

Slide 2 – Overview of presentation

The aim of this presentation is to:

Give an introduction to the Aboriginal Languages Policy and Strategic Plan,
To mention “Hard Road to Hoe”, the language project development course for
Aboriginal communities, run by the NSW Adult and Community Education,

And

To discuss the issues that a community group faces in establishing and
running an Aboriginal Language Centre.

But first I want to talk about the NSW Aboriginal Language Research and
Resource Centre – who we are and what we do.

Slide 3 – Aboriginal Language Research and Resource Centre

The New South Wales Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre helps Aboriginal communities to revitalise their languages through:

- Advocacy within government on Aboriginal languages – through the policy and strategic plan
- Funding for community language projects, through the \$200,000 per year Community Language Assistance Program. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will soon announce this years' recipients.
- Advising on potential projects, funding and acquittal requirements
- Promoting Aboriginal languages through the online archive and its website, and CDROMs for schools, TAFEs and Correctional facilities And
- Being a central contact point for language information and networking – both through its board and its larger network.

The genesis and framework for much of this work is the NSW Aboriginal Languages Policy and Strategic Plan.

Slide 4 – NSW Aboriginal Language Policy and Strategic Plan

The Policy was launched in 2003 by then Minister Andrew Refshauge, as a whole-of-government initiative.

The Policy and Strategic Plan have resulted in the listed strategic actions, amongst many other actions.

Some of these actions are independent of the policy, for example the Office of the Board of Studies' K-10 Syllabus; and some preceded the policy for example the Geographical Names Board's Dual Naming Policy.

However the intention is that the NSW Government's work in Aboriginal languages is done in a coordinated way, which is one of the objectives of the NSW Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre.

Slide 5 – Concept of a community language centre

This is how community language centres could be conceptualised.

They are the interface between Aboriginal communities who drive and benefit from the language activities, and the government and non-government agents who provide funding and other assistance to allow those language activities to be undertaken. They engage the local community through seeking their endorsement for, and encouraging their participation in, language activities.

This is a very important role – having to mediate between sometimes conflicting demands of community stakeholders and government agencies over priorities and how to do the language activity. The centre may have to resolve conflicts within its own community before it can approach and effectively deal with government and other external stakeholders. They may also have to satisfy government and other external stakeholder's demands, as part of the means of achieving the community's expectations.

This is not easy. NSW Adult and Community Education (ACE) has the training course, *Its a Hard Road to Hoe*. The course helps Aboriginal community members develop and undertake Language Projects and to be aware of what is required and how to prepare for foreseeable difficulties.

Slide 6 – ACE Hard Road to Hoe

It's a hard road to hoe:

According to the course materials, by the end of the course community members will know if it is possible to undertake a community language revival project in their community and have the knowledge and skills needed to prepare an action plan. The course gives community members the opportunity to reflect on the following aspects of a Language Project:

- *identifying the languages used within the community*
- *selecting a language for revival and determining the level of revival*
- *building a project team*
- *analysing the community context and the community resources available*
- *identifying the external resources needed to support language revival*
- *contracting specialist services*
- *safeguarding intellectual property*
- *applying for funding and*
- *writing an action plan*

This is all good stuff. But I will leave the details to the ACE course presenters.

I want to focus on what a good Aboriginal language organisation looks like, how it conducts its business, and what it takes to succeed.

The following is based on my experiences in the Aboriginal languages area specifically but also some general observations about Aboriginal organisations.

Since 2000, the NSW Aboriginal Language Research and Resource Centre has provided funding for Aboriginal community language projects.

These are my tips to organisations seeking funding. They are not secret tips on what to say in an Aboriginal languages grant application, but if you say

these things you are more likely to get funded. They are not a list of essential requirements to getting grant funding, but without them you simply won't get funding.

They are instead about what an Aboriginal language centre or organisation should look and feel like.

Slide 7 – Setting up an Aboriginal language organisation (centre)

Critical questions

Who are the members of the organisation now and who are likely to be members in the future?

How will you obtain the endorsement of your community and how will you involve them in your activities?

What kind of activities do the members want the organisation undertake?

How will the organisation raise and manage funds?

How will the organisation undertake projects, in addition to or instead of day-to-day activities?

How will the organisation interact with other organisations and institutions?

Will it be a couple of Elders meeting at each others' houses frequently to talk about language and other cultural business? Will it be somewhere for professional linguists to come and record language, undertake research into language? Will it be about putting together a language program for the local school? These matters are important to know what kind of organisational structure suits the individual circumstances.

What kind of money will the organisation be sourcing, what are the strings attached to that money?

Who has the skills and capacity to run the organisation – to organise and hold meetings, keep accounts and manage finances, to respond to correspondence, to do media and other promotional work? If you don't have these skills or aren't even interested in it, try and find another organisation who does.

I sit on many grant selection committees, and I am now not surprised that many of the same organisations are so successful at obtaining funding, whether its Aboriginal languages, environmental restoration or arts and

cultural events funding. They don't get the money simply because of who they are, or who they are friends with.

It is because they have got their act together when it comes to:

Lodging applications that look professional, meet all the selection criteria and provide evidence they can do the project (and typically have successfully done similar projects in the past)

Receiving, Managing, and acquitting the funding

Doing the project and documenting the outcomes

Submitting all reports and other required documentation

While this comes with experience for the organisation and its members, looking at similar organisations in your area can be a good starting point.

Slide 8 – types of language organisations

So what kinds of organisations are there:

Aboriginal Corporations (under Cth Act)

Cooperatives (under NSW Act)

Land Councils (under ALRA)

Native title bodies (under the Native Title Act)

Unincorporated bodies.

The main reason for incorporation is to receive and handle (ie spend) government money. There are also taxation incentives. Existing organisations like land councils should not be discounted because they have the statutory basis for existence and operation and can call on significant internal resources for assistance.

Also consider the use of corporate groups – where a corporation manages risk by using subsidiaries or related companies to conduct the business activity. For example XYZ Aboriginal Elders Corporation is the parent company, and XYZ Aboriginal Languages Centre is a wholly owned and controlled subsidiary. If XYZ Aboriginal Languages Centre has financial difficulties, the Elders Corporation may be shielded from liability and visa versa.

If you don't want to handle money, there are incentives to remain unincorporated, for example reporting requirements and formality of meetings.

If you set up the organisation for a single purpose or activity, consider what is required to wind-up the organisation at the end of the activity. Many of the Aboriginal Corporation on ORAC's non-compliant list of 2007-2008 were single purpose/activity organisations.

Once you know what type of organisation you are now, or want to be, make sure you include Aboriginal language activities in the organisation's

constitution. LALCs are covered by section 52(2)(4) – promotion of culture and heritage. Native title bodies will depend on how they describe their rights and interests in their claim or determination. Other organisations will need to put Aboriginal languages as one of their objectives, in order to justify their work to their members, funding bodies and the communities in which they operate.

If you choose to work through an existing organisation, be sure that all the members are aware of (and depending on the organisation's rules agree with) this new area of activity, particularly if it has resource implications for the organisation. If the existing organisation's core business is not Aboriginal languages, be sure that the new activities don't threaten that core business – for example an Aboriginal Housing Cooperative may not be the best organisation through which to start an Aboriginal language project.

You also need to think about the rules of your organisation. Who can be a member? How does the organisation make its decisions? What are the rules around the expenditure of money? What does the governance structure of the organisation look like? Who is responsible for handling correspondence, dealing with the government and the media?

Slide 9 – Funding

Sources of money

There are two sources of money – public and private. Public or government money is, as the media constantly reminds us, is taxpayers money, which means there are obligations on how it can be spent and the level of accountability expected from those spending it. Public money can be in the form of grants – such as Community Language Assistance Program DAA and Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records DEWHA – or it can take the form of a budget item in an agency budget – for example the ALRRC budget is part of the DAA's budget allocation from Treasury and is accounted and reported (in the annual report) as such.

Private money is less obvious in the languages area, but still a major potential and actual source of funding for Aboriginal language organisations. This can come in the form of grants or other funding from benevolent, charitable or philanthropic organisation – such as Microsoft Foundation. Other private sources of funding can include revenue from the sale of books, materials, or service provision by employees or members. An example of a language-related service could be paid welcome to country speeches.

Public money has a high degree of accountability – funding bodies expect every dollar spent to be accounted for and that it is spent consistently with the agreed project plan. This means that project spending must be acquitted or every good or service purchased in the course of the project documented. For some projects this can be straight-forward and some accounting software packages do this by pressing a single button. Other projects, that is most projects in the real world this accounting is not so straight forward. Some common difficulties are where a project funding allocation is split over several accounts, or split between the organisation and auspice. Or where it is difficult to separate the funding from several sources, eg State and Cth grants,

for the single project. Or where the organisation's own contributions are not able to be separated from the total project expenditure. These situations can be total nightmares for organisations and funding bodies.

Private money may or may not demand this degree of accountability, that all depends on who is providing the funding and their terms and conditions. The private sponsor may demand a large role in the undertaking of the project or directing the performance of the project. They may also expect some degree of ownership of the project's products and promotion of their role in the project. All these "mays" depend on who the private sponsor is and their expectations from their investment in the project.

The main message I want to leave with you – funding means that centre can function, do projects and deliver language services to its communities, but it comes at a significant cost to the organisation in terms of managing, accounting and reporting on expenditure. Think about the type of money you are or wish to receive and whether or not you have the capacity to meet the terms and conditions attached to the funding. If you can't or don't want to handle the money, think about finding an organisation in your area or a peak body who can manage the money on your behalf and meet your obligations for financial management and accounting.

Remember to establish your project budget acquittal and monitoring processes early to ensure accurate accounting and on-time project delivery. Doing this will go a long way getting future funding opportunities and saving headaches because its virtually impossible to do things properly after the fact.

Slide 10 – Auspice organisations

Auspices

If you don't want to handle money directly, the organisation can remain unincorporated, do its business but have an auspice or a sponsor organisation handle the money.

One of the burdens imposed by government money is reporting, acquittal and often auditing of project accounts. This can be time consuming and expensive for an organisation, so it can save significant work for another organisation with greater accountancy skills, expertise and capacity to maintain the project accounts. This may have some costs – financial, the sponsor or auspice may charge an administration fee – independence, the sponsor or auspice may want some say over expenditure and performance of the project – agency, what are the hidden costs of someone else acting on behalf of your organisation.

At start-up either of the organisation or for the organisation to take on a new project or involve itself in a new work activity, it needs to think about where the money is coming from and whether honestly it has the capacity to handle the money in accordance with the funding bodies expectations.

When finding an auspice think about:

Do they understand the project we are wanting to do, what the money is to be spent on, the limitations on the spending

Do they understand your organisation, what its objectives, who are the key contacts

Do their own financial management rules permit them to spend the money according to the project's terms and your organisation's expectations – for example government agencies must tender for expenditure over \$50,000.

Are they a reasonable and respectable organisation – is there a risk that the money may be misappropriated or spent on things other than the project?

These things are important to the relationship between the community language organisation and the auspice – the funding body is also usually keen to know about the auspice and their credentials. Like all relationships involving money or property, it is best to get the auspice relationship in writing. It can be as simple as an exchange of letters between the organisation and the auspice. But the important thing to be made clear is that the auspice is holding and managing money on behalf of the organisation, for the purpose of the particular project, and some rules about how the money is to be spent and accounted.

Slide 11 – Future of Aboriginal language centres

Language promotion

Two recent events that illustrate what needs to be done.

ABC Radio

On ABC Local Radio, the ABC's Religious Affairs journalist in a journalists' forum program made the comment about "relativism", and went on to call accept of "traditional Indigenous beliefs" a failed experiment, and the key point, **including teaching Aboriginal languages in the classroom.**

What was at issue was the provocative suggestion that polygamy should be allowed in Australia. But somehow the teaching of Aboriginal languages in the classroom, entered the anti-relativism debate.

In part interest has been flared by the media coverage of the poor educational outcomes of the NT schools who teach in Aboriginal languages. The criticism has centred on the fact that Aboriginal students are graduating or at least leaving schools and having poor or very poor levels of literacy in English, and therefore not being "employable" in the mainstream economy and acting as a disincentive to engaging with mainstream Australia.

I don't want to get into the relativism or anti-relativism debate, or even the poor educational outcomes for school children in the NT. But I do think when generalised and simplified by the media it does send the wrong message, that Aboriginal languages in the classroom cause lowering of educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

In NSW, the opposite is true. Teaching Aboriginal languages is a positively attracts Aboriginal students to attend school, and has does increase Aboriginal students outcomes in other subject areas. Unlike the NT schools, Aboriginal language is taught as a language subject, or as a part of related subjects such as environmental studies, rather than as the language for the communication of all subjects.

The real value of Aboriginal languages to the community needs to be promoted and the negative messages entering the media from the “shock horror” of the conditions in the NT must be counted with the great news of what is happening in NSW. But who knows this information and who is best placed to promote it through their local community?

Business use of Aboriginal names

My second event is one such good news story, or it will be, if it actually happens. I was contacted by a member of the public, as I often am, asking a question about Aboriginal languages. Typical questions are: “I am wanting to build a canal estate/golf course/cotton farm at Whoop Whoop and I want to use an Aboriginal name....”. While their intention is good, it’s a little too colonial for me. But its their intention that makes the inquiry worth pursuing.

Anyway this caller owns a manufacturing company, and wants to use Indigenous names for his export products. The first reaction was the caller wanted me to give him a list of names there and then (as these questioners typically expect). I would then see these names on the next batch of toilet paper destined for Quebec!

So I gave him my intellectual property lecture – “I couldn’t call my fish and chips shop, McDonalds without some form of licence from the McDonalds Corporation...so you should get a licence from the language owners or custodians before you use a name in their language...and just because you can find a name on the internet, doesn’t necessarily mean the ownership has been given up by the language owners...” you get the idea. Expecting this

would silence the questioner and perhaps cool their enthusiasm for using an Indigenous name, it didn't. He understood about intellectual property and was keen to make sure the language owners' rights were being looked after. He added that his export products would also be sold locally and did not want to offend anybody by using the name.

The message is that in the international and domestic market place, Aboriginal languages have a value. One some people in the business world are willing to go the extra step or two to do it right first time, rather than rely on their good intentions alone. This is where Aboriginal Language Centres can come to the fore to work with businesses on mutually beneficial outcomes – for business it means their Indigenous brand separates it from other products on the retailer's shelves, for Aboriginal communities it means mainstream acceptance of their language AND perhaps payment for the use of their language.

But how would this scenario play out if good intentioned and good willed business person calls their local Aboriginal Language Centre and there is no one there to take his call, no one there to respond to his letters, an out of date website that links to defunct sites or has old contact details. It is these things that make the difference.