

## Case Study – enabling Indigenous-led reform

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### BBY – Driving Empowerment through Joint Decision-Making in the East Kimberley

#### Background

In the East Kimberley, Binarri-binyja yarrowoo (BBY) is the 'backbone' organisation supporting the implementation of Empowered Communities (EC), a nationwide Indigenous-led reform agenda that was initiated in 2015 to drive Indigenous-led decision making and change.

As a neutral convener, BBY supports the EC leadership and convenes community and government inputs. There are over 20 opt-in organisations in the East Kimberley, who BBY works with to agree and implement reform priorities.

Based on the inputs of the community, priorities to date have included employment rates and job readiness, housing, education and community safety, a Kimberley-wide regional alcohol management strategy, and youth. Like other EC regions, the East Kimberley is also prioritising a process of joint decision-making between community and government to improve productivity, development and empowerment in Indigenous affairs.

To date, over 50 Jawun secondees have supported Empowered Communities in East Kimberley<sup>1</sup>, supporting BBY capacity as well as providing direct support to the CEO and EC leaders. They have come from 5 organisations: the Australian Public Service, BCG, Herbert Smith Freehills, KPMG and Macquarie Bank. Specifically their work has supported governance and policy development, improving of data and IT systems, development of culturally appropriate communication tools as well as community partner principles. A number have been instrumental to the design and implementation of the joint-decision making approach.

#### Approach

In June 2017 an EC East Kimberley Joint Decision Making (JDM) framework was co-designed by BBY Directors, community members and government representatives. This was intended as a platform for Aboriginal people to have a greater say in investments into communities, and for joint planning of new investment opportunities.

As a part of supporting the EC vision for structural reform, Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) committed to a collaborative process for reviewing funded activities under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). The JDM process was implemented for the first time in Kununurra and Halls Creek in early 2018, and tested a new model of collaborative decision making with the aim of achieving greater alignment between government investment and community need voiced by Aboriginal people and Aboriginal Organisations.

The JDM approach to development, productivity and empowerment for Aboriginal leaders and communities is driven by community voice and a strong evidence base. After BBY facilitates workshop sessions to draw out community voice on issues and current service delivery, key stakeholders are convened to make recommendations on services provided – whether they should continue, be re-designed, or be redirected. This is then shared with BBY Directors, all Aboriginal community leaders from across the East Kimberley who are passionate about change. They then negotiate with Government partners (currently Federal Government) to see the recommendations implemented. Final recommendations are sent directly to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs for

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<sup>1</sup> 30 were placed at Wunan, prior to the formal establishment of BBY as backbone organisation for EC in East Kimberley

consideration and adoption. The JDM process is a powerful tool for increasing the effectiveness and relevance of Aboriginal affairs, adopted in other EC regions or the same purpose.

To date, four Jawun secondees have supported BBY's work in developing a JDM approach in the East Kimberley, working in sequence to deliver this significant piece of work while also progressing other aspects of the region's Indigenous-led development agenda.

In late 2017 Sam Eden, a long-term secondee from BCG, formulated components of the JDM approach within a broader brief that also helped BBY develop a regional alcohol management strategy in response to one of the most pressing socioeconomic and community safety issues regionally. His supervisor at BBY, CEO Christy Hawker, described how Sam built strong relationships that were the basis of him effectively "transferring BCG approaches to innovation, team work and reflection to the BBY team" as they worked to deliver this challenging reform initiative.

Sam was followed by Nina Valentine in early 2018, seconded from legal firm Herbert Smith Freehills who like BCG have been a long-term supporter of BBY. Nina also worked on implementation of 100 Jobs, a landmark EC initiative in the region dedicated to improving Indigenous employment rates. Her support to the JDM process included a discussion paper on Government contracting that supports a model of shared accountability at the regional level and assisted in the development of the Regional Development Agenda for the East Kimberley. Describing her secondment as a "unique, intense and overwhelmingly positive experience" Nina said of her work at BBY,

*"The issues faced by Indigenous Australians in the East Kimberley region are complex and there are diverse opinions within the community on the approach to addressing those challenges and the priorities for development. The work undertaken by BBY is critical in ensuring that each of those 'threads' is pulled together in a cohesive and sustainable way which best serves to empower the broader community in the longer term."*

After Nina, Jennifer Burmester was seconded by the Australian Government to support BBY's investment mapping and impact evaluation. Her work with BBY's Data Manager to map indicators for the regional development agenda helped create a foundation of evidence for JDM. CEO Christy also remarked on how Jennifer, as an APS employee, helped BBY colleagues understand and navigate the government system – critical to a reform agenda she describes as "fundamentally about reforming the relationship between governments and Aboriginal people". Jennifer meanwhile left the Kimberley keen to further support Indigenous-led reform in her public service role.

Finally, 2018 Emily Wu from BCG spent the last 3 months of 2018 at BBY, working on the JDM as well as on co-design sessions around education, regional pooled funding, and language and culture. Emily had what she described as "both a soul warming and heart breaking experience" witnessing the challenges and complexities of life for Indigenous people in the East Kimberley, while BBY felt more confident after her secondment that they could successfully prepare and run co-design workshops and provide Directors with evidence for informed decision making.

## **Outcomes**

With support of Jawun secondees, BBY's dedicated team has established a JDM process. Its strength is based on key elements: data collection and analysis to ensure attention is directed towards the most need; service mapping to reduce waste and duplication; investment mapping to support data-driven decision making on priority investment areas; and strategic thinking and document development to clearly design and articulate a complex and multi-layered project. As BBY Chair Des Hill says of their sequenced efforts, "Secondees fix the specific to assist us to address the holistic".

JDM is now in place in the East Kimberley, making the region a frontrunner among EC regions. Over \$5 million has been assessed, with Government partners working with Indigenous leaders on sector innovation and investment opportunities to maximise impact for Indigenous individuals and families.

## **Next steps**

BBY is working to expand partnership of the JDM to other areas of government, and increase its reach to maximise impact to Indigenous individuals and families. There are plans to evaluate the process at regional and national levels, to see how it could consider a wider scope of funding sources.

As this JDM approach becomes core to BBY's work for members and stakeholders in the East Kimberley, so too does it strengthen the national push for Indigenous-led reform and empowerment stewarded by Empowered Communities.