

Case Study

Supporting the growth of Bama Services



Background

Formed in 2010, Bama Services (originally called Djarragun Enterprises) is a 100 per cent Indigenous-owned business, with over 70 per cent of the current workforce identifying as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. It is underpinned by the following '5 Pillars of Success' approach:

- Safe: safety is given the highest priority;
- Competent: building a competent team of experts within their fields;
- 100% Indigenous Owned: by Cape York Partnership;
- Scale: with services in six different divisions, Bama Services is a medium-sized business with the aspiration of being a market leader in Queensland;
- Competitive: an expectation to win projects based on credentials, history and price as opposed to winning based on the Indigenous ownership.

The organisation's business model also relies on providing intensive support to its employees. Many of the work crew members have grown up in communities where full-time employment is not a social norm, so a key factor in the successful transition into work is the Support and Wellbeing program provided by Bama Services. Under the program, there is a dedicated manager who coordinates services for employees around medical, addiction, mental health, nutrition, social, legal and vocational training needs – all with the aim of providing opportunities for personal and professional development.

Bama Services continually reinvests to help grow the business further and provide support for future skilled workers. Originally set up as a small construction and landscaping business, it now operates under the six commercial divisions: Building Construction; Building Maintenance; Garden Maintenance; Landscape Construction; Waste Services; and Civil Construction. Historically, the business operated with a reliance on philanthropic and corporate support, but is now focused on long-term financial sustainability through the growth of its business divisions.

Bama Services has recognised the need to bring in skilled resources to join existing employees in order to grow its business and help expand into new business streams. Industry experts have been critical in connecting the organisation with networks that were previously unavailable to it, and the Jawun secondment program has been a key enabler of these types of relationships.

Over the years, Bama Services has utilised more than 10 Jawun secondees with skills in funding submissions, reporting, compliance, policy and procedures, financial administration, health and safety, salary reviews and data management to help build a strong foundation and robust internal frameworks. However, more recently Bama Services has been supported by Cape York Enterprises and their recent secondees in a more strategic role. Through these strategic conversations, opportunities to enter new industries were identified, particularly in civil construction.

Approach

In 2013, the Queensland State Government and Federal Government approved a combined \$260 million in funding to the Cape York Region Package between FY14–FY19. Of the total contributions, it is anticipated that \$200 million will be allocated to progressive works on upgrading the Peninsula Development Road (PDR) with bitumen seal, as this is the main transport link between the Cape York Peninsula and the remainder of the Australian mainland. The completion of the works is of high

importance to the region as it will provide improved accessibility for locals and visitors, and support the growth of local industry and secondary economies. The upgrading of the PDR was seen as a feasible entry point to the industry for Bama Services.

A key element to the application made by Bama Services to the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) was to engage industry-recognised expertise to elevate confidence in working with Bama Services. A long-standing and strong partnership with Jawun helped enable this process. Jawun entered discussions with Downer, a Jawun partner since 2014, and were able to source a local Downer secondee, Craig Gordon, with the required skill set within a short timeframe. Tim Beasley, analyst for Cape York Enterprises, reflected, 'It may have taken a further 12 months to source a Project Manager of the calibre of Craig had Downer not been a Jawun partner.'

Indigenous Construction Resource Group (ICRG) partnered with Bama Services to submit a joint-venture proposal to TMR for a two-kilometre section of the total PDR works. Having limited experience and exposure to the civil construction industry, it took significant planning from all parties involved to progress the request to a 'Letter of Award' stage.

Once Craig had been accepted onto the Jawun program as a Project Manager for Bama Services, he was able to attend the final briefing meeting between Bama Services, Cape York Enterprises and TMR one week prior to the works and his secondment commencing. In this initial discussion, it became evident that TMR had a long association with Craig and that he would be a key asset to Bama Services on their first civil construction contract. Craig was seen by all parties as being integral to delivering the job.

On Monday 19 October 2015, Bama Services commenced works to complete a two-kilometre stretch of the PDR, worth around \$1.2 million. Works on the PDR include:

- completion of side tracks to allow through traffic;
- clearing a four-kilometre stretch of road;
- treatment of ground surface;
- excavation and embankment completion;
- placement of sub base material;
- laying of bitumen.

The timeframe for completion was set by TMR and Bama Services for pre-Christmas, with most suppliers closing their offices on 16 December 2015. Bama Services completed this ahead of schedule. Craig Gordon was instrumental in getting the works completed early, by consulting with Bama Services and setting up a team using existing networks from both sides, comfortably achieving progression targets, meeting compliance standards and building the capacity and capability of the Bama Services work crew.

Outcomes

The value of the PDR project to Bama Services was significant not only in dollar terms but in helping the organisation work towards attaining prequalification with TMR. In receiving a prequalification status, Bama Services will be able to tender and win contracts outright, as there will be a track record of the organisation meeting compliance and quality standards. Adam Dunn, Executive General Manager of Bama Services, said Craig's work was invaluable to this process: 'Should we not have had Craig's services, it would have taken two years to gain prequalification.'

In winning the contract, Bama Services have employed eight new staff, five of which are Indigenous. Four of the new staff come from Cape York communities and were previously unemployed, but have now been given the opportunity to work thanks to Bama Services. Craig has taken a lead role in building the capacity and capability of these individuals.

Craig said of his secondment experience: 'Working for a growing organisation like Bama Services has been energising. I've had the opportunity to take a lead role in making things happen, and working with the Executive General Manager Adam Dunn has been a really good fit. Our skills complement each other and he gave me the opportunity to get things done.'

Indicating a growing trust in Bama Services, TMR have asked that they continue working on a non-contractual basis on the PDR until the wet season arrives.

Next Steps

The success of the placement of Craig Gordon has paved the way for future secondees with industry experience in construction to come onto the program and help Bama Services and other Indigenous organisations grow their businesses in new directions via the secondment program.