

Case Study

Supporting culturally grounded training for Indigenous artists through IT



Background

National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) is Australia's premier Indigenous dance training college. Since 1976 it has provided accredited training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performers, in cultural and contemporary dance and other disciplines related to the performing arts. NAISDA is a modern and dynamic organisation, but the training it offers is based on rich cultural connection to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of learning and living and respect for Country. A cultural residency program involves Cultural Dance Tutors who provide Developing Artists (DAs) with rich insights into their culture and traditions. This knowledge is central to the experience of learning at NAISDA. It transforms DAs as individuals, and contributes to NAISDA's creation of successive generations of culturally proud and skilled Indigenous artists, who actively shape the ongoing cultural development of Australia.

Jawun became a partner of NAISDA in 2012. Since then 16 secondees have supported its work by building capacity in marketing, finance, organisational policy and other areas. Early in the partnership, NAISDA Executive Director Kim Walker recognised the opportunity to also drive innovation with secondee resources, and began overseeing their contribution to strategic planning and business development to make NAISDA's bold visions a reality. For instance, several secondees recently supported the planned development of *Naya Wa Yugali*, NAISDA's exciting new artistic cultural learning precinct set to inspire and embed Indigenous knowledge into the future.

One area central to the consolidation and expansion of NAISDA's success is IT. As a major training institute with multiple programs, dozens of staff and hundreds of DAs, IT solutions are needed for smooth administration, for marketing and profile, and to support DA learning and development. With every expansion and new growth, the organisation's needs have become greater and more complex. IT may be the least glamorous aspect of NAISDA's work, but a capable system and strategy is the foundation to achieving its ambitious goals.

In 2011, NAISDA was awarded a new building. Unsure how to embark on a necessary new IT strategy for the expanding organisation, a project brief for a Jawun secondee to write an Information Technology roadmap was written in 2012.

By July 2013 the appropriate skills had been found in KPMG secondee from Perth, Gabor Sirko, who worked with the Executive Director and a range of other staff to fully understand the NAISDA model and then define its IT and website needs for the next five years. Kim noted at the time that Gabor's secondment brought NAISDA '*amazing expertise that we cannot access without significant financial resources that are not in our budget*', and the opportunity '*to make major strategic decisions that take the organisation forward.*' Then in August 2015, Gabor was followed by a Jawun secondee from Westpac, Dragan Beocanin, who was deployed to implement a portion of the IT roadmap Gabor had started.

Approach

The report Gabor wrote covered 29 possible initiatives under three key IT requirements: a better user experience, support for organisational growth, and increased administrative efficiency. While some elements of the roadmap could be implemented immediately, it was not until 2015 that NAISDA was ready to begin the major piece of work it recommended: a full upgrade of the IT system, and software to deliver on the three key needs. Again, a project brief was developed and the right skills were found in a Jawun secondee from Westpac, Dragan Beocanin, who was deployed to NAISDA in August 2015.

Dragan researched the costs and capabilities of different options available, working with the Executive Director and staff to rapidly develop a proposal for the NAISDA Board. This was approved in the second week of his secondment, with the Board giving the all clear to proceed with the purchase and implementation of new IT infrastructure (increased server capacity and security) and Sharepoint and VETtrak Student Management Systems. Dragan oversaw within-budget purchasing and correct installation, and trained key staff to use the new systems according to their needs.

The upgrade brought a number of important transformations to NAISDA's operation and efficiency: Sharepoint's 'team collaboration software', for example, meant that all NAISDA's training, staff and DA information could now be readily accessed and updated in one place; VETtrak, Australia's leading student management system, meant that all DA enrolment, training, assessment and reporting needs could be easily dealt with and accessed by staff and students alike; and the entire system became faster and more secure.

Outcomes

Staff and DAs felt the new system improved their productivity and administrative efficiency, reporting their satisfaction in early 2016. The Executive Director certainly felt that Dragan had delivered on his brief, and had '*absolutely nailed what NAISDA needed*'. Over time, he expects the changes to lead to increased collaboration and communication internally, better time management, better servicing of DA information and data, and better future planning within the organisation.

The experience was a good example of strong compatibility between organisational needs and secondee skills, and of the value of sequencing secondees to drive longer-term change one secondment at a time. The six-week secondment exposed Gabor and Dragan not only to NAISDA but also, through its students from across the country, to wider issues facing Indigenous communities in Australia. Both were moved by the histories and challenges faced, and positive about the chance to support NAISDA and the opportunities it represents. As Dragan put it, '*Gaps in life expectancy, health, education, and living standards are as large as ever – and will only be addressed when there are enough people in the mainstream Australia who care enough to engage, and go on to engage others.*'

Next Steps

NAISDA will continue to review the updated IT roadmap, considering future needs or possible IT-driven innovations such as online training. As Kim puts it, the work of Gabor and Dragan not only strengthened NAISDA's current operations, it also laid a strong foundation for its future: '*The Jawun secondees that worked with NAISDA gave the organisation the means to scope, plan and implement an IT system that has proven invaluable in creating a more efficient and more satisfying working environment. And they also enabled a clearer map of the future needs.*'