



# STORIES OF CHANGE

STORY #5  
MARCH 2019

## Blue Mountains ACRC *sustainable enterprise*

### Change

The Blue Mountains Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre (ACRC) was formed in 1994 as a meeting place for the Aboriginal Community, and to promote visibility of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the region. ACRC provides the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community with support and services and makes culturally appropriate referrals to mainstream services where necessary.

ACRC has enlisted the support of CFD with the goal to become more sustainable and to develop a structured plan for the future of the organisation. Part of this has included securing Deductible Gift Recipient status to receive tax deductible gifts and diversify their sources of income. ACRC also engaged an CFD volunteer to learn basket weaving and tie dying skills as an important step for cultural preservation.

A key part of becoming sustainable is recruiting more staff to grow the organisation. ACRC are firmly on this path, having recently recruited four additional full-time staff.

The organisation is currently in the process of bringing together a business plan to outline their strategic direction. This has included seeking the input and feedback of potential investors and stakeholders in developing the plan and pulling together a list of actionable tasks for the Manager and Board to complete. This project is ongoing, however,

a comprehensive draft business plan has been completed, outlining key actions and priorities for the next five years.

### Social Policy Implications

ACRC has identified the importance of becoming sustainable in order to continue to offer their services, and to keep growing as an organisation.

As ACRC works to become sustainable by diversifying funding sources and growing their workforce, they are setting themselves up to achieve economic independence. This is in line with the Federal Government Indigenous Advancement Strategy's key priority of 'employment, economic independence and social participation.'

In a 2018 report, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) stated that:

"In the contemporary era, the development of a robust and sustainable 'Indigenous economy' is essential for realising self-determining futures, facilitating sustainable and independent communities, and closing the gap. In line with the principle of self-determination, more Indigenous people than ever are seeking to achieve economic independence by contributing to the economy through the establishment of Indigenous businesses."

CFD is working with ACRC to put the necessary structures in place to move towards sustainability so that they can continue to promote visibility of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the area, and offer culturally appropriate services. As CFD continues to work with ACRC, and a number of other organisations around the country with similar objectives, it will gather broad insights around the process of Indigenous organisations seeking economic independence and sustainability. An improved evidence base in this space would be a valuable resource in light of both government priorities, and the potential benefits of successful Indigenous organisations and businesses to communities.

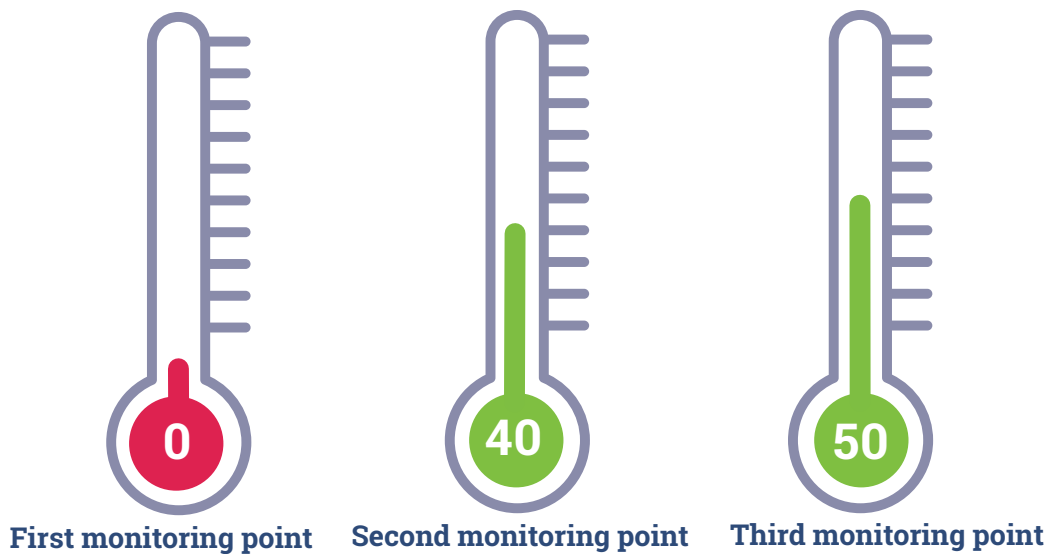


Elders Olympics team

## CFD reflections

The development of a business plan is a key step for ACRC in achieving sustainability. ACRC has been working towards the creation of such a plan for many years, and has strengthened its operations and governance to a point where it is now ready to be developing this strategic document. CFD has engaged with ACRC on other projects over the years, such as obtaining DGR status, which has led the organisation to the position that it's in today.

**Progress towards indicator: a business plan which outlines the strategic direction of ACRC has been developed**

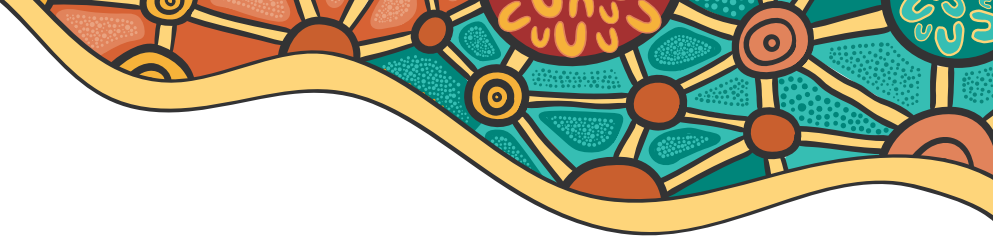


ACRC is part way through their journey towards achieving their long-term dream of financial sustainability. The organisation has recognised the importance of building strong relationships with key stakeholders as part of this process. This includes relationships with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, as well as key funding bodies and potential partners. A commitment to broad engagement is reflected in another project indicator: perspective of potential investors and stakeholders in developing the plan has been considered. Engaging widely with relevant and diverse parties is an attribute of effective governance, and will set the organisation up well for the realisation of its long-term goals (see table below).

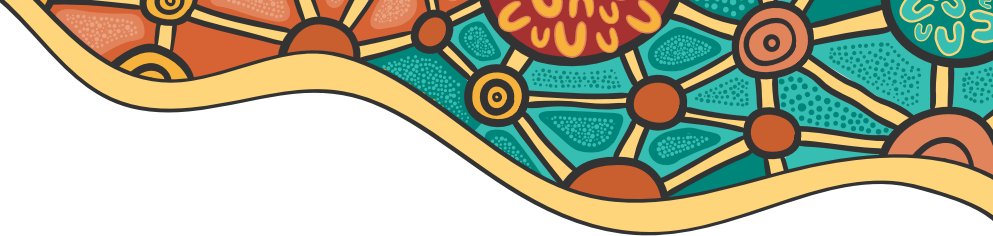
We are not in a position to attribute ACRC's strengthening governance to its involvement with CFD. CFD is, however, in the process of conducting participatory research to better understand the impact of a community development approach on the governance structures of communities we work with.

## Governance

Good governance is an important part of achieving "success in business investment," which in turn leads to economic independence. There are seven key attributes of good governance, which are listed in the table below alongside evidence of ACRC putting the attribute into action.



Attribute	Description	Evidence to support this attribute
<p><b>1. Engagement</b></p>	<p>Community: community members and relevant local networks inform and/or participate in the decision-making process</p> <p>Broader networks: relevant stakeholders from the broader network, such as governments or other external institutions, inform and/or participate in the decision-making process</p>	<p>One of the ways that ACRC involves the local community is through their membership system. Indigenous people may apply to become members, and non-Indigenous people may apply to become associate members. Full members have the right to vote on matters concerning ACRC. For example, in order to decide on the wording to be used in a particular section of the Rule Book, members were invited to vote. The option with majority support progressed.</p> <p>ACRC has also established relationships with other key stakeholders, including Blue Mountains Computers, Greater Western Aboriginal Health Service, Transport NSW and the Department of Family and Community Services. These relationships have been important for supporting ACRC's work including assisting with access to funding, transportation, culturally appropriate health services and referrals to other services for the community and ACRC clients.</p>
<p><b>2. Clear and shared strategic direction</b></p>	<p>A shared long-term view for what the community wants to do, and a timeline, or 'map', of how it will happen</p>	<p>ACRC's mission statement is "fostering respect and unity in the Blue Mountains' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, by strengthening culture through community support, empowerment and embracing diversity to achieve self-determination."</p> <p>The traditional owners of the land are the Gundungurra and Darug/Dharug people. ACRC aims to acknowledge, appreciate and respect the traditional owners and their respective cultures.</p> <p>This shared vision is articulated in their Rule Book, and they are in the process of working with an <b>CFD</b> volunteer to develop a business plan that will map out their direction, and short- and long-term priorities, over the next five years.</p>



Attribute	Description	Evidence to support this attribute
<b>3. Embedded culture</b>	<p>Governing in line with cultural and community values, understandings, and behaviours. Cultural principles that underpin Indigenous systems of governance may include, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A wide network of relationships</li> <li>- Relationships built on shared culture</li> <li>- Decision-making by consensus</li> <li>- Strong links between geography and community identity</li> </ul>	<p>ACRC is focused on providing services for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of the Blue Mountains. There are therefore strong links between the geography of the organisation, and the key priorities that underpin it.</p> <p>'Awareness of cultural values' is one of the key values that drives the work of ACRC.</p>
<b>4. Effective administration</b>	<p>Sufficient and appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- processes (organisational policies, mediations, rules, roles and responsibilities),</li> <li>- resources (natural assets, infrastructure, cultural, social, economic and human capital), and</li> <li>- capability (leadership, financial management etc)</li> </ul>	<p>The seven directors oversee the running of the corporation on behalf of all members, and make decisions about the affairs of the corporation. The directors manage, or set the direction for managing, the business of the corporation.</p>
<b>5. Accountability: external and among community</b>	<p>Actions and decisions are justified and communicated, in particular to community members and the wider network</p>	<p>ACRC communicates actions and decisions to members and the wider community through network meetings, community events, programs, newsletters, social media, AGMs and community meetings.</p>
<b>6. Legitimacy</b>	<p>Acknowledged legal, jurisdictional and cultural authority, and the genuine power to make decisions</p>	<p>ACRC largely derives its legitimacy from its long standing presence in the Blue Mountains' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.</p> <p>In 1994, a small group of local Aboriginal people had a vision of providing a meeting place for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the Blue Mountains. It was from this movement that ACRC was born. In 1996, ACRC incorporated and has played an important role in their community ever since.</p> <p>ACRC has now been an established organisation in the Blue Mountains for over 20 years.</p>

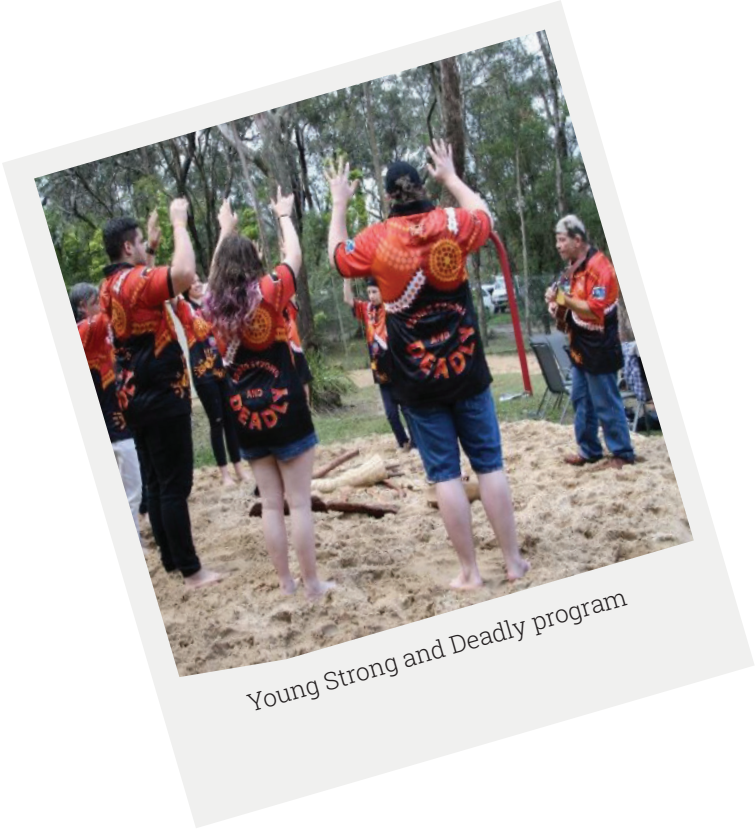


Attribute	Description	Evidence to support this attribute
<b>7. Strong leadership</b>	Influential and respected leaders who act on behalf of shared values, and are held accountable for the decisions that they make. Leaders should encourage cooperation, use resources effectively, resolve conflicts and problems transparently, care for Country, and get things done.	<p>The ACRC directors have a diverse skill set, and capabilities across a range of areas. This includes a bachelor degree in administrative leadership, a certificate in psychotherapy, qualifications in Aboriginal art and cultural practices, post graduate study in criminology, juvenile justice, and sociology, and many more. Their experience is broad, giving them a strong foundation to excel.</p> <p>The leadership is committed to professional development, and has plans for training with both staff and the Board in order to bolster the knowledge and skills of staff</p>

**Key references**

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Inquiry into Indigenous Australians at work: Successful initiatives in Indigenous employment, 13 August 2007.

The Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, Indigenous Governance Toolkit: Culture is what makes governance strong, <http://toolkit.aigi.com.au/toolkit/2-1-indigenous-governance-and-culture>.



## COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT

### OUR VISION

First Nations peoples and communities are thriving

### WHO WE ARE

Community First Development is a First Nations community development and research organisation that creates positive change in and with First Nations communities.

### WHAT WE DO

We undertake social and economic development, and research projects in partnership with First Nations communities, businesses and people. Communities have control; they name the priorities and choose the design, assets, capabilities and approaches to achieve their vision. We provide tailored support through community partners, skilled staff, trained volunteers, key supporters and service providers



*We do things with,  
not to or for, our people.*

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