

Case Study

Creating a Strategic Plan for NPY Women's Council



Background

Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands, located in central Australia's cross-border region spanning Northern Territory (NT), South Australia (SA) and Western Australia (WA), is spread over 350,000 square kilometres and home to 6,000 Indigenous people from 26 desert communities and homelands. NPY Women's Council (NPYWC) supports women and their families in the region to lead safe and healthy lives with improved life choices.

NPYWC began as a voice for women in the central desert region in 1980. It is now a major service provider that advocates for members on a range of issues. Some of the social challenges that NPWC addresses through its programs and services include: improving health outcomes, increasing school attendance, creating employment opportunities and reducing violence, alcohol, drug misuse and high incarceration rates. Specific program areas include: domestic and family violence services; Ngangkari project (traditional healers); aged, disability and respite service; youth services; child and family wellbeing programs; and Tjanpi Desert Weavers (social enterprise).

Robust strategic and operational plans were imperative to the organisation's success; rapid growth and the changing nature of funding meant it had a number of internal challenges:

- In 2015 NPYWC celebrates 35 years. The organisation (staff and revenue) has doubled since 2006. This rapid growth meant internal policies, systems and processes require review to ensure relevance and appropriateness.
- NPYWC receives funding from multiple sources including all levels of government across three jurisdictions, philanthropic organisations and corporate partnerships. Solid strategic planning is imperative to ensure that NPYWC had clear priorities, as agreed by its membership.
- Connectivity challenges associated with staff spread over such a large and remote region.

This case study outlines the development of the NPYWC 2014-2018 Strategic Plan and 2014 operational plans and the role that Insurance Australia Group (IAG) played in supporting this project. A relationship between NPYWC and IAG developed when Andy Cornish (Chief Executive of Personal Insurance at IAG) and Andrea Mason (Coordinator at NPYWC) met on the East Kimberley Jawun Executive Visit in June 2013. On return from his visit, Andy was keen for IAG to assist the NPYWC with their Strategic Plan. He seconded one of his senior team, Tony Messenger, to work with Andrea and the NPYWC team in Alice Springs to develop their strategic and operational plans from October 2013 to March 2014.

As a senior project manager Tony brought extensive experience to understanding strategic initiatives, change management, staff management and business process design. Tony's skill set was perfectly matched for the role of leading the development of the NPYWC's Strategic Plan.

Approach

Initially in October and November, Tony consulted with NPYWC membership, managers and staff. Part of this included extensive dialogue with the membership at the 2013 AGM, which is held over three days 'on country'. The 2013 AGM took place at Cave Hill in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (South Australia). At this meeting Tony asked: *"What can NPYWC do better in the next five years?"* and *"What do you want NPYWC to do more of, and what do you want to continue?"* In addition to the consultation with members at the AGM, Tony undertook one-on-one discussions with NPYWC managers and staff, and held two focus groups with Directors at their quarterly meetings.

Tony also researched best practice approaches to strategic planning in the not-for-profit sector. This highlighted the strong focus on services to clients. Working with the NPYWC, Tony developed a Strategy Map for each program area/team, including internal corporate areas and suitably of programs for end users. Activity maps were translated into key performance indicators and draft operational plans were developed for 2014 for each of the program areas.

In late 2013 Directors approved the draft Strategic Plan. Two months later in February 2014, they prioritised the top 10 issues for advocacy. The same month, Tony facilitated an all-staff planning day where a draft Strategic Plan and draft operational plans were presented. Each team considered its component of the Operational Plan and potential cross-pollination with other teams to improve efficiencies and internal collaboration. Operational plans were then finalised based on the feedback from this planning day.

Outcomes

This secondment resulted in the development and publication of the NPYWC's 2014-2018 Strategic Plan and operations plans for 2014, with the final version signed off in March 2014. The process actively engaged members, Directors and staff in the development of the plans, ensuring strong ownership.

The plans reinforced the purpose of the organisation, ensured goals and objectives are consistent with its guiding principles, communicated its direction to members and supporters, and provided a baseline from which progress can be measured.

Andrea Mason, Coordinator at the NPY Women's Council, said, *"Having Tony Messenger from IAG here at Women's Council for this period of time has been invaluable to our organisation. He has been very dynamic in his engagement with our members, directors and staff. His observations and insights were crucial to the development of the Strategic Plan. Importantly Tony became a member of the NPYWC family and will be a long-term friend to this organisation. His placement here solidified the on-going partnership between IAG and NPYWC."*

Tony was extremely positive about his secondment experience with the NPYWC, *"I'd like to thank the whole of the Women's Council for the six months that I spent in central Australia; they accepted me with open arms and made my time here truly memorable. I may have brought a particular skill set to this region and it's great that I can use my experience in supporting their work, however to say that I will take numerous learnings away with me would be an understatement."*

"From understanding priorities, time management, patience, acceptance, inclusion, empathy - I could keep going. All of these qualities will be sorely missed; however I will be taking them back with me into the corporate world. To work with such empowered and visionary women has been an absolute privilege."

Next Steps

Following this successful placement, both IAG and NPYWC formally partnered with Jawun in 2014, with IAG participating in the inaugural secondment round to the NPY region in October 2014.

NPYWC has embraced the partnership with IAG and Jawun, and looks forward to future secondees engaging in key strategic projects with the organisation. Focus areas for 2015 secondees include: strengthening the organisation's capacity to effectively measure the impact of its work; assisting with the 35th anniversary celebrations, recognising solid governance and leadership in advocating for women on the NPY Lands; and exploring and strengthening leadership development opportunities for young people.