

Case Study

Supporting Best Practice at Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation



Background

Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation (YYNAC) represents the Yorta Yorta people, who are the Traditional Owners of a stretch of territory located in the Goulburn Murray region of Victoria. The organisation's remit is to make decisions and act on matters of significance to the Yorta Yorta people. One way the organisation does this is through its Cultural Heritage Unit (CHU), which seeks to protect Yorta Yorta culture through the preservation of relics, human remains, land and water on Yorta Yorta Country.

Under the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, before any major land development occurs in Victoria a Notice of Intent must be lodged with the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, which then engages an archaeologist to develop a cultural heritage management plan. The role of the CHU is to review the plan, inspect the proposed site development for potential impact on Aboriginal cultural heritage and, as appropriate, outline recommendations.

Cultural heritage management plans are required for large developments and other high impact activities in culturally sensitive landscapes that can cause significant harm to Aboriginal cultural heritage.

From late 2014 to mid 2015, the CHU experienced an unusually busy period with an influx of cultural heritage management plans. This exposed gaps in the unit's administration processes, particularly around invoicing and compliance requirements under the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act. YYNAC CEO Tom Day sought assistance from Jawun secondee Lita Luly, an executive assistant at Westpac, to implement new reporting and invoicing processes across the CHU.

Approach

Lita worked closely with the unit's administrative staff, management and CEO Tom Day to ascertain where improvements could be made in the areas of compliance, invoicing, record-keeping and data management. Once familiar with the unit, Lita identified that efficiencies could be gained by making some simple administrative changes and introducing new processes.

Tom Day, CEO of YYNAC, explained: 'Lita added a lot of value in the six weeks she was with us. She quickly identified gaps we hadn't seen and things we could improve within the unit.'

Working closely with the administrative support officer Khiara Harrison, Lita created a register for tracking and managing each cultural heritage management plan from start to finish. The register will assist management to plan ahead and ensure correct processes are followed on future jobs, particularly with regards to government regulations. Lita then worked on a detailed analysis of the CHU, outlining its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, with a major emphasis on the unit's administrative processes.

Importantly, Lita also created new invoicing processes and templates, and mentored administrative staff throughout her secondment.

Khiara Harrison, administrative support officer for the CHU, described the impact of Lita's work and mentoring: 'The tools Lita created for the unit are fantastic. I can now track when an invoice has been raised and sent for payment. Beyond the new processes, Lita also taught me how to communicate more effectively and professionally when interacting with stakeholders. Thanks to Lita, I now have a

better understanding of how the cultural heritage management processes work, which has allowed me to become more proficient in my job.'

Outcomes

During her secondment, Lita created a range of easy-to-use templates specifically tailored for the CHU. She trained relevant staff in the use of the new templates, ensuring the new processes and procedures became part of the unit's day-to-day operations.

Staff were also trained to record, monitor and evaluate Notice of Intents, and encouraged to share the new processes across YYNAC's other business units. As a result, Lita's work was also adopted by Woka Walla, a division of YYNAC concerned with biodiversity restoration, land management and infrastructure development. Woka Walla now utilise Lita's reporting and invoicing templates when tendering for contracts.

As a result of the new invoicing processes, YYNAC's Cultural Heritage Unit received over \$300,000 from outstanding work. Processes are in place to action further outstanding invoices.

Tom Day, CEO of YYNAC, explained the benefit of having someone with Lita's experience work with the organisation: 'As a Registered Aboriginal Party, YYNAC's responsibility to protect, preserve and maintain our cultural heritage is paramount. Lita assisted in ensuring we continue to manage our cultural heritage responsibility in line with the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act's regulations and that the unit remains viable through regular invoicing.'

Lita Luly described her secondment experience working with YYNAC: 'I've learned so much it's impossible to put it all into words. From a Jawun perspective, what a wonderful opportunity to work outside my usual industry. I believe I've grown as a person and developed my problem-solving skills. We made some great progress on updating the processes at the CHU, and it was also a privilege to work with the staff. Khiara is a fantastic asset to the team and I saw some very positive changes in her in the short time I was there.'

Next Steps

As cultural heritage work increases, so will the need to maintain efficient and compliant processes. Since Lita's secondment, management at the CHU have turned their attention to the development of a business plan to increase the unit's revenue and scope.

Across all its business units, YYNAC will strive to continue to review and improve its internal processes, ensuring best practice and excellence in the ongoing protection and preservation of cultural heritage across Yorta Yorta Country.