



Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy



“Aboriginal communities and government should negotiate properly and respectfully – not rushing over the top of the other – but negotiating a way forward calmly together, with integrity.”

Gäwa Elder, Both Ways Engagement Workshops (2013)

Message from the Minister for Local Government and Community Services

Growing up in a remote Aboriginal community I have seen and been part of the consultation process between governments and communities many times. Some were good, many weren't. Often government walked away thinking they had done a good job, while we were left scratching our heads. Poor communication can have detrimental results that remain long after government officials have left the community.

The Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy that my department has developed will, for the first time, guide and inform NT public servants and others on the complexities of engaging with our remote communities. An online toolkit is being developed to offer practical, hands on advice as well as links to helpful sites that will assist in the engagement process.

This toolkit contains simple and important, yet often overlooked points to consider, which can be the difference between good, respectful negotiations and poorly planned, ill-timed affairs that do nothing more than create uncertainty and confusion.

Remote communities have been smothered under the burden of over consultation by Governments for many years. This strategy addresses the issue and sets out clear parameters on the most effective way to engage in the remote space. This is not necessarily always an expensive charter, in many cases there are better ways, cleverer ways and more cost effective ways of doing business.

The Hon. Bess Nungarrayi Price



Introduction

The Northern Territory Government *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy (RECS or the Strategy)* responds to the need to improve the way we coordinate our services and engage with remote Aboriginal community members. This will not only lead to better outcomes, it will also improve our efficiency and ability to deliver in a tight fiscal environment.

The Strategy was designed by an Inter-Agency Working Group based in Alice Springs through a series of workshops. Working Group membership included representatives of agencies whose core work involves remote service provision, two Regional Councils and Charles Darwin University.

Additional feedback and input was sought from the broader Northern Territory Government (NTG) including regional staff to ensure the Strategy was informed by current and previous practice and experience of engagement in the Territory's unique physical and social environment. Ongoing development, including both agency and remote community input, will occur through implementation and evaluation.

The Working Group considered a wide range of recognised community engagement principles, practice, research and literature, particularly relating to Aboriginal communities. The Strategy also draws on key national and international best practice and rights declarations such as the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*, *The Brisbane Declaration (2005)*, *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)* and the *International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum*.

Overview

The *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* defines remote engagement and coordination, is underpinned by values and principles and comprises six elements. The Strategy elements are: *Best Practice Guide for Remote Engagement and Coordination*, *Levels of Remote Community Participation*, *Remote Information and Coordination System (RICS)*, *Bush Ready* (induction and professional learning), an *Evaluation Framework*, and the *Online Toolkit*.

“It is not about more consultations but about listening to what the true message is. What is wanted is quality meetings that people act on.”

Gunbalanya community member (2010)



Celebrating community achievements, Numbulwar.

Context

The Northern Territory's remote communities are home to many different Aboriginal groups, most of whom continue to speak ancestral languages and follow traditional culture practices, including traditional forms of negotiation and agreement making under the authority of land owners and clan elders. Understanding of and respect for these different ways is critical to successful work in these contexts.

Challenges in practising good engagement and coordination in remote Northern Territory, are intensified by sparsely populated regions, long distances, a harsh climate, many different language and cultural groups, a history of fraught relationships with governments, multiple programs working in the same space with the same people and high staff turnover.



Purpose

The *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* responds to the identified need for the Northern Territory Government (NTG) to work more effectively to achieve better outcomes for remote community members including:

- consistent and accountable remote engagement and coordination practice across the NTG
- coordination and collaboration within and between NTG agencies, communities, regions and head office in recording, tracking and responding to ideas and issues raised
- confidence that NTG agencies are aware of and responding to local issues
- informed, responsive and aligned policy, program and service delivery decisions
- improved job satisfaction and workload management for NTG staff
- cost-effective use of resources including visits by NTG staff to remote communities
- improved community experience of government service delivery
- greater transparency of decision making processes
- relevant and culturally appropriate communication, engagement and feedback
- a reduced burden of engagement on remote community members by avoiding duplication and unnecessary consultation.

“By listening to locals rather than deciding before they come what they want to hear... actually understanding what is happening in the community”

Ntaria community member (2010)

Users

The *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* is designed for use by Northern Territory Government (NTG) staff whose work relates to remote Northern Territory. Other organisations may find it useful, or participate in its implementation.

“*We have enough meetings already. What is bad is when government calls a meeting without plenty of notice and without telling us what it’s about ...*”

Umbakumba community member (2010)

Impacts

Commitment to the *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* values, principles and practices should have the following impact at head office, regional and community levels:

- **NTG Executive Management** have confidence that agencies are responding effectively to ideas, issues and needs raised at community level, and that policy, program and service delivery decisions and development are well informed, inclusive and aligned.
- **NTG Regional Staff** are valued as an essential link between executive management, other stakeholders and remote communities and have input into NTG planning and processes.
- **Remote Community Members** influence policy and programs that affect them and receive services that are responsive to their needs, understood and coordinated.



NTG Barkly regional staff.

Remote Engagement and Coordination

Remote engagement is the two-way communication, exchange of information and deliberation that occurs between governments and people living in remote communities. It increases mutual understanding and enables community members to influence decisions that affect their lives.

Remote coordination is defined as processes by which government practices, policies, programs and services for remote communities are collaborative, integrated and aligned.

“*Remote engagement and coordination are mutually dependent on each other – engagement will only work if there is good coordination and coordination will only work if there is good engagement. They must be understood and practised together, rather than separately.*”

Professor Michael Christie, Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University (2015)



Values and Principles

The *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* is underpinned by the following values and principles.

Respect and Integrity

- Engagement is genuine, open and honest
- Traditional authority and governance are respected by working with and being guided by local Aboriginal elders and leaders

Commitment

- *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* policy, processes and practice are endorsed, implemented and properly resourced
- Enough time is given for practices to change and outcomes to improve

Accountability

- Processes are agreed and adhered to and any changes are communicated
- Decision-making is sustainable (economically viable, technically feasible, environmentally compatible, publicly acceptable)
- Ongoing evaluation is used to inform and improve policy, practice and outcomes
- Close the loop – feedback is provided to keep the community informed of processes and outcomes

Clarity

- The purpose, scope and timeframes of the engagement are clear
- Decision-making processes and boundaries (government and other) are understood
- Information and communication is understood by all

Inclusion

- Enough time and space is allowed for dialogue, to reflect and to develop shared understanding

Working Together

- Relationships are established, maintained and based on trust
- Ways of engagement are place-based to suit local needs, language, time-frames and cultural protocols
- Participation is relevant and representative
- All points of view are freely expressed, heard and understood
- Effective engagement is based on dialogue and active listening
- Quality communication and coordination occurs within and across levels of government, other stakeholders and remote community members

“Government still has a lot of duplication... one department might come out one week to talk about something and the next week another department will come out to talk about the same thing.”

Wadeye community member (2010)

Elements

The *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* comprises six elements that together provide comprehensive and practical guidance, mechanisms and tools for remote engagement work and the coordination of government policies and services for remote Northern Territory communities.

 <p>Best Practice Guide for Remote Engagement and Coordination</p>	<p>The Best Practice Guide for Remote Engagement and Coordination brings together universal aspects of best practice community engagement and coordination together with elements of practice tailored to the specific needs of remote Northern Territory communities.</p>
 <p>Levels of Remote Community Participation</p>	<p>The Levels of Remote Community Participation is designed to help identify the level of participation of remote community members in an engagement process as well as appropriate engagement tools and methods.</p>
 <p>Remote Information Coordination System</p>	<p>The Remote Information Coordination System is an electronic system to gather and document information, capture issues and facilitate a response and support coordination within and across levels of government, other stakeholders and remote community members.</p>
 <p>Bush-Ready</p>	<p>Bush-Ready identifies induction and professional learning components that will support staff to develop knowledge, skills and behaviour required to work effectively in remote communities in the Northern Territory.</p>
 <p>Evaluation Framework</p>	<p>The Evaluation Framework outlines the process for continuous improvement in remote engagement and coordination practices through ongoing review, evaluation and change.</p>
 <p>Online Toolkit</p>	<p>The Online Toolkit is a user-friendly website to support remote engagement and coordination. It includes useful information and tools including sample policies, processes and templates, stories and case studies, links to professional learning, the Remote Information Coordination System (RICS) and other relevant government systems.</p> <p>www.bushready.nt.gov.au</p>

Best Practice Guide for Remote Engagement and Coordination

While many aspects of engagement and coordination are universal, some are specific to work that takes place in remote communities.

This table is a *Best Practice Guide for Remote Engagement and Coordination* with remote community members and the coordination of actions related to this engagement.

The *Online Toolkit* expands the Best Practice Guide into factors to consider, at both operational and strategic levels, **BEFORE**, **DURING** and **AFTER** visiting and engaging with remote community members.



“*We see the planes come in and go out and often we have no idea who came and why.*”

Ngukurr community member
(2010)

Focus	Engagement – Key Actions	Coordination – Key Actions
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find out about the community, Aboriginal governance, cultural protocols, restrictions, local dynamics and any 'burning' issues www.bushtel.nt.gov.au 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify Aboriginal authorities, other community members and regional staff who you should be informing, working with and learning from on the project or issue
Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define the project, opportunity or issue as well as the objectives and outcomes Clarify the decisions being made and who will make them, as well as any related decisions already made Identify community and other stakeholders Identify the level and goal of engagement for each stakeholder group Identify the community engagement purpose, objectives and outcomes Plan and use methods and tools that suit the engagement and ensure the full participation of all stakeholders Identify risks and plan how to manage them throughout the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find out what is already known about the project, opportunity or issue, knowledge gaps, relevant history, level of interest and potential conflict or risk Use Remote Information Coordination System (RICS) for planning, documenting and evaluating engagement, coordination and visits Find out how to contact other stakeholders, and where opportunities for collaboration, coordination, challenges or conflicts may exist or arise Develop, support and use community-based and regional processes (e.g. Aboriginal governance groups, inter-agency meetings, Regional Coordination Committees) Facilitate community members' understanding of government processes and responses
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good relationships are essential – find ways to build understanding and trust with Aboriginal authorities, community members and other stakeholders Respect and follow local cultural protocols 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work closely with community-based and regional staff and others who have well-developed relationships with community members Keep everyone well informed at every stage of the project/process
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid rushing – allow time and flexibility to build relationships and enable maximum participation Allow time for community members and other stakeholders to understand and provide input into the project, opportunity or issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Base the negotiation of timing and timeframes on both community and government parameters Ensure all stakeholders are kept up to date and have time to respond when things change
Communication and Close-the-loop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate in ways that are appropriate and understood (e.g. interpreters) Ensure community members and other stakeholders are informed before, during and after the engagement Follow up and close the loop with community members and other stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help community members raise ideas and issues with the appropriate government agency Obtain and pass on responses to these
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Before you start, plan evaluation of the engagement objectives, outcomes and process – from introducing the project, staying in touch and receiving feedback As you go along, document, monitor and evaluate what happens, whether planned engagement objectives were met or not and any unplanned outcomes Ensure evaluation process is relevant and meaningful to the stakeholders Use evaluation to continuously improve engagement practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate input into the ongoing evaluation and improvement of Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy and RICS from community and other stakeholders at regional and executive levels
You	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider your self-awareness, engagement skills, cultural competency, basic skills and training and identify gaps in your knowledge and skills Be aware of assumptions and cultural bias you may bring, or even whether you are suited to remote work Stay open to learning and reflect on your performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify, organise and promote professional support, learning or training opportunities you may need Record your reflections and evaluations in RICS or the relevant government system.

Levels of Remote Community Participation

The *Levels of Remote Community Participation* is a tool designed to help identify the level of participation of remote community members in an engagement process.

The higher the level of community participation in the engagement, the greater the influence community members have on the final decision.

This tool can also be used to identify the level of participation of other stakeholders. It is essential that all stakeholders have a clear understanding about their level of engagement and the say they have in decisions. The *Levels of Remote Community Participation* is based on the 'International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum'.

“We are sick of talking – no one’s listening – I won’t go to any more community meetings as it’s all just talk – people talk and talk – no one listens – it’s not worth coming along we have been saying the same thing for a long time, but nothing ever happens.”

Lajamanu community member (2013)



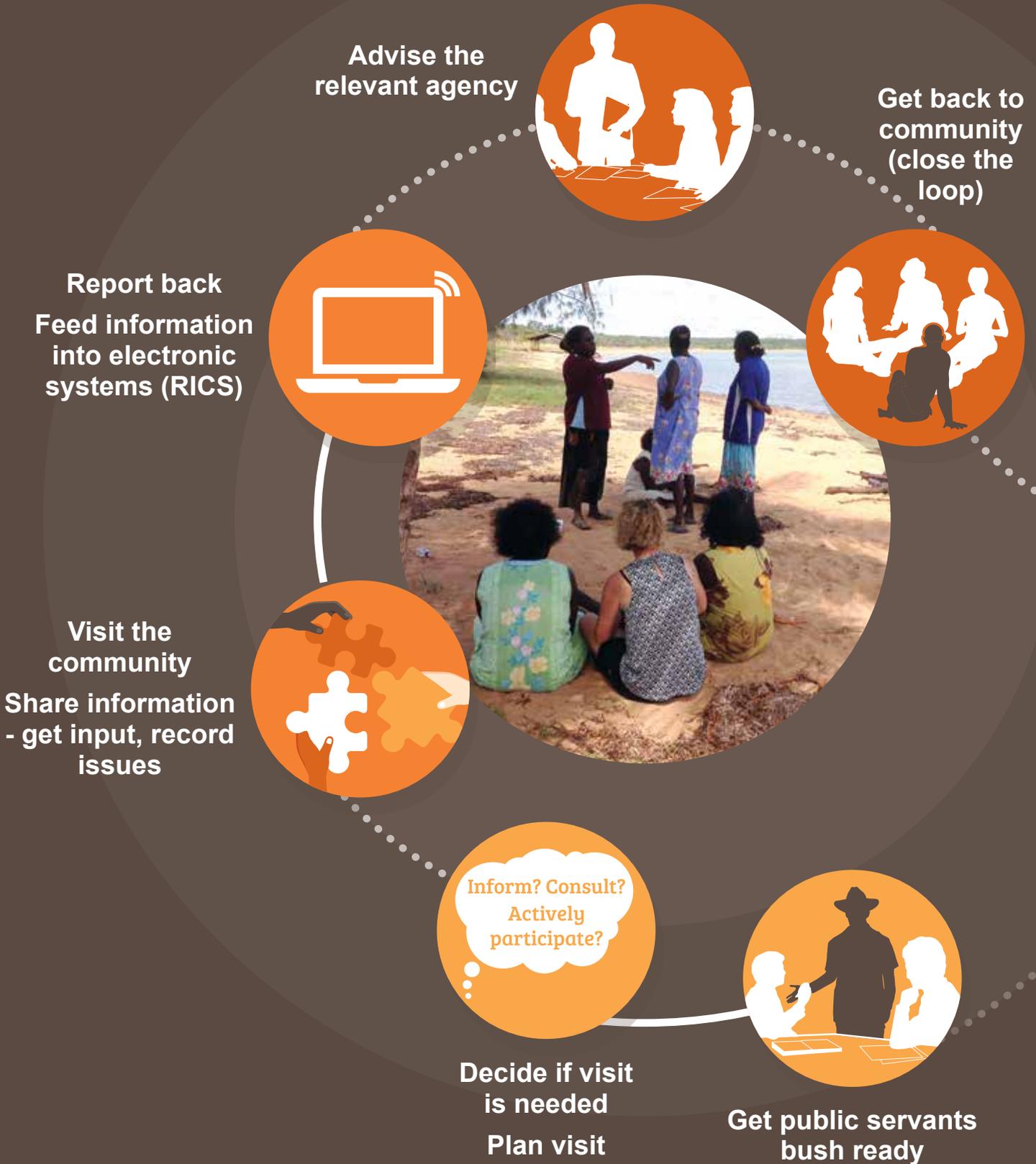
International Women's Day at Umbakumba.

Levels of Remote Community Participation

	Inform	Consult	Actively participate						
Goal of the engagement	Community members are well-informed .	Community members are well-informed and give feedback that government considers.	Community members are well-informed and actively contribute to decision-making						
Decision-making level of community members	Community members don't have a say in the final decision. The final decision is made by government.	Community members might have a say in the final decision. The final decision is made by government.	Community members will have a say in the final decision. Community can actively participate at one of three levels:						
			<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Involve</th> <th>Collaborate</th> <th>Empower</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Some say</td> <td>High level or equal say</td> <td>Total say and control</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Involve	Collaborate	Empower	Some say	High level or equal say	Total say and control
Involve	Collaborate	Empower							
Some say	High level or equal say	Total say and control							
Government commitment to community members	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide information in the right way to the right people to help you understand ensure you know the whole story keep you informed enable you to ask questions. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> listen to you and make sure we understand what is important to you ask you for ideas and feedback consider what you tell us give you feedback on how you influenced the decision. 	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> work with you at each step of the process make sure your ideas are included as much as possible work with you to find different options and decide what the best decision will be. 						
Example tools and methods	Posters, flyers, community noticeboards, walking around talking with people, use interpreters, newsletters, local radio, presentations, social media, websites, meetings, story-telling.	Surveys, interviews, use interpreters, story-telling, small group discussions (interest, family, clan, governance groups etc.), focus groups, workshops.	Discussions over a period of time, interviews, use interpreters, story-telling, group discussions (interest, family, clan, governance groups etc.), focus groups, workshops.						



Actions



Results

- Fewer unnecessary trips
- Reduced engagement burden
- More effective use of resources
- Communities get a response (closing the loop)
- Better relationships with community members
- Community residents have a better understanding of government
- Government is better informed about communities
- Communities have input to policy and program delivery

Evaluate, review
and improve
performance



Inter-Agency Working Group

The NTG Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy Framework was developed in 2015 by an Inter-Agency Working Group through a series of workshops and research activities facilitated by Kaaren Smethurst and Juli Cathcart.

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Northern Territory Police

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Power and Water Corporation

Annette D'Emden

“*... sometimes need to come back and talk a number of times to get it right.*”

Ntaria community member (2010)



Representatives from MacDonnell and Central Desert Regional Councils, NTG & CDU discuss the Strategy.

Glossary

<i>Aboriginal authorities</i>	Leaders, Elders, Traditional Owners or other Aboriginal people who are recognised authorities in their community
<i>Executive management</i>	Decision makers in government – could include senior staff, agency executives or CEOs, Members of Parliament or Ministers
<i>Remote community members</i>	People living in remotely located communities, in particular, Aboriginal residents
<i>Regional Coordination Committee</i>	Regional Coordination Committee – regular meeting of senior staff from government departments (and sometimes other organisations) operating in a particular region
<i>Regional staff</i>	NTG staff based in regional centres
<i>Stakeholder</i>	A person or group with an interest, influence or concern (stake) in something

“ ... talk to the right people, not just the people who want to talk to them, the first ones they meet.”

Ntaria community member (2010)



Nyirripi community.

Sources of Information

In addition to the documents named in the *Introduction*, the *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy* has been informed by engagement strategies and documents produced by the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments and a number of local government councils from rural and regional Australia. Other useful information sources include community development practitioners and organisations with expertise in this area.

Quotes from community members were taken from a number of 'Governance and Engagement Maps'. These are reports from a research project undertaken by the Langford Team in 2010 - 2011 managed under the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Government's Remote Service Delivery Partnership Agreement. Additional quotes are from the NTG Review of Regional Governance in

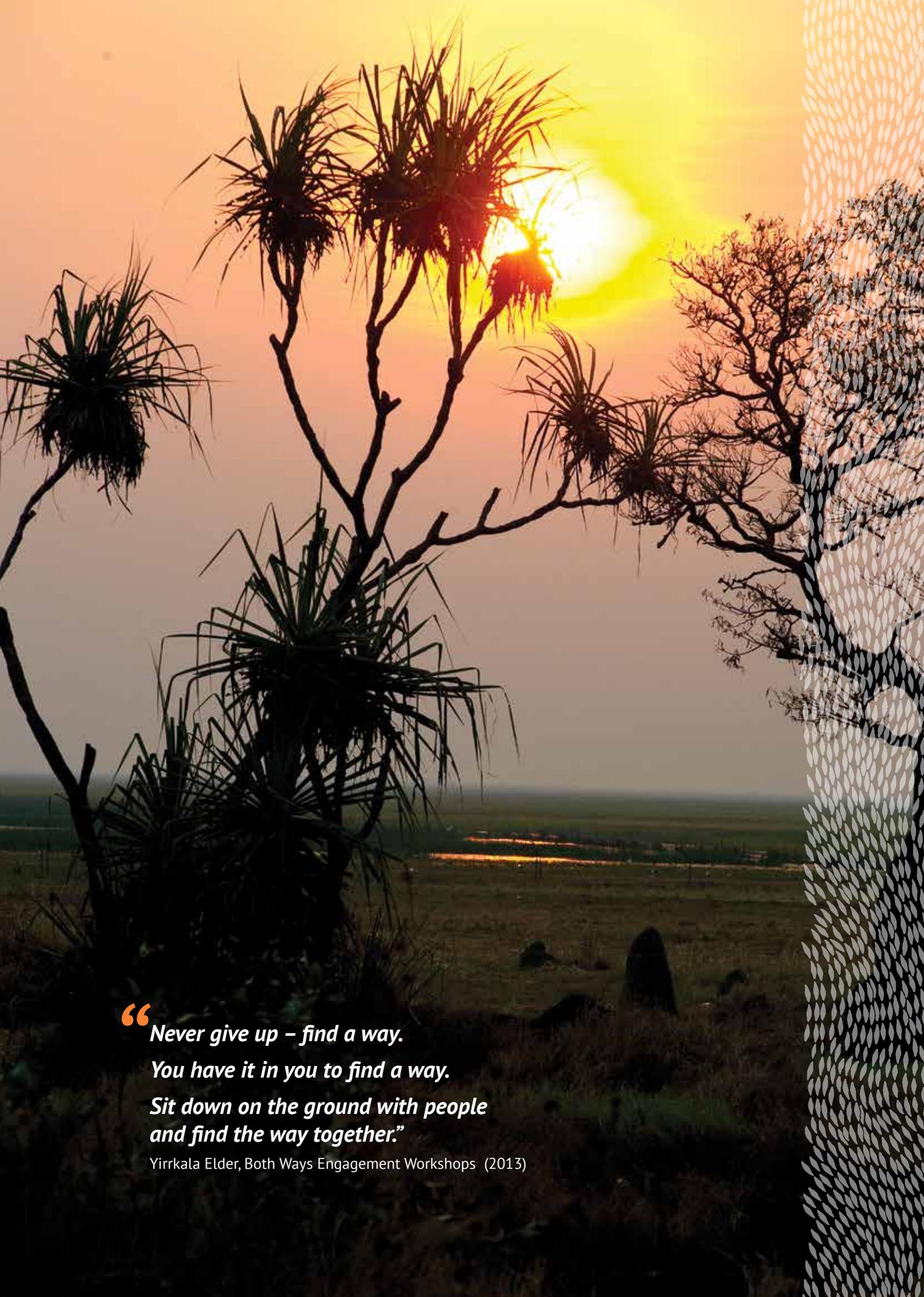
2013 (Department of Local Government and Regions) and from the Both Ways Engagement Workshops conducted by the Yolŋu Aboriginal Consultants' Initiative (YACI) and CDU in 2013.

There is particular acknowledgement of Professor Michael Christie and Juli Cathcart from the Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University, who have provided invaluable advice and input using their vast wealth of knowledge and experience in engagement with remotely located Aboriginal community members.

A full list of information sources is available on the Online Toolkit at: www.bushready.nt.gov.au



NTG officer and Central Desert Regional Council elected member workshoping the Strategy.



“ *Never give up – find a way.
You have it in you to find a way.
Sit down on the ground with people
and find the way together.”*

Yirrkala Elder, Both Ways Engagement Workshops (2013)

“Better they change the way they think. Listen to us... and... let us teach them in our community. We can show them.”

Yuendumu community member (2010)

Published by the Northern Territory Department of Local Government and Community Services.

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Edition Date: September 2015

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Cover photo: David Maymuru, Yirrkala Local Authority