

## Case Study

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### Strengthening Gumatj Corporation's Small Business Framework



#### Background

The Gumatj Corporation represents the Gumatj peoples of North East Arnhem Land. Their key focus is to develop sustainable industry through harnessing natural resources which promotes a healthy society, good education and an ability to maintain and gain real employment opportunities without government support.

Gumatj enterprises and businesses are assisting to lower the cost of living in community whilst increasing the capabilities of the local Yolngu people who are working and training in these businesses. The businesses include: the Garrithiya cattle station and abattoir, meat and fish processing centre, timber mill and furniture making workshop, furniture display room, nursery, community store and café. The community store provides easily accessible, healthy food options at a reasonable price. The only alternative food outlet is 15km away and with limited public transport, expensive taxi services absorb much of the community's money.

Over the past two years the Gumatj Corporation's Small Business Enterprise Framework (SBEF) has grown at an extremely fast rate and a gap in foundational business processes became apparent, along with the capability of staff to manage business outcomes. It was identified that Jawun secondees could assist from an administrative and operational perspective to begin bridging this gap.

Careful consideration was required for the secondees to balance an operating environment that is striving to support Yolngu participation as well as the transfer of knowledge and skills. Secondees also had to navigate the diverse group of stakeholders who have been operating their projects for many years through loose informal community arrangements that lack rigour or coordination. The secondees were required to tactfully lead and influence this group of people in order to achieve their project deliverables. The intent was to achieve all of this in time for the July 2013 opening of the new Community Business Hub, which incorporates the community store, café, plant nursery and furniture display room.

#### Approach

Since commencing in the region in August 2012, Jawun facilitated three highly skilled secondees to Gumatj Corporation from the Equities and Margin Lending team of the Commonwealth Bank. Each of these three secondees has brought project management and business process development expertise to the brief outlined by Gumatj Corporation.

Mathew Tilley, Manager for Exchange Traded Options, International and Derivative Markets commenced the project in October 2012. He began by conducting an analysis of the entire SBEF. Working with the Darwin based finance team his main objective was to create a structured expense management framework that would provide a standardised financial structure that could be utilised across each business entity including the community store, café, nursery, meat/fish processing centre and furniture display room. Mathew streamlined a set of policies and procedures for replication across procurement, ordering, receipting and payment for goods and supplies. He also produced a training manual to assist in transferring the new knowledge and building the capability of the staff. According to John Marchant, Group Finance and Administrative Officer, "The procedures that he [Mathew Tilley]

has drafted will be an asset to getting our core business activities into a more streamline order, which in turn, will greatly enhance the running of the group as a whole”.

In February 2013 Carl Merchant, Team leader Australian Equities & Margin Lending, arrived at the Gumatj Corporation offices in Gunyangara ready to pick up where Mathew had left off. He continued the administrative work of tightening the business processes by developing clear business guidelines, policies and procedures that created further transparency across the SBEF. The final document gave a clear succinct outline that the company could follow. It was important that this could be easily understood by the board members and future Yolngu leaders.

Carl took a more practical approach to focus the diverse group of stakeholders and bring them all onto the same page. With the deadline drawing closer he also recognised the opportunity to train some of the Yolngu ladies in coffee making. He and a fellow CBA secondee set up the necessary equipment in the café, store and processing centre. According to Klaus Helms, CEO Gumatj Corporation, “Carl wasn't phased by the difficulties on the ground here in Gunyangara. Any subject matter that was given to him he managed to achieve a positive outcome for Gumatj Corporation”.

Finally, CBA Business Analyst, Damien Messina, came on board in May of 2013. Damien stepped in to oversee the 5 project streams. Damien's project management and communication skills came to the fore as he began engaging daily with the key stakeholders, contractors, suppliers and Yolngu staff. Damien clearly outlined all the steps leading up to the opening deadline and allocated accountability to each team leader. Damien mentored the furniture workshop managers in how to utilise some of his own processing and planning tools so that they too could better meet their own project deadlines. According to Rob Steendam, Furniture Workshop Manager, “In terms of helping with managing tasks and timelines across the department it will create clarity for the Yolngu work crew as well as the people requesting more jobs”.

## **Outcomes**

The underlying benefit of having three secondees from the same business unit who knew each other as friends and colleagues meant they were able to pass essential knowledge and information about the community, family and business networks to one another prior to secondment allowing them to grasp their roles quickly. Furthermore, known association allowed the Indigenous partner and community members to connect more easily because they remembered the previous secondee.

The secondees balanced administrative and practical operational support to produce business policies and procedures, financial forecasting templates, training manuals and a clear map of the organisations structure including roles and responsibilities. They successfully liaised with the stakeholders engaging them to all focus on meeting the deadline for the opening of the 'Community Business Hub' in July 2013.

The opening of the community store means that the local community can access healthy nutritional food at a reasonable price. Long trips into town in expensive bush taxis will no longer be a daily occurrence. The progressive work of the secondees on the SBEF has enabled Gumatj Corporation to keep the community's money in the community. It is not set up to make huge profits. Instead it is set up with the intention to create a more sustainable economy for the long term as well as employment and training opportunities. According to Klaus Helms, CEO, “Engagement is a key criteria to building relationships with Yolngu people, although family seemed to be mixed heavily in business the secondees managed to balance the difference between business and culture to achieve this outcome”.

## **Next Steps**

A key recommendation going forward from the last secondment was for a Project Manager to be engaged to manage the Gumatj SBEF. A position description was drafted ready to be presented to the Gumatj Board for consideration.