

Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund



Response of the Indigenous Remote Communications Association



March 2018

This submission is made by the Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA) following sector consultation. It is expected that some radio services, RIBS and RIMOs will make individual submissions in which case the IRCA Submission should not be taken to displace those submissions.

About the Indigenous Remote Communications Association

The Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA) is the peak body for Indigenous media and communications. It was founded in 2001 as the peak body for remote Indigenous media and communications. In late 2016 it transitioned to the national peak body for First Nations broadcasting, media and communications.

Up to 105 Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services (RIBS), 33 additional licensed retransmission sites across Australia, 8 Remote Indigenous Media Organisations (RIMOs) and 28 urban and regional First Nations radio services are eligible for representation by IRCA.

About the First Nations broadcasting and media sector

First Nations broadcasters are not-for-profit community organisations providing a primary and essential service to their communities. They reach nearly 50% of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, but are prevented from providing a primary radio service to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples due to a lack of funding.

First Nations broadcasters and media producers also connect non-Indigenous communities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture, developing greater understanding and building stronger relationships.

The sector:

- Comprises:
 - Radio services able to reach around 320,000 First Nations people, including around 100,000 very hard to reach people in remote Indigenous

communities, or approximately 47% of the First Nations population.

- A wide range of First Nations news and current affairs services including:
 - National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) and its National Indigenous News and Weekly News-in-Review
 - Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association's news service, including its Strong Voices program.
 - Koori Radio's news and current affairs programming
 - NITV News and Living Black
 - Print media including Koori Mail, National Indigenous Times, Land Rights News
- A regional satellite TV service reaching 240,000 remote households and a free to air national TV service.
- Over 230 radio broadcast sites across Australia.
- Is a multimillion dollar industry with over 35 First Nations community owned and managed not-for-profit media organisations.
- Holds the capacity to be a preferred supplier for all government messaging to our communities.
- Is the most relevant and appropriate service with the highest listenership, community engagement and local ownership of all media services.
- Is delivered in the first language of many remote peoples.
- In remote communities, is the most reliable and ubiquitous radio and media services.

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Response

The importance of civic journalism is such that groups not represented effectively in mainstream media need to be included in any activity aimed at enhancing public interest journalism. First Nations media organisations and peoples should be actively supported to engage in the creation of public interest news and current affairs in ways that recognise and cater for their social, cultural and economic positions. The Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund does not provide the required support.

1. Expression of concern on the marginalisation of First Nations news media in the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund

The Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA) expresses its concern about the shaping of the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund such as to effectively exclude the majority of First Nations news media.

It is vital that First Nations media be supported through the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund. IRCA's January 2018 response to the *Inquiry into the Regional and Small Publishers innovation Fund* set out the specific issues regarding the under-representation and misrepresentation of First Nations people in the news media and set out the reasons for First Nations news providers being the first line service for their communities and peoples.

IRCA noted that the way in which First Nations issues are represented in non-Indigenous media is of vital interest to First Nations peoples. **First Nations peoples and issues are consistently misrepresented in news and current affairs.** Recommendation 208 of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report specifically noted "that many Aboriginal people throughout Australia express disappointment in the portrayal of

Aboriginal people by the media”¹.

Statement of Principle

First Nations media organisations are the primary providers of First Nations news and current affairs to their communities and are the key providers of mainstream news and current affairs to their communities in forms that are appropriate and relevant.

The poor representation in non-Indigenous media directly impacts on the development and implementation of government Indigenous policy². Mainstream reporting often takes a deficit approach focusing on the “problem of First Nations peoples” rather than addressing the many successes, or in fact the structural inequalities arising from dispossession and racism that underpin the so-called “problem”.

Additionally, the survey data presented in our January 2018 Response showed First Nations audience preferences for First Nations presented news and current affairs. Consequently, IRCA identified the need for strengthening and expanding First Nations news services and including First Nations media organisations as eligible groups for the Fund.

It is extremely disappointing therefore, to note that the needs of First Nations people for First Nations news provision have been disregarded. Furthermore, the specific exclusion of broadcasters from access to the fund completely overlooks the lack of print based news in remote communities as well the limited availability and cost challenges of accessing Internet based news services.

IRCA’s research indicates that in the majority of very remote communities, the local First Nations radio service is the only terrestrial radio service available providing news. For example, in the Kimberleys and Ngaanyatjarra Lands of very remote Western Australia, of

¹ <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/rciadic/national/vol5/5.html#Heading5>

² Kerry McCallum (ed). 2012. The media and Indigenous policy: how news media reporting and mediatized practice impact on Indigenous policy. p4. Available at http://www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/faculties/arts-design/attachments2/pdf/MIP-Report_Combined_Final.pdf

the 32 communities served solely by a First Nations radio service, only 7 have a second terrestrial radio service. IRCA's research indicates also that 1/3 of households in very remote communities lack the back-up of the direct to home VAST service.

First Nations local radio services provide vital news services for their communities in these areas not served well by print or mainstream media, and yet are specifically excluded under the prohibition of broadcasters under the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund guidelines. IRCA considers this to be an inequitable and flawed component of the Fund.

The flawed implementation is compounded by the Fund's exclusion of not-for-profit organisations. The social and economic marginalisation of many First Nations people and community groups has historically created barriers to the development of for-profit First Nations business ventures. Typically, First Nations media programs are effected through not-for-profit organisations with only one or two exceptions.

The specific exclusion of non-government organisations under the *Independence Test* set out in the Fund guidelines is a structural and, in IRCA's opinion, an unwarranted barrier to First Nations media organisations accessing the Fund. IRCA considers this to be a further inequitable component of the Fund.

IRCA requests that the Innovation Fund program be reshaped to enable First Nations not-for-profit organisations with a news service and appropriate editorial arrangements, or with an effective plan to build a professional news service, to apply for funding.

2. Expression of concern regarding the lack of effective training pathways for First Nations people seeking a journalism career

The specific exclusion of not-for-profit organisations in accessing the Cadetship program is a serious limiting factor on the entry of First Nations people into journalism careers. As noted in the preceding section, the typical operation of First Nations media organisations is as not-for-profit organisations.

The well-known, not-for-profit organisation, Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) is a case in point and provides an example of the lost opportunity that the guidelines of the Cadetship program represent.

CAAMA has a strong news service that is not only broadcast over its own radio services, but also taken by other First Nations radio services. It has an editorial desk, and a strong news program – see <http://caama.com.au/news>. It is an excellent example of providing a culturally appropriate workplace in which media and journalism skills can be developed.

Similarly, the National Indigenous News Service is a quality news service producing news content that is then made available to First Nations radio services for broadcast. Through the National Indigenous Radio Service, it employs journalists for its own news effort, has an editorial desk, and takes community news stories mediated through the editorial desk.

But under the unduly restrictive guidelines for the Cadetship program, neither of these two organisation would be able to apply for Cadetship funding. Other indicative First Nations not-for-profit organisations with the potential to offer cadetships would include (although not limited to):

- Radio Larrakia
- Goolarri Media
- Ngukurr News (see <http://stand.uow.edu.au/the-revival-of-the-ngukurr-news/>)
- Nunga Wangga
- Koori Radio
- 3KnD
- Noongar Radio

The unnecessary restrictions of the Cadetship program create a barrier to First Nations people to enter into journalism within culturally appropriate organisations. The framing of the Cadetship program represents a significant lost opportunity for building a First Nations Cadetship program within organisations where employment is both meaningful as well as culturally appropriate.

IRCA requests that the Cadetship program be extended to enable First Nations not-for-profit organisations with an evidenced news service and appropriate editorial arrangements, or with an effective plan to build a professional news service, to apply for the Cadetship program.

Turning to the Scholarship program, IRCA considers that the scholarship framework creates significant challenges for take up by First Nations people in remote communities.

The guidelines provide little confidence that the educational needs of First Nations people in remote Australia are properly understood. The requirement for full-time study takes no account of the cultural obligations of First Nations people nor of the well-being implications for First Nations people being off country and/or away from their community and family for extended periods. Whilst IRCA acknowledges that the guidelines note the option of online study (in itself a significant challenge with poor broadband provision in remote Australia) thus allowing people to stay on country, the overall requirement for full time study is an overriding challenge no matter the delivery mode.

What is specifically disappointing is the lost opportunity to support the development of an innovative journalism training pathway from VET in Schools through Certificate courses through to higher education. The guidelines reveal a lack of vision for how First Nations people could be better supported to train in journalism. Using regional universities, there is an opportunity for those universities to work with First Nations media organisations in their region to support mixed mode delivery of journalism including work placements, and embedded Certificates leading to Diplomas. The scholarship guidelines as they stand represent a mainstream model that narrows training

approaches and will in turn work against any significant number of First Nations people taking up scholarship opportunities.

IRCA requests that the scholarship program be reshaped to fund Higher Education Providers to implement innovative training pathways including VET in Schools and embedded Certificate level courses in collaboration with appropriate remote and regional First Nations media organisations.

3. Reiteration of IRCA's January 2018 Recommendations

3.1 Concerns on limitation of eligibility to print and online

IRCA does not support the exclusion of First Nations licensed community broadcasters from eligibility for funding through the Small and Regional Publishers Innovation fund.

Recommendation

1. That First Nations broadcasters be included in the eligibility criteria for funding on the basis of their unique role in the provision of news and current affairs content to First Nations communities, as well as their unique position in the provision of news and current affairs through the lens of First Nations peoples.
2. That 10% of the funding allocation for the Small and Regional Publishers Innovation Fund be allocated for First Nations news and media (print, broadcasters, and online).
3. That the funding allocation be available for the purposes of building news and current affairs capacity in transitioning to contemporary news platforms and systems as well as in building capacity for the development of an increasing number of First Nations journalists.
4. That the Small and Regional Publishers Innovation Fund guidelines consider innovation broadly to include the development of shared systems and platforms for provision of news and current affairs content, including

sharing to non-Indigenous news organisations in remote, regional and community spaces.

3.2 Representativeness of the Advisory Committee

The importance of civic journalism is such that groups not represented effectively in mainstream media need to be included in any activity aimed at enhancing public interest journalism. It is important that minority and culturally and linguistically diverse communities be represented on the envisaged Advisory Committee.

Recommendation

5. That Section 205ZK (1) of the Bill be amended as follows:

The Minister may constitute a committee to advise the ACMA in relation to the exercise of the ACMA's powers under this Part, which Committee will include representation from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including First Nations.

3.3 Concerns on the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) as grants administrator

IRCA questions the identification of the ACMA as the funding administration body. IRCA has no issues with the integrity and professionalism of the ACMA and can only commend it for its capacity to manage spectrum, broadcast licensing and associated matters. However, the ACMA has no current capacity for administering a grants program and IRCA questions the cost-effectiveness of establishing a grants program in a new body without the history of grants administration. The Department of Communications and the Arts has that experience and we strongly recommend that the Australian Government assign the grants administration role to that department.

Recommendation

6. That grants administration be allocated to the Dept. of Communications and the Arts.