

Case study – strengthening Indigenous organisations



From left to right: RASAC Chair Jamie Nyangu and Mark Jackman ('Jacko') at Exec Visit; Sam presenting the Strategic Plan; Nugget Ngatai (left) Sam (middle) and Jacko (right); RASAC work crew.

RASAC – capacity and connections to support Anangu employment

Background

Regional Anangu Services Aboriginal Corporation (RASAC) is a not-for-profit corporation wholly owned by the Anangu membership of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankatjatjara (APY) Lands, with board directors elected from each of the represented communities. Established in 2010, RASAC is committed to building better communities, and does so by providing local services, sustainable employment, and training opportunities for Anangu people. RASAC is principally a civil works service provider with capability in municipal services, road and airstrip maintenance, construction management and supervision, and project management.

When Jawun's partnership with RASAC began in 2015, the organisation had 87 staff and a handful of programs. Today RASAC employs 106 people and has grown enormously in what it delivers.

RASAC's annual turnover is now over \$10m and it employs over 100 staff in both Alice Springs (General Manager and administrative staff) and the APY Lands. This includes the Anangu work teams based across the seven major communities, over 90% of whom are local Anangu workers. Up to 75% of all RASAC workers are Indigenous. The organisation also recently expanded its programs by initiating community patrols (see earlier [case study](#)), and is looking into providing more employment options in construction.

RASAC now has a strong reputation for offering flexible and culturally safe employment options for local Anangu workers across its vast geographic coverage. Providing a range of unskilled and semi-skilled employment options, it is seen as an employer of choice for Anangu and is well regarded for its investments in getting Anangu 'employment ready'.

The recent phase of growth and expansion has been guided by RASAC General Manager Mark Jackman, who has worked in the region in a variety of roles including Police Officer, Government Business Manager and Service Coordinator (Australian Government) for over 18 years. He has extensive experience working in partnership with local communities, all levels of government and the not-for-profit sector, and has been General Manager of RASAC since 2014.

When Jawun began discussing a partnership with Mark and the RASAC management team in 2015, two areas of potential support that stood out.

First, RASAC needed a Strategic Plan owned by the management team and understood across the whole organisation. A strategic plan had existed previously, but it had little visibility and had lost relevance as the organisation's priorities and opportunities changed. An updated and clearly understood strategic plan, backed by management ownership, would guide the organisation in its prioritization and future direction.

Second, General Manager Mark Jackman recognised he would benefit from advice as he sought to steer the organisation to be more proactive and strategic about its growth. This would complement Mark's ability to create strong relationships and make the most of new opportunities, and support him to lay strong foundations for RASAC's sustainable future.

Approach

Mark Jackman and the Jawun Regional Director first talked about the development of a Strategic Plan and the idea of a mentor for him in May 2015. Workloads and other priorities meant that Mark was not

ready to take on a secondee with this focus until 2017. In late 2016 Mark was in NSW and joined the Jawun General Manager (Regions) to visit a couple of organisations on the Central Coast who had used secondees as both mentors and to assist develop organisational strategic plans. This helped give Mark confidence in this approach, and the Jawun Regional Director began looking for a suitable secondee.

In 2017 Sam Gerovasilis, a General Manager with BlueScope Steel, was identified as a possible secondee to develop a three-year strategic plan for RASAC. Sam had over 15 year's leadership experience managing up to 500 personnel and operating budgets between \$200 - \$350m across multiple sites and departments. He had a Masters in Business Administration and a Degree in Mechanical Engineering. With his background at BlueScope, he could share relevant experience of the construction sector with RASAC, who were hoping to be able to support more employment options in that field in future. Crucially, Sam's manner and style were very relaxed and down to earth and would suit Mark's personality. They were a good fit. Sam was interviewed and the secondment locked in early 2017 for Round 2.

For the six week placement, Sam shadowed Mark at every meeting, to understand his role and observe his approach and style. A great rapport and trust developed between the two.

At the same time Sam held consultations with RASAC management, and jointly facilitated a workshop with Mark to develop a Strategic Plan articulating key priority areas for future consolidation and growth. Sam also established processes to ensure the plan and its support documentation would be a regular part of the organisation's operations.

Outcomes

The Strategic Plan was presented to and accepted by the Board of Directors during Sam's secondment.

Sam additionally offered advice to Mark on areas he could work on in terms of his management style and engagement with staff, particularly the RASAC APY Lands Management team and the ongoing approach to embedding the Strategic Plan into RASAC operations. It is now a standing item at regular management meetings, and factored into annual reporting processes.

At the end of the Sam's time in NPY Lands, Mark spoke of his satisfaction with the secondment:

"We are very grateful to Sam for his work in helping RASAC to develop our Strategic Plan. While it was a bit daunting to have Sam shadowing me for 5 weeks, it was an invaluable experience for myself and for RASAC. I also felt it was a massive learning experience for Sam in respect to learning how RASAC as an organisation overcomes the many barriers presented due to remoteness."

Sam himself also gained learning and experience while working with RASAC:

"I have learnt a lot about dealing with significant levels of ambiguity, at the political level, the community level, and the organisational level. I also have a new perspective on how much more powerful good working relationships can be, when organisational resources are scarce."

Next Steps

Based on the strong relationship developed and his sense of investment in RASAC, Sam Gerovasilis applied for and was appointed to the role of independent Director on the RASAC Board. Through this he will continue to provide advice on the strategic direction of the organisation and play a mentoring role to Mark Jackman. Together they hope to strengthen RASAC's established ability to provide employment options to Anangu across the APY Lands, including by securing new contracts with local Indigenous employment criteria.

Later in 2017, a BlueScope secondee and an APS secondee assisted RASAC in some project planning and construction design for a potential contract to redevelop the Ernabella Recreation Hall. This is set to enable RASAC to build capacity in the construction field, creating jobs as a result.

In early 2018 two other secondees (again BlueScope and APS) developed RASAC's OHS capacity and did a first analysis of regional employment data to inform government discussions as well as Empowered Communities priorities. The work built on prior secondments and strengthens RASAC's long-term Anangu Workforce Development Strategy. The future looks strong for this organisation dedicated to the safety and prosperity of Anangu people and communities in the centre of Australia.