

Case Study

Supporting the growth of the Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative



Background

The Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative (RAC) is one of Victoria's largest Aboriginal community controlled organisations, providing a broad range of services to a client base of 6,000 people. Rumbalara operates in a culturally appropriate and sensitive community controlled environment that maintains a holistic approach to service provision and emphasizes the importance of family and community. The cooperative provides services across health, family, justice, aged care and housing.

With a strong brand and history, RAC was growing across all service delivery areas. In 2008, RAC identified a need to review their administrative support systems to ensure they were organised to best manage the increase in service delivery and program offerings. It was anticipated that the expansion of their services would lead to an increase in employee numbers and greater reporting requirements and as such, this would place more pressure on their administration department. The CEO and board identified a need for a review with the way that they were currently operating to ensure that their administration team wasn't overloaded, and that their service delivery lines were able to focus on what they do best; providing top quality service to their community.

Approach

In 2008, the RAC had their first Jawun secondees from KPMG. The two secondees, with a background in HR and audit, worked collaboratively to provide recommendations based on identified resource gaps in their support services area. As a result of this review, the secondees identified a need for the RAC to upgrade multiple systems and processes and devised a long-term strategy to support RAC in making this operational. As a result of this project, 3 major areas of change were identified:

1. A new HR and payroll system to accommodate the increase in employee numbers
2. A more integrated approach and upgrade to the finance software and;
3. A new system for managing the compliance requirements attached to multiple funding agreements

Between 2008 and 2012 the RAC growth was evident in the development of their own 60-bed aged care facility and a new health service building renovation, complete with an entirely new dental ward. Employee numbers had risen from 80 employees in 2008, to roughly 180 employees in 2012. The administration upgrades took a back seat whilst this development was taking place, however it very quickly became a top priority once these new service areas were operational. Felicia Dean, CEO Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative, reflected: "Five years ago it started with 2 KPMG people with HR and audit skills and it took successive briefs from other corporate secondees to implement the new infrastructure".

In 2011, Paul Berry from BHP Billiton, an engineer with a background in project management, was given the task to help RAC design new compliance processes. As part of the contractual obligations that RAC enters into, each funder requires individual activity and financial reports. Historically, RAC

have used an array of manual procedures to satisfy these requirements. Paul identified that the previous model of accountability placed the onus purely on the Finance Manager alone, leaving RAC exposed to missing critical compliance milestones and potential funding cessation.

Paul's natural way with people allowed him to navigate his way through heavy consultation and stakeholder engagement, and the end result was a central compliance registry to enable better monitoring of requirements, clear responsibilities and KPI's to measure performance.

In 2012 Nadia Tsirlin, a Senior Accountant from Audit at KPMG, was tasked with the role of researching supplier options for an HR and finance software upgrade and provide recommendations based on the needs of the organisation. Nadia researched the software options for RAC, connected with the suppliers to obtain quotes and shortlisted the best options for the CEO and Executive Manager to take to their board. Executive Manager Naomi Buckworth, reflects on the value of secondees in her work, "We rarely have the time to do thorough research and compare our options. It is also difficult to know who to trust. Having Nadia from KPMG with a background in finance meant that she was able to do the research on our behalf and we knew it was unbiased... We were then able to make an informed decision for the best possible software upgrade for our business".

Based on Nadia's recommendations at the beginning of 2012, the CEO and board made an informed decision on the best software option and the actual upgrade of the new HR software took place in September of 2012. Following this, the new finance system upgrade went live in June 2013. "Having Jawun secondees increases our capacity to look at things we need to do. They develop relationships with our staff. Secondees are about planning; the future stuff. They find out what we need and they do the research. Then we finally were able to get their recommendations implemented and it makes things so much easier".

Approach

The work completed by the 4 Jawun secondees helped to build the internal capabilities and infrastructure RAC needed to manage their growth in services to the community. Felicia Dean, CEO Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative, reflected, "The secondees provided a basis and foundation for us to move forward. They commence projects, make relationships with our staff and then leave it in a position for our staff to take it on and move it forward".

Next Steps

Whilst all of the staff have now been trained on the new software, the next phase is to ensure that the new software is being well utilised and meeting the needs of the RAC. With the new software in place and operating smoothly, the next major piece of work for the cooperative is to review their IT systems and requirements and will likely require another long-term, strategic piece of work with successive Jawun secondees to implement. The RAC also hopes to review their organisation structure to ensure that they have an adequate support team to match their growth in service delivery.