

Working Towards Community Capacity Building Through the Arts:

**Researching art and cultural activities with
Aboriginal communities of the region
serviced by Outback Arts Inc.**

Commissioned by Outback Arts Inc.

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Executive Summary

In this report we researched Outback Arts Inc.'s Regional Indigenous Cultural Officer (RICO) contributions to the region serviced by the company, as a position created in response to a need to reflect the diversity of the region and acknowledge the fact that Aboriginal Australians have a distinct culture from the rest of the Australian population. We looked at what had been and could be achieved with Aboriginal communities of the region serviced by Outback Arts through arts and cultural activities in general and community cultural development (CCD) projects in particular.

The authors found that Outback Arts and many stakeholders believe in the value of arts and cultural activities in bringing about positive social and economic change. It is a belief that the revitalisation, maintenance and development of the arts and cultural practices of a community are the foundation for self-determination, improved social cohesion, education, employment and respect. It is thought that working with art and related activities is a way of creating economic benefits for the region and increasing career and employment opportunities through increased tourist activities and increased capacity for communities to harness public, business and community sector resources. A consequence of this is that these practices are also seen as providing a conduit for reconciliation with non-Aboriginal Australians.

The authors have also found that Outback Arts' CCD projects have a potential to strengthen and promote culture and validate what members of the local Aboriginal population do in order to address key priority areas such as low employment rates, poor housing quality, lack of access health services, higher health risk factors and low levels of access to formal education. It is clear, though, that Outback Arts' capacities to carry out CCD activities is constrained by how much funds are available, the level of support and understanding by external bodies and resources as well as what is actually feasible for one person.

Further, the authors have found that, overall, the RICO has been valuable and beneficial to Aboriginal people in the industry and has allowed greater local Aboriginal control. In the short period it has been created, has engaged and fostered participation with diverse elements of local communities and made some way towards establishing cultural, social and economic benefits. It has therefore made some direct and significant contributions to community capacity building that is meaningful to Aboriginal communities and represents a significant achievement towards local Aboriginal communities' renewal. By providing advice, creating opportunities for artists to exhibit their work and helping artists seek funding for their work and projects the RICO has elevated the status of Aboriginal Arts for local artists and provided pathways to further education for some people.

The position has the potential to affect change but economic rationalist pressures to reduce costs are an obstacle to realising this potential. The challenge is therefore to facilitate community capacity building efforts that require funds and time in order to implement strategies that enable a shift in mindset from people seeing themselves as objects affected by change to agents effecting change.

The concerns emerging here are to do with how to help Aboriginal people express their aspirations and needs and work towards self-determination using arts and cultural activities. Issues such as how to engage the various communities and get them to invest time and energy in such activities are real. Those issues and concerns can be addressed by establishing long-term relationships with individuals and communities, but it is important to note that this kind of work takes time and ongoing commitment from the organisation that chooses to bring about positive social and economic change to the communities they work with.

In view of these findings, the Centre for Popular Education, UTS, recommends that Outback Arts develop and sustain its RICO position and develop for its Aboriginal arts program a five to ten-year strategic vision based around the careful planning and evaluation of some major CCD projects.

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Introduction

Our research reports on ways in which art and related activities planned and organised by Outback Arts Inc.'s (Outback Arts) recently created Regional Indigenous Cultural Officer (RICO) have contributed to the renewal of Aboriginal communities in Bogan, Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar, Coonamble, Walgett and Warren shires.

The Centre for Popular Education, UTS, (the Centre) was commissioned by Outback Arts to review their capacities to carry out art and related activities in general and community cultural development (CCD) activities in particular with local Aboriginal communities and make recommendations for future directions and projects. In this report the Centre looks at the ways in which the RICO position has or could:

- make direct and significant contributions to community capacity building that is meaningful to Aboriginal communities;
- represent a significant efforts towards renewal of Aboriginal communities;
- engage and foster participation with diverse elements of local communities; and
- create cultural, social and economic benefits.

The data, for this review, was gathered through a review of literature, reports and other relevant materials as well as through interviews with selected stakeholders, individuals, groups and organisations. Twelve people were interviewed from Lightning Ridge, Brewarrina, Bourke, Coonamble, Dubbo, Nyngan and Walgett. This included two staff members of the local funding bodies (Orana Development and Employment council (DoTARS/ODEC) and Murdi Paaki ATSIIC), the RICO, the present and former Regional Arts Development Officers (RADO), a board member of Outback Arts, two local Aboriginal community workers, two local Aboriginal artists and two local CCD practitioners.

In the following text, we discuss the use of art and related activities with disadvantaged communities to strengthen and promote culture and validate what members of those communities do in order to address key priority areas such as low employment rates, poor housing quality, lack of access health services, higher health risk factors and low levels of access to formal education. We first sketch the state of such activities in parts of Far West NSW's Aboriginal communities. Then we outline the capacities and barriers to working towards community capacity building and renewal using arts and cultural development processes, and compare that with the position's achievements to date before making recommendations about possible future directions.

Understanding the place of arts in Aboriginal cultures

Aboriginal art is seen as the new flagship and symbolism of the whole Australian nation by people within the arts and tourism industries (Bell, 2002). It is also seen as offering some promise for the future economic development of Aboriginal people (Johnston, 1991 and Altman, 2003). This situation creates opportunities as well as a struggle for some Aboriginal people working in the art industry and/or participating in art and related activities mainly because of a different understanding of the place and importance of arts in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.

From traditional arts to community arts

The western distinction between arts and culture can prove to be problematic when working within an Aboriginal context. As Leuthold (1996, p.323) states, “[i]n contemporary Western culture we associate art with its commodity status and exhibition value”, while in most Aboriginal cultures art is still very much a receptacle or transmitter of culture as a way of life, it is “the creative process and production applied to expression of culture” (ATSIC, 1997, p.1) where culture is defined as “the way of living practised by people and communicated from generation to generation, as well as the expression of that way of life in material artistic form.” (ditto). As one interviewee stated “Arts is part of your Aboriginality.” Aboriginal art is ‘a living cultural expression’. For Aboriginal people, therefore, performing and visual arts is a means of retaining identity and expressing culture. Art is a way of communicating and a way of reclaiming culture.

We are mindful that the following definitions are broad generalisations, yet we consider them helpful in understanding that this distinction between art and culture requires most Aboriginal people to be cross-cultural and willing to work or operate within a western framework, which tends to disempower the community because it reasserts colonial cultural platforms (Bell, 2002).

Further, this different understanding of arts and cultural activities also brings up issues of quality and control of Aboriginal arts, and questions such as: What is good Aboriginal art? What to do about Aboriginal art made for tourists’ consumption? When is Aboriginal art appropriated? Is it more important to support the Aboriginal arts for Aboriginal economic development or for its cultural significance? Can the use of arts as a commodity be produced with government funding and therefore comply with government policy which could be seen as extending the culture of dependency and reliance on hand out? Is the development of an Aboriginal art industry an affirmation of Aboriginal practice or further dominance by non-Aboriginal culture? What is the role of the artist in these communities? etc. (Bell, 2002).

Though it is not the place for this report to address these questions, it is clear that these issues have an implication for the work Outback Arts carries out. For all the criticisms directed at the people at the head of the Aboriginal Art industry it is still an efficient way for people to tell their stories. Maybe the problem comes from wanting to develop and operate an Aboriginal Art industry in a cooperative way within a market economy. After all didn’t it develop out of a need expressed by Aboriginal people themselves? Further, Aboriginal artists have contributed to the development of the industry and made major decisions for themselves within it. They have not totally lacked control and capacity to produce quality art.

John Harvey (2000) suggests 3 types of art and related activities which Aboriginal communities engage in that involve community control and participation. These are traditional arts, cultural products and community arts. He defines traditional arts as activities that people take part in order to create, maintain and be part of culture; cultural products as the artefacts produced in exchange for money; and finally, community arts as new ways of exploring identity with outside expertise to facilitate the process.

Historically, the region's traditional art activities and cultural products have included line art, body piercing, sand art, rock painting and carving. Contemporary artforms have drawn on those traditional forms but diversified the stories and interpretations and use different media, including painting (mostly acrylic on canvas), as well as, though to a lesser extent, pottery, ceramics, watercolour, photography, video, CDs, digital art, carving, metal work and jewellery making. Further, Harvey (2000) argues, that, today, traditional arts are more and more seen as something that has a cost associated with it and needs an external impetus to happen.

In the context of the National and State Aboriginal arts industry

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnston, 1991) clearly made the connection between Aboriginal arts and Aboriginal people's economic development. The report was significant in defining arts and craft activities as one of a number of economic activities that offered some promise for the future economic development of Aboriginal people. Specifically, the report states that "[t]he income-generating potential of the arts industry is important, particularly to artists who reside in remote areas" (point 34.4.15). The report goes even further by emphasising that the support of the arts is more important to Aboriginal economic development than for its cultural significance (point 34.4.19).

It was not the 1st time this connection was made, but it set a benchmark for Commonwealth and State arts organisations. Indeed, Altman (2003) notes that "[i]n the last 30 years there has been a significant growth in the extend of Indigenous arts practice, much auspiced by the Commonwealth utilising a community-controlled arts organisational model" (p3). He finds, however, that this growth in the Aboriginal arts industry has not been mirrored by a growth in the socio-economic status of Aboriginal people in general.

At a national level the Australia Council for the Arts' National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board sets the principles and priorities for promoting and working with Aboriginal artists in a policy document (ATSIAB, nd). ATSIAB stresses the importance of respect (acknowledging connections between arts, culture, heritage, land, sea and customary law), authority (acknowledging that authority and self-determination are essential in relation to the arts), rights (to express spirituality, integrity and authority through the arts) and responsibilities and diversity (pluralism and diversity amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples). As the industry stands they see the priorities as the development of arts and industry of course, but also regional cultural development, broadcast media, multimedia and information technologies, cultural environmental tourism, national oversight, strategic coordination, communication and strategic promotion, distribution, promotion and market development, cultural heritage and cultural resource management, infrastructure and finally issues of copyright, intellectual property and moral rights.

At the State level, one of the NSW Government's key goals in its *Cultural Development Policy* (1995), revised 1999 as *Encouraging the Arts in Local Communities*, is to nurture Indigenous cultural expression in NSW by recognising, supporting and promoting it. To achieve this goal, the Indigenous Arts Reference Group (IARG), devised in 1998 a policy document entitled *Indigenous Arts Protocol:*

A Guide, which outlines principles, guidelines and a checklist for working with Aboriginal people in cultural development. This promotion and support of Indigenous arts and cultural activity is further supported by a NSW Ministry for the Arts policy and strategies document (NSW Ministry for the Arts, nd). This policy aims to introduce a more coordinated and strategic approach to Indigenous arts support and better address the needs, aspirations and priorities of Indigenous people in promoting their cultural heritage and expression. It intends to build on progress achieved so far to facilitate and improve communication and collaboration between Indigenous and other Australian artists and cultural organisations. This policy is informed by seven general principles.

1. An acknowledgment of the significance of Aboriginal Australia as the oldest living culture in the world.
2. An acknowledgment of the impact of colonisation on Indigenous people and their cultural heritage.
3. An acknowledgment that Indigenous culture is informed by the past, and the recognition that Indigenous cultural expression is a vital part of contemporary society.
4. A recognition of the respect due for the cultural diversity of Indigenous people.
5. Support for the principle of self-determination in setting cultural priorities and the adoption of appropriate cultural protocols in the public sector.
6. An acknowledgment of the role of the public sector - representing as it does the community as a whole - in supporting, maintaining and nurturing Indigenous cultural heritage and expression.
7. A recognition of the intellectual and moral rights of Indigenous people to their diverse cultural expressions.

Trindall (2003) in his review of the state of Aboriginal Arts in NSW found that even though there seems to be great strengths and opportunities for Aboriginal Arts there is still a deficit in regional development. He claims that this deficit is mostly due to the fact that there is very little understanding of what is required to develop the Aboriginal Arts sector, limited coordinated effort and a lack of structures in place outside of the metropolitan area towards this development. He also finds that there is a focus on the economic benefits of such development rather than on the spiritual and social.

Altman (2003) also highlights similar issues related to the Northern Territory Aboriginal arts industry that are relevant to the NSW situation. He finds that there is a need for increased professional development opportunities in arts and arts management for and by Aboriginal people, the need to attract and retain trained staff in relevant organizations, the need for a more equitable and sustainable funding model (on par with economic businesses and non-Aboriginal arts projects?), the need for a more coordinated approach between organisations and others such as tourism agencies for instance, the need to overcome funding insecurities, the need for support of other Aboriginal artforms besides visuals.

Some strategies suggested by NSW Ministry for the Arts (nd) for addressing these issues and implementing its policy include identifying and developing “opportunities for interaction and cross-fertilisation between art forms and between artists and groups of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people”, supporting “measures likely to

enhance the training, professional development and employment of Indigenous arts practitioners”, and improving “accommodation for Indigenous arts organisations”. Other strategies include increasing the number of trained workers in the rural and remote areas (Altman, 2001) and the implementation of a network of Indigenous arts development officers to “provide the links with funding employment and training for Indigenous artists” (Trindall, 2003, p.3).

CCD and Aboriginal cultures

Harvey (2000) states that since all 3 types of art defined above involve a certain level of community control and participation, they are compatible with CCD processes. Also, we’d argue also that it is further compatible with CCD practices because it uses art as a process rather than as a commodity. Similarly, many interviewees stated that CCD was a good and appropriate process for working with Aboriginal communities because their cultural practices are an ideal CCD practice, based on forming relationships and exchange and following the lines of communication or ‘protocols of engagement’. It is about reading the community and not being tied to time. With CCD processes the focus is back on ‘ordinary’ people.

For example, imagine a local community group choosing to invest funds in a community film project. Imagine finding and commissioning a film-maker who over a period of six to twelve months didn’t make a film about the history and future of the community, but instead collaborated with various stakeholder groups and supported them to make the film. Imagine a process where members of the Aboriginal community get an opportunity to work hands-on, researching, scripting, editing, acting, and dubbing in the making of part of the film. Likewise, shopkeepers, nurses, juvenile offenders might engage in a similar hands-on collaborative film-making process. Imagine the thinking and discussion that would have to go on among these people to research and make, not a documentary, but a film of artistic quality. It could be launched and shown in town and at other places. Imagine the pride and sense of achievement that might be generated by this.

In Australia, the field of practice that is CCD has been very closely associated with, though not solely defined by, the historical and political developments of the Australia Council for the Arts, the federal arts funding body. The term is used to cover a variety of practices ranging from resistance art or art for social change to site-specific art via community arts. This field of practice is usually characterised by a collaborative effort between a group of disadvantaged people and artists in making art. Generally speaking, this kind of work is borne out of an intention to intervene in a social issue with a desire to collaborate in making art or vice versa.

CCD practices are not a universal tool for empowerment or change, but this mostly structured and planned approach is very useful in engaging with people because it creates relationships built on positive aspects of people’s lives, rather than on negative aspects such as crises or the lack of opportunities and options. As one interviewee stated, art was now seen as “the door to access community”, a leveller allowing communication across boundaries as a common entry point.

The practices of CCD are generally inclusive, non-judgemental and encourage participants to put themselves forward in a positive way. These practices are a great medium for exploring possibilities or stretching the imagination of people towards an

ethical society or community and making meaning through community building (McConachie, 2001).

CCD practices include a number of processes and skills that allow art to be used for the benefit of a whole community, to fulfil collective aspirations in affirming or developing what their culture is. CCD practices provide a voice in defence of attitudes, sensibility and understanding of the world of a group of people who lack this opportunity of expression. It is about establishing a civil society, a sphere of participation, creating a connection, asserting control and redefining social truths about one's environment and the wider world. CCD practitioners and processes seek therefore to create opportunities for people to be actively rather than passively engaged by giving them the responsibility to research and devise capacity building strategies for themselves.

Capacities for implementing art and related activities in Aboriginal communities

It is clear that Outback Arts' capacities to carry out CCD activities is constrained by how much funds are available, the level of support and understanding by external bodies and resources as well as what is actually feasible for one person. Outback Arts and some stakeholders, however, believe in the value of such activities in bringing about positive social and economic change. They believe that the revitalisation, maintenance and development of the arts and cultural practices of a community are the foundation for self-determination, improved social cohesion, education, employment and respect. These practices also provide a conduit for Reconciliation with non-Aboriginal Australians. They believe that working with art and related activities is a way to create economic benefits for the region and increase career and employment opportunities through increased tourist activities and increased capacity for communities to harness public, business and community sector resources.

There is local support and understanding of Aboriginal Arts because it is seen as a legitimate business opportunity which brings economic benefits to the community, because "the tourists want to see indigenous art" (male interviewee). According to most people interviewed, participating in the arts or any creative activity is important because it helps tell a story and creates opportunities to express oneself. One interviewee stated that, "once indigenous people start, and find out they can do it, it becomes a very important part of their community and a source of pride because non-indigenous people admire it and it gives value to their culture. The benefits of developing such activities in the region were thought to include:

- Advocacy tool for a disadvantaged group of people to promote understanding, diversity and change
- Preservation of an important heritage
- Pathways to formal education and employment
- Addressing community and policy priorities
- Connecting across generations.

For individuals the benefits of participation and seeing their artwork on display included skills development, increased self-esteem, increased sense of pride and identity and connection to a culture. Therefore, it is an easy way for participants to get recognition and a positive feedback for something they've done. Ultimately, it helps

build a cohesive community by breaking down the barriers in a non-controversial and non-political way. Participation in the art is, therefore, seen as a flagship activity that is very relevant. But what are the capacities and barriers within and outside of the organisation to developing and supporting such activities with local Aboriginal communities?

Within Outback Arts

The RICO position is part of Outback Arts, a regional arts and cultural development organisation located in Coonamble. The organisation works to provide a regional overview of the arts, to advocate at a state and national level for the local arts, to generate and develop sustainable arts and cultural projects and activities relevant to the local communities, to assist with and facilitate touring performers and artists and to provide information and advice to artists, community groups and local government.

Outback Arts is jointly funded by NSW Ministry for the Arts and the seven shires of Bogan, Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar, Coonamble, Walgett and Warren. The position is currently further funded by Murdi Paaki ATSIC regional office, the Australia Council for the Arts and DoTARS/ODEC grants.

This RICO position is a recognised Aboriginal position. Though it was one of 3 similar positions in regional NSW (the other 2 being in Coffs Harbour and at a State level), it is today only one of a kind due to a lack of funding and policy support. The impetus for the creation of these positions was led in 1999 by the then State RICO and the 2 local RADOs. The position was created in response to a need to reflect the diversity of the region and acknowledge the fact that Aboriginal Australians have a distinct culture from the rest of the Australian population. The position's main focus is on Aboriginal matters at a regional level, including cultural maintenance and development and economic development. The current RICO was appointed in February 2001.

The RICO works closely with the RADO in promoting all degrees of arts in the region. The RICO position is, however, more hands-on, focusing on the delivery and running of activities on the ground rather than on policy and strategic development. Ultimately, the position aims to capitalise on opportunities that lead to and form artistic excellence and cultural identity. It aims to facilitate and help engage people, raise their awareness about the local arts market, encourage them to come forward and build their confidence to participate in it. This has meant working within existing artistic and cultural capacities, targeting people who already work as artists or those expressing interest in the arts and working within existing structures, to build local Aboriginal people's capacity to sustain and develop their communities through their own choices.

The position is integral to fostering and prioritising the development of the local Aboriginal communities through the arts. Its main challenge is to help Aboriginal people express their aspirations and needs and work towards self-determination using artistic activities. To that end the RICO's duties mostly revolve around developing marketing strategies to assist local Aboriginal artists and cultural groups and organisations more effectively promote and sell their work. This has meant employing, consulting and working with Aboriginal people to support their art and develop a tourism market for Aboriginal artists to make a living from. In the long run,

the RICO's work is about giving control to groups and individuals over the creative and related administrative processes. All of which are in line with the national and state recommendations reviewed in the section entitled.

On a daily basis, the RICO spends most of her time coordinating with artists and helping Aboriginal people make the most of existing opportunities. To this end the RICO works with regional and national institutions and organisations creating and strengthening regional strategies and links with galleries, stores and peak Aboriginal arts and cultural organisations, etc. The RICO also works with individuals and groups of established and emerging Aboriginal artists using community development and advocacy strategies such as skills development, mentorship, dissemination of information and advice.

Though the RICO position has only been established for a short period of 3 years, there has been some useful projects implemented as well as relationships and trust built. Overall, the RICO has been valuable and beneficial to Aboriginal people in the industry and has allowed greater local Aboriginal control. It has elevated the status of Aboriginal Arts for local artists and provided pathways to further education for some people.

Some of the RICO's main achievements include assisting artists in professional development; locating material for artists and preparation work; carrying out an audit of local artists; increasing local artists' interest in creating bodies of work; establishing the value of exhibiting; forging connections with the regional and state gallery; working with individuals from the different language groups; assisting local artists establish themselves in the marketplace; overcoming the cultural barriers; disseminating information about projects and ideas; creating a forum for artists and local Aboriginal people interested in the arts to discuss their needs; organising exhibitions; organising art and craft as well as arts administration workshops; seeking funding for local groups and individuals; and developing professional skills with other contemporary Aboriginal artists.

While the position has no explicit objectives to deliver CCD projects, its expected outcomes are to provide "opportunities to participate in arts and cultural initiatives that are appropriate to the needs of the region" which in effect is a mandate to carry out CCD activities. It was found, however, that the reality and expectation of that responsibility varies widely depending on interviewees' understanding of CCD. This is often, too, linked to their position in the community.

Some of the RICOs' achievements in the area of CCD include the Coonamble Wellbeing workshops; the Reconnect youth (visual art and weaponry making) project in Warren; a partnership with the Sydney University; and various project with local youth centres and schools (Gulargambone Central, St Brigid, Quambone Central, etc.) in printmaking, jewellery design and making, digital photography and visual arts.

Other resources

There has been a history of CCD activity in the region. But it has been characterised mostly by one off projects that range from cultural awareness or protocols programs to cultural maintenance projects with only a few focusing on social change. In the recent past there have been some projects such as the Teenage Roadshow (Britton,

nd) and the Bush Picture (Anon, 1993). Only recently have many more local organisations been using art as the primary entry point for intervention and as a vehicle for their core activities (Brewarrina's Granny Patrol, the CDEP Arts Program, Bre-Images, Gulli Gania TAFE arts program, Re-Connect program, Muda Aboriginal Coop, the Brewarrina cultural museum though currently closed because of poor management capacity, local health promotion sector, JPET, The Youth Centre, Families First, Women's group, Men's group). There are today more possibilities because there have been recent precedents in using CCD as a way of building community at a local level (e.g. BIG hART, Brewarrina Circus Skills Program) as well as a State level (e.g. State initiatives and policy). This represents a profound difference from the more traditional way of promoting engagement with the arts.

With a history of CCD activity there is understanding in the region of the concepts and processes involved in CCD work. But because most of the projects have been only temporary and dictated by one individual that will come and go with no long-term commitment to the region and its communities it means that there might be a lack of trust from Aboriginal people for institutions

There is an understanding of CCD by local institutions and government bodies such as local government authorities, youth centres and the local Community Working Party (which operates like the council for Aboriginal people and represent a valuable access to community consultation and community leadership within the region). Similarly, there is an understanding and support by local communities for this kind of work because it uses culture as an entry point.

From the main local funding bodies' perspective, ATSIC and DoTARS/ODEC, CCD is not seen as the sole responsibility of the RICO. Rather, it is seen as mostly the responsibility of local elders. The RICO's main responsibility is thought to be about providing advice, marketing opportunities for the local Aboriginal artists which therefore has an emphasis on working with a particular community rather than on generating a particular product or establishing a particular process. The RICO is only, therefore, there to provide a support mechanism (for instance translating the cultural differences between the place of arts in the wider Australian culture and that in the local Aboriginal communities) of which CCD is an underpinning strategy.

Interviewees' definitions of CCD ranged from using arts and cultural processes to respond to communities, address social equity, help people and communities make local decisions and develop communities (organisations as well as individuals), using a bottom up approach, through to social entrepreneurship activities.

Some interviewees, though, thought that there was some confusion between CCD, community development and art. Some saw them as distinct with CCD being about using culture, community development about service delivery and government bodies working together and art focusing on creativity and developing innovative ways to express ones' self. Others saw them as the same and thought that this difference stemmed from a divide between CCD theory and practice of the more innovative contemporary trend and CCD practice in rural and remote communities. In any case this has meant that the spectrum of CCD activities in the region varies from at the one end supporting individuals in promoting their artwork through marketing and

professional development and at the other supporting non-artists express their issues and desires through arts and craft workshops.

Local workers and artists report that there is lots of local talent and many local Aboriginal people engaged in artwork or interested in participating in creative processes in general. As a worker stated “everyone wants to participate in everything”. Yet, other interviewees, suggested obstacles to people engaging in CCD activities were due to the fact that a lot of projects had been brought in in the past but not sustained due to a lack of artists, funding, planning, infrastructure, etc. required for this kind of work.

Interviewees also stated that there was no clear understanding in the local Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal communities of the benefits of taking part in such activities. Engaging in art and related activities has an economic benefit in terms of getting people on a pathway to further and/or higher (formal) education, giving them better employment opportunities or providing them with an income. However it also has a great potential in terms of community renewal. The challenge is working to bringing about collective change with people who feel relatively powerless to influence change. One interviewee regretted that people only saw it as a way to an end or “something that replaces the dole”. For instance, several interviewees stated that CDEP art programs were seen as an alternative job, something to aspire to as a career path. The challenge is, therefore, in engaging the various communities, getting them to invest time and energy in CCD activities.

There is support for particular artforms or art and related activities from different funding bodies such as Australia Council’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board (ATSIAB), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSIC), NSW Department of Education (DET), Juvenile Justice, Attorney General, NSW Ministry for the Arts, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Land Councils, etc. There is support from funding organisations such as DoTARS/ODEC because it represents a great opportunity to add value to their work and helps them address issues of cultural employment and engagement through a wide range of activities.

Though the employment rates are low, many Aboriginal people and groups are involved in some work for the dole scheme through the local Community Development Employment Programs (CDEP) or in some type of arts and cultural activity, such as dancing, writing, music, visual arts, as a way of supplementing their income and/or as a way of preserving culture (Mermott & Moran, 2001).

Though Outback Arts aimed for the RICO position to be financially self-sustainable within the first 3 years, this has proven impossible to achieve. Because of pressures to reduce costs at all levels of Government, there is only a small level of funding for cultural work. This is an important issue that needs to be addressed by changes in State and Federal policy.

To date, most of the funding has only covered the cost of wages. It has been problematic securing funds for operational costs. It is therefore difficult to be supporting artists and initiating projects and activities when local organisations and individuals have had to compete for those small funds. It seems, though, that partnerships have been an effective strategy for dealing with this situation. There are

partnerships with schools, youth services, health services, clubs, TAFE colleges, correctional centres, Women's Safe Houses, Keeping Places, community radio stations, Shire Councils, Community Working Parties, Museums, local Aboriginal Land Councils and CDEP.

Future directions & recommendations

Outback Arts sees CCD as integral to and a long-term goal of the RICO's duties because it is integral to capacity building and an effective strategy for addressing social inequity and injustice. It is important, therefore, that Outback Arts maintain the RICO position and develop a five to ten-year strategic vision for Aboriginal arts and cultural development as opposed to a short-term management plan. This would help the organisation better meet its outcome of doing community capacity building through the arts. A feature of this long-term plan is to develop a programmatic approach based around some major CCD projects.

Community capacity building approaches offer an alternative to other approaches that remain dominant and popular in community or cultural development and planning strategies. Such alternative strategies might include Aboriginal community members working with local arts workers using community cultural development processes to engage with different groups in the community and help express their views about a community's history and future.

Community capacity building strategies are important because they have the potential to directly address people's levels of efficacy; i.e. help people feel more able and powerful to make changes. In a community capacity building approach people are seen as having talents, resources, aspirations that are positive. Community capacity building places value not just on hard skills and knowledge but also on 'soft' attributes that fall more in the realm of qualities and attitudes that shouldn't be taken for granted. They can be nurtured and can be learnt. And they are a foundation for any efforts in community development and renewal.

To facilitate community capacity building efforts is complex and difficult. The strategies used are shaped by an assumption that the deepest challenge in community capacity building is to bring about a change in mindset. This shift of mindset from people seeing themselves as objects affected by change to agents effecting change is the greatest challenge in community capacity building.

Shifting focus and strategy

This new vision requires a shift from providing support and advice to Aboriginal artists to encouraging full engagement and participation. This different approach means using different strategies, in particular the implementation of CCD strategies across artforms through a sustainable program rather than one-off projects. This shift would therefore help Outback Arts establish itself as a unique organisation which not only promotes arts in rural areas and support local projects, but also as one working towards Aboriginal empowerment and accountability. This is a challenge, but would help Outback Arts address key issues as outlined in the RICO's workplan and bring about social and economic change within Aboriginal communities in a more dynamic and strategic way.

A shift in mindset is required from developing marketing skills in individual Aboriginal Artists to enabling the most innovative local Aboriginal arts and cultural development that leads the way towards community renewal amongst local Aboriginal communities. One of the implications of this shift means changing the emphasis of the RICO's main duties from marketing and promotion strategies to CCD strategies and shifting the duties from regional promoter of Aboriginal arts to cultural facilitator. The focus would then be on exposing the issues for the region's Aboriginal communities, advocating on their behalf as well as creating a more cohesive art movement. The position would therefore shift from an emphasis on Aboriginal Arts rights to an emphasis on Aboriginal rights. This in turn means that the RICO would need to take on a more educative role with a focus on developing a rapport with people and communities and breaching cultural differences.

We are mindful that it is often difficult for outside community development workers to be accepted in and even more difficult to have an impact on those communities. It is important to note therefore that this kind of work takes time. Hence, it is important that it is funded on a long-term basis in order to build relationships with individuals and communities.

Planning & evaluation framework

From this research it is apparent that a lot of the people interviewed more readily understand the potential economic impact of CCD and art activities. They less readily, though, understand the social impact of such activities. Following is a framework to help assess the social impact of such activities. These community building and social change measurement indicators are some draft indicators to evaluate the role of arts-based projects in social change and community building efforts that can be adapted to guide future planning of CCD activities in the region.

This framework is a tool to enable the measurement or assessment of CCD project against a set of community capacity building indicators. For each indicator we describe the sort of evidence that would suggest low, medium and high achievement.

Indicators	Low	Medium	High
Community Engagement: degree of time and energy people and groups are investing in community initiatives.	Passive engagement by locals involved in a tokenistic or superficial manner. Their interest is low and demonstrated by brief attention spans and attendance.	Episodic engagement of locals which appear either indifferent or are only occasionally active in project activities but do participate.	Deep engagement of locals who are energetic, enthusiastic, active and volunteering to do more.
Engagement with Community Groups who Experience Social Exclusion: degree of engagement of people who feel relatively powerless to influence change.	Socially excluded groups do not participate in community activities. Project activity is perceived to be largely of interest to one or two dominant groups.	A small number of socially excluded groups participate in community activities. Some inclusion of others' cultures by reference to their existence and perhaps	A large number of socially excluded groups participate in community activities. Diverse community groups, including those who have experienced social exclusion

	two dominant groups.	existence and perhaps some activities based on their interests.	social exclusion, experience a strong sense of their community, identity and pride. Diverse cultures are explicitly valued in the content and process of the community activities.
Bonding Social Capital: degree to which community members are able and willing to pitch in together, and support bottom-up initiatives.	Community groups struggle to recruit volunteers willing to get involved in planning and management of activities. People show little care or concern for others outside their immediate families. They are more interested in receiving than initiating community services (ie. welfare mentality).	Willingness to help out with planning and management of community activities is sporadic. For short periods of time, group memberships are high and people applaud community initiatives.	There is never a shortage of volunteers able to plan and manage community activities. Many people are committed and determined to initiate local solutions to local problems.
Community and Cultural Identity and Pride: Community and culture may be defined by class, sexuality, gender, disability, occupation, ethnicity, religion and place.	People feel subjugated and alienated. They feel shame and embarrassment about their place, histories and culture.	People are not sure about which places and cultures to identify with. They have ambiguous feelings about their place, history and culture. They profess not to be interested in history or culture.	People feel strong and secure about their place, identity and culture. They are proud of their histories and of their suburb.
Bridging Social Capital: level of exchange and interaction between the various groups.	The community is deeply fragmented and factionalised. A sense of community is defined less by 'place' and more by ethnicity, language, religion, age, sexuality or interest. Conflict is common between various groups and factions within groups.	There is tolerance and respect for and between the diverse groups in the community. But there is still a widespread feeling of 'us' and 'them' between many groups. There is widespread perception that there is a 'mainstream' community and that there are 'peripheral' communities.	While there are communities defined by interest, culture, religion, work, etc. they are united in a shared pride in place. There is significant trust, and high levels of exchange, sharing and co-operation between various groups.
Technical Change And Learning: level of the learning of technical art-form skills and knowledge.	Participants miss out on opportunities to gain specific art-form skills.	Participants gain some useful knowledge and art-form skills.	Participants gain skills and knowledge that enable them to successfully do and get

			commissioned art work.
Interpretive Change And Learning: level of knowledge and understanding of other people's views and analyses.	Participants learn nothing new about other people and gain no new appreciation and empathy for other residents.	Participants gain insights into the experiences of other people and groups. They gain some new knowledge about local issues, challenges and community action initiatives.	Participants win deeper and new insights and knowledge of local issues, challenges and community action initiatives. They gain more understanding of the perspectives of other people and groups. They learn more tolerance and compassion.
Transformative Change and Learning: level of change in participants' belief in the value of their own knowledge, ability to change their circumstances and question powerful people's domineering and excluding behaviours.	People seem to be resigned to the way things are, even in the face of what makes them unhappy. They do not question the status quo. They do not question others who show disrespect to them. They do not question inequalities, social exclusion and apathy. They believe they do not have the necessary qualities, skills and knowledge to be 'enterprising.'	People begin to name things that make them unhappy. In particular, they begin to name challenges and issues in their community. They question what they perceive as injustice. They imagine the possibilities of being enterprising and of change for the better in themselves and their communities.	People assert that their knowledge is as valuable as 'expert' knowledge. They question taken-for-granted assumptions about many social issues. Powerful people seek to include previously excluded people in analyses and actions. People see themselves as 'enterprising' and sufficiently powerful to make change.
Community Leadership: degree to which people are willing and have the capacity to exercise leadership and develop projects and initiatives	There is a tendency to depend on others, especially figures of authority, to not act on challenges and issues.	Individuals and groups are interested in supporting various enterprise initiatives and activities. They actively seek opportunities to make their voice heard and convey their ideas.	Individuals and groups actively support each other in their efforts to improve quality of life in a community. Recognised 'leaders' actively seek to nurture 'emerging' leaders. Significant amounts of time are invested in planning and pursuing community enterprise and action initiatives.
Community Participation, Collaboration and Ownership: nature of the participation and level of collaboration in and ownership of the project.	The cargo cult – the project concept is imported from outside the region. The agency - a group of professionals undertake planning, production and management according to a brief.	Travelling players - hired professionals work with members of the community to create the project. The masterclass - a tireless artistic director builds a group of volunteers into semi-professional	The tapestry - a group of volunteers co-operate to plan and manage the project production together. The studio and workshop - studios and workshops open to all in which individuals motivate themselves to

	The artistic hero - a group of artists work together on the artistic director's vision.	practitioners and performers.	produce their own project activities, with guidance where necessary.
Artistic Creation and Quality: degree of reflection and comments (subjective understandings included) generated by participants and other stakeholders about the artistic quality of the performance.	The artwork or product of the project is perceived as boring, uninspiring and not worthy of much money. Barely any word-of-mouth publicity gets around.	The artwork or product of the project is considered enjoyable and interesting. Word-of-mouth publicity spreads widely.	The artwork or product of the project is perceived as moving and challenging, it attracts widespread acclaim. Not only are people provoked to engage in discussions, but are inspired to support similar future productions.

Major CCD projects

Following are three examples of major CCD projects that have been successful in contributing to strengthening social capital and a sense of identity and place amongst some Aboriginal communities of Far West NSW and Northwest Queensland. They are good examples of projects which have achieved between medium and high according to the indicators of the framework above.

They are presented here as the kind of projects that have or could help address or further address key priorities and issues with local Aboriginal communities. They provide a valuable source of ideas and information to help the RICO plan and develop its own ideas for major CCD projects, such as a language and arts project, marrying a language revival program with an arts program, and an Aboriginal Arts Cooperative to help Aboriginal artists across the region achieve some economic gains.

The first example of a major CCD project is *BIG hART*. The RICO is no stranger to this project as it a local project managed in partnership with Outback Arts. *BIG hART* “is a multi art-form organisation established to make art with people or groups experiencing the effects of marginalisation in a rural regional or isolated context. It was established by Scott Rankin & John Bakes in 1992.” (nd). It operates in small clusters around the country, including in Far West NSW in partnership with five shires (Coonamble, Cobar, Nyngan, Walgett and Bourke).

BIG hART is a site-specific work around workshops using radio, film and the web to develop narrative skills and community capacity building. The issues explored vary from social space, domestic violence, to recidivism amongst juvenile offenders, self harm prevention and racism. Through participation and generation of a production pathways to education are created, agency for young people and help-seeking behaviour are promoted.

Some of the *BIG hART*'s projects include, working in 1999 with 250 marginalised young people from Burnie, Rosebery, Queenstown, Zeehan, Strahan, Tullah Illawarra, Wagga Wagga, Riverina, ACT, Queanbeyan, Palmerston NT, Manly, Walgett, Moree, Armidale, Tamworth, Narrabri; Inverell, Cobar, Bourke, Gunnedah, Lismore,

Kalgourlie, Adelaide, Latrobe, Melbourne and Surry Hills to produce the film, entitled *Hurt*, which was awarded an AFI Award for “Best Concept in a Non-Feature Film” in November 2000. *Hurt* looked at social space and violence. Another project was *Not at Home*, a film project and radio plays dealing with addictive behaviours working with people from Armidale, Tamworth, Narrabri Gunnedah, Moree, Inverell, Glen Innes, Walgett, Bourke Cobar Coonamble, Ningan, Lismore.

The success of BIG *hART* is based on establishing connections with local community leader who is interested in driving the project on the ground. Community ownership of the work is central. Another important element is participation as it is through participation that people gain a sense of pride and achievement. Also the success is based on artists and producers working together, whereby the producer being a resource for the artist.

The second example of a major CCD project is the Brewarrina Circus Skills Development Program (BCSDP) which was established in October 2002, following the success of a previous one-off short-term circus workshop. Again, a familiar project to the RICO as, with BIG *hART*, it is a local project managed in partnership with Outback Arts.

The vision for BCSDP was to devise a 2-year program for young people to learn and develop circus skills. It aims to provide a focus for the young people of Brewarrina, with an objective to:

- provide a creative outlet;
- develop circus and other performance skills;
- develop communication, teamwork and leadership skills;
- promote positive and healthy lifestyles;
- establish an understanding of career pathways in the arts; and
- develop partnerships with local organisations.

The program is a success with the young people it engages with and has attracted the attention of the wider community who are very supportive of it. In a town where there are very few perceived activities for young people, this project is engaging with approximately half of the youth population, of which the majority is Aboriginal. Over the years, the program has attracted up to 250 regular young people who attend intensive workshops of 3 hours, 4 times a week over a 6 weeks period. In working together, in a creative environment, they explore issues pertaining to healthy lifestyles, access to education and living in a remote community.

Its success is based on a fully consultative approach. Though the program is resource hungry, it still provides value for money as its impact and potential as a pathway to further education and employment for the participants is vast.

The long-term goals of the program are for it to become a sustainable and permanent training school. By 2005, BCSDP aims to establish itself as a key player in young people's performing arts as well as to establish partnerships and networks with other circus arts projects and organisations for young people.

The third example of a successful CCD strategy is Placeworks, an intergenerational project which links young people's computer skills with older people's story telling

skills. Since 1991 Feral Arts, a Brisbane based organisation, have been conducting this CCD program focusing on displacement through oral and community histories in Northwest Queensland's isolated and predominantly Aboriginal community of Dajarra with the Waluwarra people (Feral Arts, nd). This program uses new media and strategies and has enabled the implementation of a true partnership between local organizations, individuals and Feral Arts. It even has the potential to connect virtual communities across the state and around the world.

Placeworks aims to set in place skills and resources to enable the community to better develop and manage their cultural, social and artistic lives. It operates in partnership with local agencies including the school, the Aboriginal Coop, the library and the CDEP program to document oral histories through video and supports the community's campaign for a cultural centre and keeping place.

The program has a broad base of activities run by a local worker as well as a series of specific one-off short-term workshops run by Feral Arts workers. The activities include visual arts, music, video, digital scanning and printing, poster and certificate design and printing and computer and internet skills. The program responds to a wide range of needs and interests identified through consultation. This project is a success because it has been running for 12 years, using new medium and strategies and has enabled the implementation of a true partnership. It even has the potential to connect virtual communities across the state and around the world.

This work not only aims to develop community members' skills, but also "to enhance the services and skills of a number of local community organisations to improve their capacity to meet the needs of the broader community and to work collaboratively across geographical divides." (Feral Arts, nd).

Through the process of accumulating oral and community history material Feral Arts decided to develop a piece of software to store and provide access to this material. The software is called Placeworks and serves as a digital museum and an online community development forum. It is a multimedia database software and web server enabling users to manage and share text, photos, graphics, music, videos, sound files and links to other web based resources.

Overall, all three projects are successful CCD strategies because they emphasise mentoring, local ownership and responsibility, partnerships with community groups and individuals and supporting communities in making decisions themselves. They are also and foremost successful because they are based on a slow and complex process of building relationships and trust. Further, they use an infinite variety of ways to foster participation and make valuable contributions to community capacity building in the sense that they can help people map their communities, research and tell their histories, and convey their possible futures, in ways that are creative, engaging, dynamic and inclusive.

It is through the implementation of such strategies that the RICO will be able to encourage the local Aboriginal communities and artists to think critically and creatively about local identity and professional development and therefore be seen as a change agent working towards social change.

Conclusion

In this report we have researched and made recommendations about the contributions and future directions in art and related activities the RICO can achieve with Aboriginal communities of the region serviced by Outback Arts. We have looked at the ways in which Outback Arts' CCD projects help strengthen social capital and a sense of identity and place amongst the local Aboriginal population.

This study reveals that the RICO position, in the short period it has been created, has engaged and fostered participation with diverse elements of local communities and made some way towards establishing cultural, social and economic benefits. It has therefore made some direct and significant contributions to community capacity building that is meaningful to Aboriginal communities and represents a significant effort towards local Aboriginal communities' renewal.

It is clear that Outback Arts' RICO position operates in the interest of Aboriginal economic and social development in the region and should, therefore, be developed and sustained. The position has the potential to affect change but economic rationalist pressures to reduce costs are an obstacle to realising this potential. This is an issue that needs to be addressed by changes in State and Federal policy.

The challenge is now to implement some long-term arts and related initiatives, including CCD activities, with the Aboriginal communities of the region that will bring about positive social and economic change.

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