and continue to build knowledge.
More Aboriginal community input into Nest programs and activities	• Gumbaynggirr communities would like more input into the classes including ensuring Aboriginal methods of learning and teaching are the priority and that Gumbaynggirr teachers should be approved by Gumbaynggirr communities. • Reference group could include more community members, including those from different organisations and hold their meetings across the Nest region.
Adequate and sustainable resourcing of the Nest	• Nest is currently under-resourced and need an increased budget so that schools do not have to use their funding to ensure Nest classes operate. This would ensure secure teaching hours. • The Nest needs to be better resourced and funded including staff support, training and job security. This includes teacher training WITHIN the community and support for ongoing Gumbaynggirr Language development. • More learning and teaching resources, training and support for Gumbaynggirr teachers – including support for Gumbaynggirr Elders to be allowed into schools to teach. • Schools need to be able to access other Gumbaynggirr Tutors to ensure Gumbaynggirr Language classes have stability. Ideally Tutors would be on continuing contracts rather than being casual employees.
Number of Language classes available	• There needs to be an increased number of classes offered- The current class once a week is not enough to learn language. • Schools should be resourced to receive more than 3 hours of Aboriginal Language teaching each week. • Aboriginal Language teaching should be part of the core curriculum not an added extra.

Themes	Recommendations
	• Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture should be part of the pre-school curriculum.
Education and training of Nest Teachers and tutors	• There needs to be supported professional education and training to develop tutors and to increase the number of Gumbaynggirr Language teachers. • Increased funding and support for developing Gumbaynggirr Language teachers' knowledge and capacity, including professional development. • Nest Tutors and Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) should have a resource kit. • Nest Tutors should be encouraged to share their resources, experiences, and have access to peer support.
Need for improved communications	• Improve the communications between teachers, tutors and schools. • Improve communications between the Nest and Aboriginal communities.
Governance	• Clarify the governance structures, decision making processes and accountability mechanisms, and processes of the Nest including the roles of the Steering Group, NSW Department of Education, NSW AECG Inc. and Aboriginal Affairs NSW. There needs to be a program protocol which sets out in detail the structures and processes for governing the Nest.

North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest

Recommendations for NSW Government

Theme	Recommendations
Sustainability – long-term funding	• Provision of secure and long-term funding for the North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest (the Nest). • Establish a Wiradjuri Language and Culture Centre in the north west Wiradjuri region in the long-term.
Continuing Professional Development	• Expand funding and opportunities for ongoing training, information sharing and resource development for Wiradjuri teachers and tutors. This would include opportunities for coordinators and teachers to access additional funding for mentoring and support for tutors.
Sustainability – employment security	• Provide ongoing funding to ensure employment security for Wiradjuri Language teachers and tutors – not casual employment for 3 hours a week.
Access to Nest programs	• Support School Principals in the region to include the teaching and learning of Wiradjuri Language and Culture in their schools. • Provide more support for the teaching and learning of Aboriginal language across all Government Schools, including Aboriginal young people in Juvenile Justice custodial institutions, and non-government school sectors.
Community role in decision making	• Understand the complexity of local Aboriginal cultures and provide opportunities for Aboriginal communities' active engagement in decision-making.
Data provision	• Provide data for stakeholders – numbers and stages of children learning an Aboriginal language.
Governance	• Governance structures and processes for the Nest should be clear and should reflect community ownership of the Nest.

Recommendations relevant to Schools/Department of Education:

Theme	Recommendations
Inclusion of local Aboriginal language as core curriculum for all students	• Encourage local Principals to make local decisions to include the North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest as part of their responsibility to NSW Government policies regarding the teaching and learning of Aboriginal languages and cultures.

Theme	Recommendations
	• Include local Aboriginal Languages and Cultures as part of the core curriculum – not as something unique or 'add on'.
Culturally safe environments	• Develop a respectful and culturally safe environment for Aboriginal Language and Culture teachers, tutors and students in schools. Ensure all staff, Principals, teachers and general staff receive localised Aboriginal cultural competency and safety training. • Support Aboriginal Language and Culture teachers and tutors within schools and work with classroom teachers to understand the role of Aboriginal Language and Culture teachers and tutors and how the North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest program works in Key Learning Areas and across all stages of the curriculum. • Ensure relevant local Aboriginal protocols are identified and followed – who can teach Aboriginal language and culture?
Expansion of Aboriginal Language and Cultural Activities-teaching on Country	• Encourage participation by broader Aboriginal communities in schools, especially in Aboriginal Language and Cultural activities. • Support 'on Country' learning.
Continuing Professional Development	• Provide and support continuing professional development, education and training pathways and opportunities for Aboriginal Language and Culture teachers and tutors. • Aboriginal Education Officers to work with Nest staff and develop formal mentoring structures.
Sustainable supply of Aboriginal Language teachers and tutors	• Develop an online shared resource and register of available and casual teachers and tutors. This resource could be flexible and used by, and across other Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests.
Government policies included	• Government policies supporting the teaching of Aboriginal language and culture need to be reflected in local school actions.

Recommendations relevant to NSW AECG Inc.

Theme	Recommendations
Relationship and Communications with NSW AECG Inc.	• Improve liaison with NSW AECG Inc. to ensure the diversity in Aboriginal communities are represented – ensure the Nest Reference Group reflects this diverse representation and is not an additional level of governance.

Theme	Recommendations
Cultural Keeping Place	• Develop and implement a Cultural Keeping Place (fixed location) to support and resource the North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest – including digital platforms for sharing resources and the repatriation of important cultural objects and other artefacts.
Relationships to assist in community determined service and activity provision	• Maintain and support relationships in the participating communities. Ensure the North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest is providing what communities want.

Recommendations relevant to North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest coordinator, teachers and tutors

Theme	Recommendations
Stakeholder relationships	• Continue to build on strong community and school relationships and include all stakeholders in decision making where possible.
Aboriginal Cultural Diversity	• Continue to acknowledge the diversity of the region and work with other Aboriginal language groups.
Continuing Professional Development for tutors	• Tutors to participate in training opportunities to develop digital resources and technology skills. • Tutors to continue to take advantage and participate in any knowledge and information-sharing workshops.
Program Design	• Include more activities and programs.

This report belongs to members of NCARA.

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