

## Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships Case Study

### *Fellowship Program*



### **Background**

Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships (IEP) enables Australian companies to help transform the vision of Indigenous communities into a reality, and shine as leaders of corporate social responsibility.

The initiative began in 2001 with a handful of Westpac employees seconded to Cape York Peninsula, Queensland, to collaborate on Indigenous business development ventures. These individuals embarked on a journey working hand in hand with the communities, exchanging business and cultural knowledge, and creative energy. The result was win-win - the Indigenous entrepreneurs obtained counsel from highly skilled professionals without the corresponding cost, while the Secondees received a rewarding, often life-changing experience.

The success of the pilot led to expanded opportunities for corporate participation and to date, more than 500 Secondees from a number of companies have contributed their diverse range of skills.

A cornerstone of the program's success is the Fellowship, whereby a corporate employee is seconded to the Cape York Business Development office in Cooktown for a year. This role is vital in providing consistent engagement and a solid relationship between the communities and the Secondees representing corporate Australia.

The Fellowship is a major contributor to analysing project viability proposed to IEP by Non Government Organisations (NGOs), primarily Cape York Partnerships ([capeyorkpartnerships.com](http://capeyorkpartnerships.com)) and Balkanu ([balkanu.com.au](http://balkanu.com.au)). These partnerships share the common strategic goal of providing business guidance, infrastructure and motivation to generate self-sustainability.

### **Objectives**

Embracing the most challenging social issues in Australia, IEP's mission is to help Indigenous people build the capabilities to choose a life they have reason to value.

Research indicates individual initiative and reward for effort results in workers and management taking responsibility for the viability of an enterprise – the key requirement for long-term success. Therefore, IEP's aim of supporting the development of Indigenous businesses is to provide training opportunities ensuring continuity, employment, a sense of purpose, pride for the local people, and opportunities to showcase their culture and connection to country. This combination helps lead to the ultimate goal of self-sustainability.

Priorities are to:

- *Build the capacity of Indigenous individuals and organisations*
- *Assist Indigenous people to access economic opportunities through the diverse capabilities of skilled people from corporate partners*
- *Engage in the real market economy*
- *Support programs fostering self-reliance, entrepreneurial activity, business planning also serving leadership and advocacy*

## IEP involvement

Model:

- NGOs identify business development support requirements - skills and funding
- IEP facilitates the private and public sector partnership - identifies corporate partners for resources and financial investment, manages the placement and training of Secondees and Fellowships
- Corporate Partner commits to supporting staff participation in the program:
  - Employee (Secondee) salary for 5 week program duration, travel & accommodation
  - Fellowship – Economic Development Officer 12 month stay working with Cape York Business Development. Salary provided by company, half claimed back from NGO.

The Fellowship conducts initial research to determine the viability of a comprehensive feasibility study, identifies the skills requirements, manages the Secondees on-site, provides continuity following their departure, and maintains the team and client focus.

“Long-term trust is developed by living side by side and appreciating the experiences of the residents of the communities on a daily basis,” says Joe Green, a Westpac Fellowship recipient, who spent a year as the Economic Development Officer in Cooktown.

Joe saw The Fellowship role as “an opportunity of a lifetime”. He headed north with his wife, three kids and their dog to manage the Cape York Business Development Office, inspired by a vision - “to provide support in an Impactful, meaningful way that continues after you’re gone.” The role spanned collaborating with existing Indigenous business owners to those who were starting with just an idea.

“One of our clients was interested in developing an eco-cruise. By talking with the traditional landowners of the area, we were able to research the project, develop a feasibility study and business proposition, and identify the financial and skills requirements to create a business plan. As a facilitator, I matched the project with the optimal Secondee.”

The Secondees provide intensive support, while the Fellowship acts as the backbone to optimise the relationships and provide assurance they will operate in the community’s best interest.

Once the Secondees complete their month-long secondment, Joe ensures continuity by underwriting the study, translating the business terminology, maintaining motivation, acting as a sounding board, ensuring due diligence, and sourcing further resources and investment.

“There are challenges,” he adds, “learning about a new culture involves accessing integrity and humility and making mistakes. However, teaching people to help themselves is incredibly empowering for everyone involved. Building relationships to develop trust, rapport and credibility is instrumental. Every positive interaction facilitates the next one.”

## Achievements to date

Examples of the successes of local Indigenous entrepreneurs of the Guugu Yimithirr Warra tribe in the Hope Vale/Cooktown region include:

- **Guurrbi Tours** (est. 2003) run by Willy Gordon with a partner, is a multi-award winning tour that has built its popularity through positive relationships with the mainstream tourist industry of Cooktown and Far North Queensland (FNQ). For the first two years the business depended on CDEP (*Community Development Employment Projects*) as income supplement. However, by 2007 the tours approximated 1600 visitors/year at an average fare of \$60/head. Total turnover just exceeded \$100k to support two people. The tours operate six days per week from 6am to 6pm. Willy, who has been Vice-President of the Cooktown Chamber of Commerce, was awarded Citizen of the Year by the Cook Shire. He regularly promotes FNQ as a tourist destination at Industry Expos and forums.
- **Eddie Woibo** has been forging productive links with commercial agricultural producers since establishing his farm within the DOGIT (*DOGIT is land granted in trust under the Land Act 1962 for the benefit of Aboriginal inhabitants or for the purpose of an Aboriginal reserve*). Eddie engaged local commercial cattleman, Alan Holmes, to help establish the Hope Vale Cattlemen's Association, 'Minya Gima' and to motivate and provide management direction for the individual producers. While opportunities exist for other Hope Vale cattlemen, Eddie is currently the only one to enter into a favourable commercial grazing agreement with commercial cattlemen. He is a member of the local Cooktown Farmer's Association and is establishing a passionfruit enterprise.
- **Conrad Michael / Helen Cordon / Joseph Mclvor** are local Cooktown Indigenous artists. While they have had mixed success with the sale of artwork, they have been able to capitalise on strong relationships with Cook Shire Hospital and other mainstream businesses by being awarded contracts to complete various pieces of art work. Currently Conrad and Helen are negotiating a proposal with the Cook Shire for the role of resident Indigenous artists at the official Information Centre.
- **Hope Vale Cultural Centre** has forged beneficial relationships with the mainstream art community, selling art and artefacts through the Cooktown Art Cooperative and other commercial outlets. Resident artist, Roy Mclvor, has recently held an art exhibition in Cairns. The proposed new centre at Hope Vale will be promoted throughout Cooktown and along roads attracting tourists to Hope Vale.
- **Black Image** is a local Indigenous band who have excellent relationships with mainstream Cooktown. Their talents attract large mixed crowds at a variety of venues throughout Queensland, generating premium appearance fees and / or gate takings.



## Recognition of value

Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships leads a program which enables businesses to enhance their community relations and employee engagement, while enriching the life of the Indigenous population. The Fellowship role offsets the cynicism originating from communities experiencing brief encounters with countless organisations and minimal follow-up. It has created trust and respect with the Indigenous leaders – a key differentiator.

“The Fellowship opportunity is something I can take back and share with my colleagues and friends. It made me feel immensely proud working for a company that has a social conscious,” says Joe Green.

“I encourage and recommend others to seek advice for their enterprises. The Balkanu team respected our ideas and helped make them a reality,” Eddie Woibo, agricultural producer.

“I gained a renewed perspective on life, appreciation of the issues facing indigenous communities and a confidence in my ability to deal with new situations. Quite simply, skills transfer can make a big difference,” Secondee, Helen Warrington based at Wujal Wujal and Cairns.

“Spending time with the communities gave us the ability to identify and scope the commercial opportunities available from land management to tourism for a unique people and environment. The strategic framework we prepared for the Lama Lama people will help provide a path forward that allows them to prosper, while preserving their heritage, culture, land and lifestyle,” Secondee Lyn Edmondson based at Coen.

“I am proud of my employer for their persistent involvement in this great program, and grateful they made it possible for me to contribute,” Secondee Richard O'Brien based at Kowanyama.

*“This program is far beyond just signing a cheque and sending it in the mail – it is about genuine collaboration with fellow Australia and the power of that is unbeatable.”*

