

Case Study

Building Solid Foundations for La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council



Background

Established on 25 January 1984 and with a membership of over 380 Aboriginal people, the La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) is committed to serving the Aboriginal community and the broader community through business and economic enterprise, integrated with extensive cultural and social expertise, to achieve a better future for La Perouse.

La Perouse LALC have faced many challenges in the past, and have been under government appointed administrators on several occasions due to mismanagement. The current Board and management are respected community members who set the task of clearing the organisation's name, as well as establishing a strong Community Land and Business Plan (CBLP) for the future.

A CLBP (business plan) is a statutory requirement of all LALCs in New South Wales, to determine operations and functions of each LALC. The business plan must be approved by the LALC's members in order to be actioned.

The La Perouse LALC receives a modest statutory grant from the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council and also generates income from supplying the following services:

- Provision and maintenance of community housing
- Aboriginal cultural heritage protection
- Conferences and events
- Aboriginal cultural awareness training

Chris Ingrey, an Aboriginal man from La Perouse, became CEO of the Land Council in 2011. Since then, Chris has embarked on the challenge of establishing the La Perouse LALC as a central organisation in the area and one of the leading LALCs in New South Wales. To do this, the La Perouse LALC needed to develop a new business plan, to outline the actions required to deliver real benefits to the La Perouse Aboriginal community.

La Perouse LALC has been working with Jawun since March 2012, and to date has been supported by 10 corporate and government secondees. Six secondees were from Commonwealth Bank, three from the Australian Public Service, and one from the John Holland Group.

Approach

In March 2012, one Commonwealth Bank (CBA) secondee and one secondee from the John Holland Group were deployed to the LALC. These secondees worked with Chris Ingrey to review the LALC's current operations and business plan. The key priority for the La Perouse LALC was the development of their new CLBP as this would be critical in establishing the new direction of the Land Council. However, some foundational work was required before the organisation could get to that point. After a thorough diagnostic and consultation with the LALC, the secondees articulated a number of key priorities which would guide the work of future secondees.

The first priority was to implement more effective record management and accounts systems. As part of its core operations the Land Council needed to manage everything from land claims, disputes and land management paperwork, compliance documents and internal records. In the past, record keeping had been managed in an ad hoc manner and Chris was keen to establish a more systematic process.

At the same time new policies and procedures were required, such as a clear approval process for membership to the Land Council and how the Land Council's AGM should be run. Establishing clear processes aimed to build the confidence of the staff and help them manage their external stakeholders.

The Land Council is also a central community organisation with responsibility for the provision and maintenance of affordable community housing. As such, the staff field a wide range of inquiries, complaints and feedback from the community. As a lean organisation, this can be challenging for the staff at times. More sophisticated customer service and client management training and procedures were required to assist in this area. In addition, other ways for the community to engage with the Land Council and obtain information also needed to be developed, such as an effective website and social media channels.

The LALC received three more secondees in 2012. A CBA secondee with a background in retail management and a government secondee with a background in law worked together to support the Land Council staff with enhanced customer service procedures. They also developed a computer-based records management system and began assisting the members, Board and staff in identifying what community benefits could be achieved through the new business plan.

Another secondee was deployed in 2012 from CBA with a background in fraud and digital media. This secondee set to work interviewing staff and building the content and platform for a new website for the Land Council.

In 2013, a Department of Defence secondee with a background in governance was deployed to progress the business plan. This secondee continued to develop the draft CLBP, the engagement process and draft presentation to gain the support of LALC members.

Following this, a secondee from CBA with a background in website design continued the work initiated in 2012 and created the LALC's own website to promote the work being done by the improved La Perouse LALC and provide information to the community.

A secondee from CBA with a background in marketing created social media pages on Facebook and Twitter to aid the LALC's access to and communication with its members and the wider community.

A secondee from Australian Public Service Commission with a background in administration completed the draft CLBP to be presented to members at the end of 2013. The final secondee for 2013 was from CBA with a background in finance, who worked closely with the La Perouse LALC's accounts person to improve the organisation's accounting systems.

Outcomes

The La Perouse LALC has come a long way in its first two years with Jawun, and has learned how to manage and optimise the skilled resources it has received through the Jawun program. Chris Ingrey understands the importance of engaging the secondees and providing them with the tools to deliver. He ensures the secondees feel part of the team, includes them in key meetings and enables access to the information they need. Managing short-term, skilled resources effectively can be challenging, and Jawun regards La Perouse LALC's ability to do this as a mark of their growing capabilities and maturity as an organisation. Chris Ingrey, CEO of La Perouse LALC, says: "In the beginning, I quickly realised that this program wasn't just consultants coming into our organisation for six weeks to work on a specific project and Jawun secondees shouldn't be considered as consultants. At La Perouse all Jawun secondees are considered part of the La Perouse LALC team and community for the six weeks."

To date, the La Perouse LALC has delivered many of the recommendations made by the first Jawun secondees in 2012:

1. The Land Council now has more efficient back-office systems and procedures which help existing staff do their jobs more effectively
 - Staff have migrated to a more efficient, computer-based, records management system
 - New organisation policies and procedures have been implemented which have improved governance and customer service.
2. The LALC has benefitted from an enhanced reputation and increased community confidence helped by:
 - Improved customer service and client management systems
 - A new website and new social media pages (Facebook and Twitter) providing alternative mechanisms for the community to obtain information and engage with the Land Council.
3. A (draft) Community Land and Business Plan has been developed which sets the future direction for the Land Council and for the broader La Perouse community.

Chris Ingrey, CEO of La Perouse LALC, explains: “It has been great to have access to skilled people from corporate Australia. Jawun has assisted our Board and staff to develop our business plan for the next three years. This plan will ensure we create a strong foundation and purpose for the organisation for the next 10 years. Something no organisation in the La Perouse Aboriginal community has had the opportunity to do.”

The La Perouse LALC has not only improved their own organisation over the past two years, but they are now supporting other Aboriginal organisations in La Perouse.

Next steps

Armed with a new draft CLBP, the La Perouse LALC will first present its plan to the members, and then work to implement the actions on the plan, with the aim to deliver real benefits to the La Perouse Aboriginal community.

Jawun and La Perouse LALC have prepared briefs for future secondees to work on the all-important implementation phase of the CLBP. This work is extremely significant for the La Perouse community and will be incredibly gratifying for those future secondees involved.