

# Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands

## Fit for Purpose: New accounting system for NPY Women's Council



### Background

Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council represents Anangu and Yarnangu women from 26 communities across the tri-state region of Northern Territory, Western Australia, and South Australia. Aboriginal women from the NPY Lands created NPY Women's Council in 1980 to give a voice to women in this region. It is now a major provider of health and human services that maintains a strong voice for its members on issues such as substance abuse, domestic and family violence, child protection, policy and other safety issues, and the needs and aspirations of young people. At its core, the purpose of the NPY Women's Council is to work with the women and their families of the NPY region in central Australia; to increase their capacity to lead safe and healthy lives with improved life choices.

The services available across an area of 350,000 square kilometres are made possible through the efforts of 100 plus staff. This is a combination of staff based permanently in communities, casual Indigenous staff living in community, staff who travel extensively around communities for weeks at a time, and staff based in Alice Springs. The organisation's assets include 30 properties and 85 vehicles. Its annual grant income is over \$16 million, comprised of 46 funding agreements (each with individual reporting guidelines).

With an expanding range of services offered in multiple sites by a growing body of staff and a fleet of fixed assets paid for by 46 separate contracts, the payroll, purchase order, and financial reporting needs were in danger of becoming unmanageable. This was exacerbated by the finance system not being compatible with third-party systems, which meant the three-person Finance team had to manually input data. For example, the depreciation of fixed assets had to be tracked manually on an Excel spreadsheet, with inputs from multiple forms, in order to meet accounting requirements.

In short, the Women's Council was in need of a financial system overhaul that would enable it to meet multiple financial and reporting requirements, whilst improving accuracy and efficiencies.

### Approach

Four secondees were deployed to NPY Women's Council over 18 months to identify key issues and come up with improved systems.

In October 2015, Emily Phan (Senior Consultant, KPMG) reviewed accounting software packages and recommended Xero and Asset Guru. Xero, a web-based system, integrates with other software (which provided the foundation for future implementation), and includes a payroll module with electronic timesheets and purchase orders supporting approval processes that employees can access via their own portal. Asset Guru records and maintains the organisation's assets, also a web-based system that integrates with other software.

Immediately after Emily in early 2016, Margarita Moya (Digital Analyst, Westpac) came to NPY Women's Council Springs to launch Asset Guru. With a background in data analysis and engineering,

she consolidated the various asset registers and transferred data that was in multiple formats across several platforms to this centralised asset management system. Asset Guru was tested and went live before the end of her secondment.

With Asset Guru fully implemented, Guy de Tourettes (Process Design and Improvement Manager, Westpac) focused on introducing Xero in mid-2016. He ran running trials that demonstrated some limitations in the functionality of the payroll system and purchase order system. Based on this he explored options for a standalone alternative electronic purchase order system that integrates with Xero, and recommended Approval Max. This system removed most of the existing manual processes, significantly reducing the steps of approvals for purchase orders and bills.

In October 2016 Trevor Coulter (Audit Leader, Australian Tax Office) was deployed to streamline the use of Xero, launched in May 2016. It had emerged during organisation-wide implementation that the system's template could not accurately capture the variety of hours worked by the high number of casual and part time staff. Trevor explored alternative electronic timesheet systems and recommended KeyPay to address the issue. KeyPay is also web-based and integrates with Xero. It will go live in July 2017.

Reflecting on the sum total of work and skills transfer that secondees accomplished, Lavenia Seville, Finance Manager of the NPY Women's Council says:

*"The standard of the work has been extremely high quality. Most placements also involved the development of relevant training manuals and delivery of this training to the finance team. It was ideal that we could break the project into logical stages, each building on the work of the initial recommendation. Emily, Margarita, Guy and Trevor were all a pleasure to work with. They brought their own expertise, style and charm to the finance team. This work would not have been possible without the input of the Jawun secondees. I am extremely grateful to Jawun and all the corporate partners for their ongoing support."*

## **Outcomes**

Through the work of various secondees able to identify and address systems issues, the NPY Women's Council is on the verge of having a fully integrated web-based accounting system. Lavenia Seville underlined the importance of the long-term commitment by Jawun and its corporate partners, which allowed them to see through a full transformation:

*"Over an 18 month period, four Jawun secondees enabled NPY Women's Council to implement a fully integrated hosted accounting system. This will result in significant cost saving in terms of efficiencies; with automated time-sheets, purchase orders, existing forms and management of assets."*

The implementation of Asset Guru has enabled the organisation to have an asset management system that: produces real time calculations; tracks assets; depreciates assets automatically; and, enables flexible access from anywhere and any device. This means that an annual depreciation calculation process that previously took the Finance Manager a number of days is now completed with the push of a button. This not only decreases avoidable pressure placed on the small team but also allows for accurate and timely reporting, which means the Women's Council can manage grants better and satisfy funder's requirements.

## **Next Steps**

The new software to be integrated with Xero – KeyPay (on-line payroll system) and Approval Max (on-line purchase order system) – will be tested by selected groups of employees in Alice Springs and beyond, and are expected to go live in July 2017. The impact of this is eagerly anticipated, to further streamline and improve payroll and purchase order. This will lead to an improvement in NPY Women's Council's ability to maintain government-funded programs, and ultimately continue its broad community impact.