COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In Rural-Remote
and Indigenous
Local Government

Report for Australian Centre of
Excellence for Local Government

OCTOBER 2012

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IN RURAL-REMOTE AND INDIGENOUS LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Acknowledgements

Citing this report

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Purpose of the study

This study was conducted for the Australian Centre of Excellence (ACELG) and builds upon previous research activity commissioned by ACELG on local government community engagement in Australia in 2011. Community engagement was amongst the ten priority areas that ACELG's 2010 *Capacity Building Strategy for Rural-remote and Indigenous Local Government* identified as requiring attention. This study aims to further explore this priority capacity building issue to provide insight to the community engagement practices and challenges of rural-remote and Indigenous (RRI) local government in Australia for the purpose of identifying some practical options for supporting this cohort of councils to help them improve their engagement. The study explored:

- What community engagement RRI local government in Australia undertakes.
- Barriers and unique challenges RRI local governments face when engaging with their communities.
- Community engagement strategies and methodologies RRI local governments find effective and ineffective.
- Gaps in the community engagement knowledge and resources of RRI local government, and
- The most useful options for improving community engagement by RRI local government.

These issues were examined through a review of community engagement literature, stakeholder interviews and an online survey of RRI local governments. The following sections provide an overview of some of the key findings of this study. The results outlined here are largely based on data collected from 43 of the 105 RRI local governments that participated in the survey.

Current community engagement practices of RRI local government

- The study considered whether RRI local governments in Australia have developed robust community engagement processes by looking at their internal community engagement systems and practices and the levels at which they undertake community engagement.

- On the whole RRI local government recognises the central role of community engagement in supporting council to effectively perform its role but overall these practices are still largely in their developmental phase.

- At least half the RRI local governments regularly engage their communities at the lower levels of participation (informing, consulting and involving) although one local government reported rarely or never engaging its communities at any level and two others reported only occasionally engaging their communities at any of the lower levels.

- Most RRI local governments at least sometimes engage their communities on issues where it is not required by legislation.

- The most well developed community engagement processes in place include having:
  - A dedicated community engagement budget (65% of councils)
  - Designated staff/roles/responsibilities for community engagement (58% of councils), and
  - A formal community engagement policy/strategy (54% of councils).

- The least well developed community engagement processes include:
  - Providing community engagement training opportunities for staff (42% of councils)

- Having processes for informing the community about their influence on council decisions (33% of councils)
- Using a community engagement handbook/guide/process (26% of councils), and
- Having procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of community engagement (23% of councils).

- About 30% of RRI local governments in Australia use social media as a community engagement tool but only about 20% have a social media policy/strategy in place.

- Less than half the RRI local governments indicated that they have a sound understanding of how an integrated planning approach can help improve their decision-making processes especially in relation to managing the expectations of other tiers of government, helping them choose what mix of services to deliver and assessing the full cost of different levels of service delivery. There is a perceived need for practical integrated planning tools and frameworks tailored to the circumstances of RRI local government.

Top challenges to RRI local government community engagement

The most substantive challenges impacting RRI local government capacity to engage with their communities in general related to three key areas – internal capacity constraints, community capacity constraints and external factors. The top 12 challenges identified in descending order of importance are:

- Having appropriate support systems available inside council to do this work
- Having enough funds available for community engagement activities
- Having staff adequately skilled in community engagement
- Community participation fatigue
- Community resistance
- Competing council priorities
- Community understanding of council's role including the purpose and limits of engagement
- Fear of raising community expectations
- Technology and telecommunications
- Level of knowledge or understanding of different ways to engage especially hard to engage community members
- Literacy, and
- Distance/remoteness.

Most valued support options for improving RRI local government community engagement

The most practical options for supporting RRI local government community engagement related to three key areas – council and community education, internal community engagement skill development and engaging culturally diverse groups. The five most valued options for improving RRI local government community engagement practices are:

- Staff training and development on different community engagement approaches
- A community education program on their role in community engagement and local government decision-making processes

- A council education program on the role of community engagement in good governance and council decision-making
- Development of a material resource guide on how to integrate community engagement outcomes in council planning and decision-making and
- Cultural awareness training of council staff and elected members.

Next steps

ACELG can play an important advocacy and facilitating role to progress the initiatives needed to help RRI local government address their main community engagement challenges and improve their community engagement practices. A stage two project needs to be designed to review what community engagement training, development and education programs already exist and then, where gaps are identified, collaborate with peak local government sector entities across jurisdictions to develop suitable practical education and training programs and resource materials as required. Furthermore, to promote the sharing and exchange of community engagement experiences, ideas, knowledge and issues amongst RRI local government ACELG should establish and publicise a dedicated interactive online portal within its *Innovation Knowledge Exchange Network* (IKEN) website.

List of acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACELG	Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government
ACLG	Australian Classification for Local Government
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ALGA	Australian Local Government Association
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
ARIA	Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia
ASCG	Australian Standard Geographical Classification
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CARM	Community Affairs Resourcing and Management
CDEP	Community Development and Employment Program
CE	Community engagement
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DIA	Department of Indigenous Affairs
DKCRC	Desert Knowledge Collaborative Research Centre
ECU	Edith Cowan University
FAGs	Financial Assistance Grants
HACC	Home and Community Care
IAP2	International Association of Public Participation
LGA	Local Government Act
LGAQ	Local Government Association of Queensland
LGASA	Local Government Association of South Australia
MSC	McKinlay Shire Council
NGO	Non-government organisation
NITV	National Indigenous Television Network
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
OCA	Outback Communities Authority
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
PBC	Prescribed Body Corporate

PD	Professional Development
QLD	Queensland
RPA	Regional Partnership Agreement
RRI	Rural-remote and Indigenous
RRMA	Rural Remote and Metropolitan Areas
SA	South Australia
TSIRC	Torres Strait Island Regional Council
VLGA	Victorian Local Governance Association
WA	Western Australia

1   Introduction

1.1   Background

In 2009 the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) commissioned three scoping studies to identify the key issues impacting on rural-remote and Indigenous (RRI) local government in Australia, particularly the northern areas, and to develop a range of initiatives that could better equip them to provide sustainable local governance for their communities. These scoping studies were conducted in the Northern Territory (NT), Queensland (QLD) and Western Australia (WA). The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) also made available to ACELG a study conducted by Morton Consulting Group into the capacity issues of non-amalgamated councils in QLD, thereby completing the picture of the capacity building needs of RRI local governments in these jurisdictions. Collectively, the findings from these four studies reflected the capacity issues of 112 local governments – 8 in the NT, 34 in QLD (18 non-amalgamated rural-remote councils and 16 Indigenous councils) and 70 in WA (22 with remote Indigenous communities within their LGAs and 48 small rural-remote councils).

The findings from these studies were presented and discussed at a Roundtable of Federal and State departments, local government associations, professional institutes, academics and ACELG consortium and program partners. The scoping study and the Roundtable outcomes were then transformed into a capacity building strategy for RRI local governments in Australia. This strategy document was endorsed by the ACELG Board in December 2010.

One of the ten key priorities identified in the *Capacity Building Strategy for Rural-remote and Indigenous Local Government* (Morris, 2011) was 'governance development and community engagement' (Strategy 3.5, pp.15-16). This priority area highlighted the need for improving community engagement to underpin council decision-making so it better reflects community aspirations, needs and priorities. The main issues around community engagement related to:

- Generally low levels of Indigenous community participation and engagement in RRI local government decision-making processes, and
- A poor understanding of effective community engagement methodologies, particularly for engaging 'hard to reach' community groups in RRI local government.

A subsequent ACELG sponsored study, *Local Government and Community Engagement in Australia* (Herriman and Pillora, 2011) investigated, amongst other things, who councils are engaging and how. This research revealed that cross-cultural communication is an important challenge in community engagement by councils generally and that RRI local governments face unique issues that need to be addressed. Amongst the community engagement challenges identified were highly dispersed populations, low literacy and numeracy levels, limited internet access, financial constraints, conflicts of interest and differing community dynamics.

Collectively, this evidence based research revealed that there is a clear need to build RRI local government capacity in community engagement.

1.2   Study Aims

The strategic actions proposed in the *Capacity Building Strategy for Rural-remote and Indigenous Local Government* (Morris, 2011) under the key priority relating to community engagement were to:

- Build on ACELG's current research activity on community engagement by undertaking a review of the challenges of community engagement and good practice methodologies in RRI local government

- Explore options and make recommendations for improving community engagement – including consideration of education for the community on the roles and responsibilities of local government and councillors that would parallel the governance training of councillors and staff, and

- Produce a document that provides practical guidance to RRI local government on how to overcome barriers and to effectively conduct community engagement.

To meet these study aims, the following research questions were formulated for investigation:

1. What community engagement occurs in RRI local government in Australia?
2. What barriers and unique challenges do RRI local governments face when trying to engage with their communities?
3. What community engagement strategies and methodologies do RRI local governments find effective?
4. What gaps are there in the knowledge and resources required to improve community engagement by RRI local government?
5. What options are available for improving community engagement by RRI local governments (including consideration of community education on the roles and responsibilities of local government and councillors)?

2 Study approach

2.1   Target population

The target population for this study was RRI local governments within Australia. However, the local governments comprising the cohort has never been clearly defined under the ACELG rural-remote and Indigenous local government program. This oversight may contribute to inconsistencies in the research approaches taken when investigating matters relating to these councils and thereby potentially lessen the comparability and value of the research outcomes.   Thus, in the interest of providing a more consistent approach to future research within this program area, a secondary aim of this study was to clearly define and delineate the cohort of local governments within Australia that can be classified as rural-remote and Indigenous, notwithstanding that this group will require periodic review as it is likely to change over time.

A search of the literature revealed that although universally accepted definitions for the terms 'rural' and 'remote' would greatly facilitate study comparisons, research collaboration and policy or program development, no such definitions exist. The main endeavours in defining rurality and remoteness appeared to be in the field of rural health services.

To clearly delineate what local governments could be classified as rural-remote and Indigenous, acceptable definitions of the terms rural, remote and Indigenous are needed along with suitable criteria for categorising local governments as 'rural-remote' or 'Indigenous'. The term 'rural-remote' itself raises the question of whether this means 'rural or remote' or if it means 'rural and remote'. For the purpose of research conducted under the ACELG umbrella, it was agreed that rural-remote would mean 'rural and remote'.

Over time, various systems have been developed in Australia to group geographic areas with similar characteristics. These include the ACLG (Australian Classification for Local Government) (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government 2010), the RRMA (rural, remote and metropolitan areas), ARIA (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia) and the ASGC (Australian Standard Geographical Classification) Remoteness Areas (AIHW, 2004) classifications. These different frameworks use various criteria for categorising geographic areas and are used to describe regional differences for a range of purposes. Table 1 (over page) summarises these four classification systems and the criteria used by each.

Under each of these frameworks, a single local government area might be categorised quite differently. While each classification system has its own strengths and weaknesses, a discussion of these is beyond the scope of this report.

The ACLG framework was selected as the starting point for delineating the cohort of RRI local governments that would form the target population for this study as it is the only local government specific classification system available. Local governments included in the ACLG classification system are those that receive general purpose financial assistance grants (FAGs) as defined under the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995*. Bodies declared as local governing bodies by the Commonwealth Minister on the advice of the State Minister for the purposes of the Act are also included. Thus, some Aboriginal community councils and other entities that do not come under the auspices of the Local Government Act (LGA) within their jurisdiction are included in the ACLG

classification system as they qualify for FAGs funding. Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY), Gerard Community Council, Maralinga Tjarutja Community Incorporated, Nepabunna Community Incorporated and Yalata Community, as well as the Outback Communities Authority (OCA) in South Australia (SA) are five such governing bodies. Under the 2001-12 ACLG framework, 74 local government entities were designated as 'remote' – 8 in the NT, 35 in QLD, 24 in WA, 5 in SA and 2 in New South Wales (NSW).

Table 1: Classification systems of geographic remoteness

Classification System	Criteria	Classes
ACLG	• Population size • Population density • Proportion of LGA population that is urban	2 broad categories – urban and rural with 22 finer categories Rural divided into 3 sub-categories - rural or remote each with 4 population size classes, or significant growth (not remote)
RRMA Index of remoteness	• Population density (personal distance) • Straight line distance of SLA centroid to nearest service centre • Population size of urban centre in SLA	3 broad with 7 finer classes – Metropolitan (Capital cities, other metropolitan areas) rural (large rural centres, small rural centres, other rural areas) remote (remote centres, other remote areas)
ARIA Average Index (0 – 12)	• Minimum road distance from populated localities to 4 population size classes of urban service centres	5 classes - highly accessible accessible moderately accessible remote very remote
ASCG Average Index (0 – 15)	• Minimum road distance from populated localities to 5 population size classes of urban service centres	5 classes - major cities inner regional outer regional remote very remote

Source: (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, 2010 AIHW, 2004)

A further 31 local governments were added to this group based on input from ACELG's RRI program reference group as well as key agency representatives in NSW and SA. The main criteria considered in making these additions were whether the local government area was:

- Predominantly rural in character and relatively remote and/or
- Remote with a substantial town based Indigenous population and/or
- Remote with remote Indigenous communities and/or
- Deemed to be an Indigenous Shire Council.

Interestingly, the cohort of local governments defined as RRI through this process was found to be quite consistent with the geographical areas with remote classifications under the other

frameworks. They all had a remote or very remote classification under the ASGC remoteness area classification system and the vast majority were classified as remote or very remote under both the RRMA and the ARIA frameworks (AIHW, 2004). The exceptions were a small number of councils in SA (classified as 'other rural' under RRMA and 'moderately accessible under ARIA) and one council large council in WA (classified as 'moderately accessible under ARIA).

A summary of the numbers of councils defined as RRI for the purpose of this and future ACELG studies is presented in Table 2. These local governments are reported according to the 2011-12 ACLG classifications within each jurisdiction. Those deemed to be 'Indigenous' is also identified.

Table 2: Target population numbers by jurisdiction and Australian local government classification

2011-12 ALGC Codes	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	WA	Total
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
Rural-remote extra small - RTX			6	4	6	14
Rural-remote small - RTS			9		4	13
Rural-remote medium - RTM	1	1	15		5	22
Rural-remote large - RTL	1	7	5	1	9	23
Rural agric. small - RAS		2		8		10
Rural agric. medium - RAM	3		3	6		12
Rural agric. large - RAL	2			1		3
Urban fringe small - UFS		1	1			2
Urban regional small - URS				3		3
Urban regional med. - URM					1	1
Total	**7**	**11**	**39**	**23**	**25**	**105**
Number in total considered Indigenous		8[1]	16	5[2]	1[1]	
% of all rural-remote and Indigenous councils	6.7%	10.5%	37.1%	21.9%	23.8%	100.0%

[1]Not strictly designated as Indigenous Councils but rural-remote and predominantly Indigenous in geographic and demographic character.
[2]These are the Aboriginal councils in the unincorporated areas of South Australia.

A complete list of local governments delineated through this process appears in Appendix 1.

2.2 Research method
This study was conducted in five main steps as outlined below.

Step 1 - Literature Review
Stage 1 involved a review of community engagement literature with a specific focus on engagement in rural-remote areas and with Indigenous communities. This review included an examination of the ACELG Working Paper No. 5 on *'Local Government and Community Engagement in Australia'* (Herriman and Pillora, 2011) upon which this study was intended to build. The purpose of the literature review was to identify the current extent of research on this topic particularly in relation to community engagement in rural-remote and Indigenous community contexts, to reveal

what insights prior studies can shed on the research questions posed, and to uncover what new knowledge this study can bring to this literature.

Step 2 – Stakeholder interviews

To supplement the literature review, the second stage of the study involved 14 individual or small group interviews with a total of 20 stakeholders who were considered well placed to inform this agenda. Interviews were conducted with representatives from:

- Local government associations in the NT, QLD, SA and WA.
- Departments of local government in the NT, QLD, WA and NSW.
- Rural-remote and Indigenous council representatives (including an Indigenous leader).
- Outback Communities Authority (OCA) in SA.
- A consultant experienced in engaging Indigenous communities.

The Local Government and Shires Associations in NSW and the Office for State/Local Government Relations in SA were invited to take part but for various reasons opted not to do so. Stakeholders were contacted by email or telephone to invite their participation in the study. Following this initial contact, an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study and an outline of the topics to be covered in the interview were emailed to the participants (see Appendix 4).

The WA interviews were conducted face-to-face while those in the other jurisdictions were done by telephone, although one participant requested to provide an email response. Each interview lasted 30-60 minutes and explored a range of topics including:

- Community engagement challenges of rural-remote and Indigenous Councils.
- Examples of RRI local governments with good community engagement policies and practices.
- Availability of training materials, guides, checklists on community engagement that could be shared by small RRI local governments.
- Need for community education on the roles and responsibilities of RRI councils and how to become involved in council decision-making
- Gaps in the knowledge and resources needed to address the community engagement constraints.
- Options for addressing community engagement challenges and improving community engagement by RRI local government.

The interview notes were transcribed and coded into key themes (e.g. community engagement challenges, resources needs, options for improving community engagement). More detailed coding was then conducted to identify major sub-themes. These sub-themes were then combined with the information gathered in the literature review to formulate the questionnaire to be administered to the target cohort of RRI local governments.

Step 3 - Online survey

The third stage of the research - an online survey - was conducted with the 105 RRI local governments identified as the target population for this study (see Appendix 1). Although the CEO of each local government was the primary target respondent for the survey, an option was given to have another suitably informed person within the organisation respond.

The online questionnaire comprised a combination of structured and semi-structured open ended questions. It was divided into five sections – about your council, current community engagement practices, community engagement challenges, sharing community engagement experiences and options for improving community engagement practices. These sections addressed a variety of key community engagement matters including:

- Current community engagement practices
- Challenges to community engagement
- Examples of community engagement that did or did not work well
- Integrated planning – its use and understanding the role of community engagement
- Social media as an emerging area of community engagement – its use, purposes and barriers
- Practical measures for improving community engagement
- Role of ACELG in building the capacity of RRI local governments to improve their community engagement practices.

To ensure all survey participants had a common understanding of the meaning of 'community' and 'community engagement' definitions of these terms were provided at the start of the questionnaire. A variety of response scales were used for different questions including categorical response formats and 4-point and 5-point Likert scale formats. Participants were also given opportunities to provide extra information on most topics covered.

The online questionnaire was pilot tested with a small group of practitioners and academics and minor modifications made to incorporate the feedback received. The survey was launched in late January and participants were initially encouraged to complete the questionnaire within 16 days. This could be done in a single occasion or progressively over two weeks from starting without having to begin again. No further responses were accepted after 24 days.

Using publicly available email contacts, the CEOs of the target councils were emailed an invitation to participate in the online survey. The covering email explained the purpose of the survey, what was required, advice that participation was voluntary, an assurance of confidentiality of responses, and the link for the online questionnaire. A copy of the cover letter and online questionnaire is provided in Appendix 5.

Participants only needed to reveal the council they were from if they were willing to provide extra detail about their successful and unsuccessful community engagement experiences. An assurance was given, however, that their contact details would be separated from their survey responses. To enhance participation in the survey, support was sought from the local government associations in each jurisdiction to encourage their members to take part. The researcher also sent participants three reminder emails over the survey period.

A total of 46 responses were received by the final close off date. This gave an overall response rate of almost 44%. Three responses were eliminated from further analysis however due to their level of incompleteness. Representatives from another six local governments had entered the online survey but had not progressed past the first section on council demographics. Two other CEOs emailed an apology for not participating due to other pressing priorities at the time.

Table 3 summarises the distribution of responding councils by self-reported ACLG code and type of council by jurisdiction and in total.

Table 3: Number of survey participants by jurisdiction and Australian local government classification

	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	WA	Total	Actual No.
	(N = 7)[1]	(N = 11)[1]	(N = 39)[1]	(N = 23)[1]	(N = 25)[1]	(N = 105)[1]	2011-12
ALGC Code	**Distribution by ALGC code[2]**						**ACLG codes**
Rural-remote extra small - RTX	1		2	1	1	**5**	**14**
Rural-remote small - RTS		1	4	1	4	**10**	**13**
Rural-remote medium - RTM	1	2	8	1	3	**15**	**22**
Rural-remote large - RTL	1	2		1	7	**11**	**23**
Rural agric. small - RAS			1	1		**2**	**10**
Rural agric. medium - RAM				2		**2**	**12**
Rural agric. large - RAL	1					**1**	**3**
Urban fringe small - UFS						**0**	**2**
Urban regional small - URS						**0**	**3**
Urban regional med. - URM						**0**	**1**
Type of Council	**Distribution by self-reported type of council**						**Usable responses**
Rural-remote with little or no Indigenous population			4	3	1	**8**	**8**
Rural-remote with mostly town based Indigenous population	4	1	3	3	8	**19**	**17**
Rural-remote with remote Indigenous communities		4	1	1	6	**12**	**11**
Indigenous Council			7			**7**	**7**
Total responses received	**4**	**5**	**15**	**7**	**15**	**46**	
Usable responses	**4**	**5**	**14**	**6**	**14**	**43**	
Response rate (% total responses received)	57.1%	45.5%	38.5%	30.4%	60.0%	43.8%	
Response rate (% usable responses)	57.1%	45.5%	35.9%	26.1%	56.0%	41.0%	
% of all usable survey responses	9.3%	11.6%	32.6%	14.0%	32.6%	100.0%	
% of total rural-remote and Indigenous councils	6.7%	10.5%	37.1%	21.9%	23.8%	100.0%	

[1] N = total number of rural-remote and Indigenous local governments in the jurisdiction or category of councils.
[2] Self-reported ACLG codes corrected to actual 2011-12 ACLG codes where incorrect self-reporting detectable.

The sample of respondents included a reasonable cross-section of local governments from all jurisdictions. The response rates from each State were quite solid ranging from just under one-third (30.4%) in SA to almost two-thirds (60%) in WA. Usable responses were attained from 41% of the total target population of 105 local governments which is large enough to be 95% confident that the margin of error in the survey results is no more than +/- 13.6%.

With the exception of SA which was somewhat under-represented and WA which was somewhat over-represented, the actual numbers of usable responses received from each State were closely proportional to the actual percentage of the total numbers of RRI local governments in each State. This pattern of response added confidence to the overall representativeness of the research results. The survey responses were analysed using SPSS statistical software. Frequency distributions, graphs and descriptive statistics (averages and standard deviations) were generated where appropriate. In addition, factor analysis was conducted on sets of items in the questionnaire relating to community engagement practices, community engagement challenges, integrated planning understanding and community engagement supports to see if these items could be reduced into a smaller number of key factors or themes. A correlation analysis was also undertaken for some sets of items and scores for groups of items expected to be related to each other. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of responses by different sub-groups of RRI local governments was conducted using one-way ANOVAs to compare the average ratings on relevant questions. All significance tests were conducted at a 5% level of significance. These comparative analyses revealed very few significant differences between the sub-groups – jurisdiction, council type and size of council - so the findings are reported in aggregate only.

Step 4 – Case Studies

The stakeholder interviews sought to identify examples of RRI local governments using some effective community engagement practices. Also in the online survey councils were asked if they were willing to provide more detail about examples of successful and unsuccessful community engagement experiences. These two sources of information were used to identify potential case studies for further investigation. For the purpose of this project six case studies from four jurisdictions were developed. The case examples provide a snapshot selected local government approaches to community engagement to be shared with other rural-remote and Indigenous councils. Case studies of this type offer a platform for building a 'community engagement community of practice' network for rural-remote and Indigenous councils to support each other in improving community engagement practices over time.

Step 5 - Stakeholder feedback

Lastly, a draft report was prepared. This presented the key research findings, the case studies and recommendations on practical ways of improving community engagement in RRI local government. Each case study was reviewed by the respective local government representatives who provided the information to confirm the accuracy the events and activities depicted and the draft report was distributed to a range of key stakeholders for feedback and comment. The report was then modified as deemed appropriate based of the feedback provided.

3 Review of community engagement literature

3.1   Introduction

This literature review was designed to identify the extent of research on community engagement involving RRI local government. It examines the insights of prior research in relation to the research questions forming the focus of this study. Furthermore, it identifies apparent gaps in the literature that this study can potentially address. Specifically, in the context of RRI local government, this literature review seeks to establish:

1. What is meant by community engagement?
2. What form does community engagement take?
3. What barriers or challenges do RRI local governments face in engaging with their communities?
4. Where community engagement is successful, what appear to be the key success factors?
5. What are the apparent gaps in the community engagement literature as it relates to RRI local government?

This review firstly undertook a broad search of the community engagement literature addressing issues relevant to engaging with rural-remote and/or Indigenous communities. The focus was on identifying examples of engagement between governments or government entities and rural-remote or Indigenous communities. Secondly, a more specific examination of key issues relating to local government engagement of communities was undertaken. This endeavoured to identify known barriers to engagement, literature relating to engaging 'hard to reach' groups and literature about best practice methods of engagement especially with rural-remote and/or Indigenous communities.

Extensive literature is available addressing how community engagement is defined, its potential scope, and why and how such engagement is useful for local governments. In this current review, however, discussion of these areas has been kept to a minimum as it was addressed in considerable detail in the ACELG Working Paper No.5 *Local Government and Community Engagement in Australia* (Herriman and Pillora, 2011). Similarly, specific tools for engagement are referred to here but more detailed information is available in the annotated bibliography that supports this ACELG working paper (UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures, August 2011). These resources would be useful to councils seeking to develop an approach to community engagement.

3.2   Meaning of community engagement in a local government context

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) framework for public participation is amongst the most widely used guides on community engagement in Australia and elsewhere. Yet this framework makes no specific reference to community engagement. Rather it adopts the term 'public participation'. In common parlance, however, terms like public participation, community engagement, community consultation and community participation are often used interchangeably. The IPA2 spectrum of public participation presents engagement as an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of community participation activities - information giving, consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment (see Appendix 2).

The IAP2 core values state that public participation:

1. Is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.
(IAP2, 2011)

The 2005 Brisbane Declaration on community engagement that was developed at the International Conference on Engaging Communities, built on the IAP2 core values and other key sources to include the recognition that '… community engagement is a two way process:

▪ by which the aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors in policy development, planning, decision-making, service delivery and assessment and

▪ by which governments and other business and civil society organisations involve citizens, clients, communities and other stakeholders in these processes.'

Furthermore it defines meaningful engagement as seeking '… to address barriers and build the capacity and confidence of people to participate in, and negotiate and partner with, institutions that affect their lives, in particular those previously excluded or disenfranchised'. It also recognises that '… inclusive engagement requires that Indigenous peoples and the poor and marginalized, are adequately resourced to participate meaningfully in the broader community and that they have a stake in the outcome and benefit equitable as a result of being involved'
(IAP2 2005).

The core principles endorsed by the Declaration are:

Integrity – openness and honesty about the scope and purpose of engagement.
Inclusion – opportunity for a diverse range of values and perspectives to be freely and fairly expressed and heard.
Deliberation –sufficient and credible information is provided for dialogue, choice and decisions, and there is space to weigh options, develop common understanding and to appreciate respective roles and responsibilities.
Influence – when people have input in designing how they participate, when policies and services reflect their involvement and when their impact is apparent.

Several Australian local government associations (including LGAQ, LGASA and VLGA) together with a growing number of councils including RRI local governments (for example Central Desert Shire Council, McKinlay Shire Council, and the Outback Communities Authority) have adopted many of the core IAP2 framework principles to guide their engagement policies, approaches and practices

(Hagan, 2005, Herriman and Pillora, 2011, VLGA, 2009, Heylan and Chappell, 2008, LGAQ, 2010). While there are several other useful models available such as the OECD model of engagement (www.oecd.org) and Arnstein's ladder of community participation (Arnstein, 1969), the IAP2 model is considered particularly helpful for local authorities because it links the goals of engagement with the implicit promise of democratic reward for the community (Brackertz and Meredyth, 2007). The IAP2 values also reflect positions similar to those recognised by ACELG as important in engagement.

3.3   Forms of community engagement used by local government

While community engagement is being increasingly incorporated into the work of local governments in Australia, considerable variation remains in the extent and level to which it is undertaken. The reasons for engagement, the types of issues addressed, and the willingness of councils to allow for community determination also vary greatly (Brackertz and Meredyth, 2009, Herriman and Pillora, 2011, Heylan, 2007).

Brackertz & Meredyth (2008) identified a range of motivations for councils to engage with their communities. These vary from the pragmatic to conceptions about local government's role in democracy to its ability to foster civil society or redress social justice. Councils may seek to engage on a wide range of matters including major policies and strategies, operational or service plans, performance evaluation or issues of concern to the community. The reasons for public participation 'include the desire to improve planning and decision making through a better understanding of constituents' needs and priorities, statutory requirements, the desire to foster good governance, the wish to educate the community about important issues, and the desire to strengthen social capital through community engagement and community building' (Brackertz and Meredyth, 2008, p.3).

Additionally, considerable differences exist in how a community is defined and hence who councils engage with (Brackertz and Meredyth, 2009, Herriman and Pillora, 2011, Heylan, 2007). Although service delivery functions of councils may be limited to residents in local government areas, the community can be defined much more broadly to include citizens, ratepayers, landowners, businesses, industry, community or business associations, government organisations and other stakeholder groups: 'This broader definition of a community would include anyone who lives, works, conducts business, studies, visits, owns property in or participates in the services offered in the local government area' (Herriman and Pillora, 2011, p.6).

Given the wide use of the term engagement to describe different levels of interaction with community members, the IAP2 spectrum of public participation offers a useful framework for measuring and benchmarking the level of engagement undertaken on a given project or by a particular council. It provides an indication of the role of the community in the process (from passive participant receiving information to highly active participation as final decision maker) and the level of council commitment to engaging the community (the extent of its promise to the community) as summarised in Appendix 2.

A snapshot of community engagement in rural-remote and Indigenous communities
Data on the extent of community engagement by the local government sector across Australia is generally not readily available (Herriman and Pillora, 2011, p.19). Two organisations known to have gathered some data on community engagement by councils in their jurisdictions are:

- The Local Government Association of South Australia (LGASA) that commissioned a study in 2007 (Heylan, April 2007) and
- The Queensland government Department of Infrastructure and Planning that introduced an annual community engagement survey in 2009 (Queensland Government Department of Infrastructure and Planning, 2009 2010b).

The following sections outline the key findings of each of these projects.

Overview of the 2007 South Australian Study

In 2007 the LGASA supported by the State government through the Office for State/Local Government Relations embarked upon a Citizen/Community Engagement project to develop tools and techniques to support councils in developing good community engagement practices. As part of this project the LGASA commissioned a study on community engagement by local governments in SA for which a survey was conducted to gather information about the community engagement practices of councils. Leading practice case study examples were also sought and subsequently showcased (Heylan, 2007).

The survey attracted 26 responses (12 metropolitan and 14 rural) that included a cross-section of larger and smaller metropolitan, as well as regional and smaller rural local governments. The study, however, only reported aggregate responses. Thus, it is not possible to focus here on the community engagement practices of RRI local governments in this jurisdiction. Thus, the following summary points give an overview of practices across all respondents.

- Most councils reported having a stand-alone 'public consultation policy' or a policy within a broader policy framework
- All councils reported extending their community engagement practices beyond prescribed minimum standards
- Half the councils reported having access to various resources to help them design engagement strategies. Some had stand-alone handbook/charter/guideline resources (23%) while others had steps/checklists set out in a policy (12%). Two councils (8%) were in the process of preparing these resources, one (4%) used in-house expertise and another (4%) used external expertise for advice and assistance
- More than half the councils indicated that they have a dedicated budget and in many cases staff resources for their community engagement activities. Several also indicated that community consultation is resourced through or supplemented with specific project funds
- Councils mainly relied on traditional methods to inform their communities with local media, direct mail, internet/website and displays being the four most frequently used techniques
- All councils had various committees or reference groups established to support council in planning and decision-making processes and these were reported to have a medium to high impact on council decisions
- While most councils (88%) had taken steps to engage young people, far fewer had taken initiatives to foster participation by other 'hard to engage' community groups including Aboriginal people (54%), CALD groups (46%), women (31%), aged and disabled (27%), persons on low income (8%), homeless persons (4%) and other disadvantaged persons (4%)

- Very little formal evaluation of the effectiveness of community engagement activities was reported and what evaluation occurred was by larger urban councils.

As a second phase to this study, a community engagement handbook was developed as a model framework in leading practice in community engagement. The Handbook provided Councils with a practical guide for effectively planning and implementing community engagement (Heylan and Chappell, 2008).

Subsequent to this work, in 2011 the LGASA launched a 'Local Excellence' program that has community engagement as one of four key themes for introducing a range of new reform initiatives. In 2012, the Association plans to explore the future of community engagement in local government as one of its community engagement projects. This is expected to involve updating the 2007 survey 'to identify key changes in how Councils are managing community engagement' and will link with a number of other community engagement initiatives involving social media, engaging with multi-cultural and Aboriginal communities, mobile technology, governance and service provision (LGASA, 2012, p.4).

<u>Overview of the Queensland surveys</u>
In 2008-09 the Queensland government's Department of Infrastructure and Planning introduced a sustainability performance measurement and reporting process as part of the State's local government reform program. Community engagement is one of four sustainability elements on which local governments now provide an annual return. This reporting process was introduced as a data collection tool to '... to determine whether Local Governments have developed robust community engagement processes and if these are being used in community planning and asset management planning' (Queensland Government Department of Infrstructure and Planning, 2010b, p.3). The Queensland government's community engagement model is based on the IAP2 framework and the annual survey reflects this framework.

The community engagement practices by Queensland local governments reported in the 2009 and 2010 returns are summarised in Table 4 (over page).

As might be anticipated, the robustness of Queensland council community engagement processes varied with the size of the local government. Generally a larger percentage of large and very large councils reported having formal community engagement policies/procedures in place and undertaking all levels of community engagement than did medium and small/ Indigenous councils. The Queensland government used this data to identify and showcase better performing local governments. These were councils with a formal community engagement policy and a comprehensive approach to their community engagement activities. In the 2010 return, 26 better performing councils were identified. Eight of these councils are part of the target population for this ACELG community engagement study, these being Balonne Shire Council, Croydon Shire Council, Longreach Regional Council, McKinlay Shire Council, Mount Isa City Council, Richmond Shire Council, Maranoa Regional Council and Torres Shire Council.

Table 4:   Queensland local government community engagement practices – 2009 and 2010

	2009 return	2010 return
Number of local governments surveyed	58 All non-Indigenous councils including Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC)	73 57 non-Indigenous 16 Indigenous
Number of local governments submitting a return	45 (78%) (including TSIRC)	51 (70%) 47 non-Indigenous (82%) 4 Indigenous (25%)
Response rates by size of local government: Small/Indigenous Medium Large Very large	 13 (76%) 11 (79%) 12 (80%) 9 (75%)	 14 (44%) 12 (86%) 13 (87%) 12 (100%)
% of local governments that:		
Undertake community engagement	98%	100%
Have a formal community engagement policy	31%	59%
Use documented community engagement guides or processes	44%	65%
Have a formal community engagement roles/responsibilities assigned	60%	71%
Have a community engagement integrated with asset management planning	33%	39%
Undertake CE at the 'inform' level	93%	98%
Undertake CE at the 'consult' level	98%	100%
Undertake CE at the 'active participation' level	78%	88%
Evaluate CE activities	58%	67%
Offer training/PD to staff	60%	n.a.

Case study examples

To get an even better picture of what community engagement looks like in practice, Table 5 presents nine case studies developed using secondary data illustrating a small set of examples in rural-remote and/or Indigenous communities. In most cases, the engaging partner was a council but examples of Indigenous communities developing their own engagement strategy to achieve an internal goal (Nursey-Bray, 2005) and the NT and WA governments engaging with small Indigenous towns or groups (Ah-Chin, 2005 Wiluna Shire Council, 2009) are also included. Several engagement programs refer to particular engagement levels on the IAP2 spectrum. Yet the approaches used to engage the community vary suggesting no single best methods necessarily exist for specific engagement levels as these are likely to be situationally determined.

Table 5: **Case examples of community engagement with rural-remote and Indigenous communities**

Area and engagement partner	Engagement project or purpose	Level of engagement (if stated)	Methods or tools used	Evaluation used (if stated)	Barriers identified in the process
Campbelltown, South Australia: engagement by local council (Popping, 2008)	Proposed memorial garden	IAP2 Spectrum levels: Involve — Consult	- Information flyer with feedback form - Information posters at key locations - Colour advertisement in the local paper - Community Open Day with a guided walk of the proposed site - On-site Q&A and BBQ - Mock-up garden - Web page with feedback option	Informal: measures include public participation, number of feedback forms received, change of community perception, and commentary on the engagement techniques.	- Other prior issues could overshadow engagement topic - Community concern pre-made decision could jeopardise engagement
Whyalla, South Australia: engagement by local council (Westbrook, 2008)	Vision for 2022	IAP2 Spectrum levels: Involve	- Media release - Council newsletter and letter, - Project / steering committee set up - Public engagement forums held - Newsletter and survey sent to residents - Web page and surveys on Council's website - Spare newsletters and surveys made available - Presentations made to community groups 'DIY' kits produced for groups to hold own forums.	Participants filled in evaluation forms at formal engagement events. A Gantt chart and engagement process plan was adopted by the Project Steering Committee and evaluated at each meeting for the plan process achievements and appraisal. Involved staff held informal evaluation meetings after each event.	- Sense by community that engagement was often undertaken only after decisions had been made - Sense by councillors that engagement was a wasted exercise that involved a 'vocal minority'. - Once engagement was successful, concern that community expectations for future engagement would be challengingly high.

Area and engagement partner	Engagement project or purpose	Level of engagement (if stated)	Methods or tools used	Evaluation used (if stated)	Barriers identified in the process
Northern Territory Indigenous communities: engagement by Northern Territory Government (Ah Chin, 2005)	Indigenous employment forums	Not stated	▪ Workshops held across Territory ▪ Group discussions conducted by facilitators	Evaluation through Continuous Improvement (CI) and Process Improvement (PI) models	▪ Unexpected death of a traditional owner in one region delayed proceedings ▪ Competing priorities interrupted planned schedule ▪ Engagement project needed to grow beyond original planned scope ▪ Initial concerns raised by Indigenous groups that objected to 'another Indigenous talkfest' ▪ Sense of hopelessness and lack of faith that employment forums could achieve anything, with sense that everything had been tried and had failed before.
Girringun traditional owner group for the Hinchenbrook section of the Great Barrier Reef: co-management enterprise with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (Nursey-Bray, 2005)	Natural resources initiatives	Not stated	▪ An equitable internal consultation process negotiated among traditional owners ▪ Process development to address external engagement with communities of interest in their country ▪ Consultant worked primarily with CEO who conducted an iterative feedback process with traditional owner groups ▪ Public meetings held ▪ Final revisions to plans made with new volunteer groups	Social and outcome-based evaluation recommended: (i) ecological soundness (ii) social justice and (iii) political feasibility.	▪ Wuthathi people live in three different areas, presenting logistical and fiscal challenges ▪ Difficulty on the part of external parties to action their rhetoric as this would necessitate a sharing of power and knowledge, community sees employment as part of engagement.

Area and engagement partner	Engagement project or purpose	Level of engagement (if stated)	Methods or tools used	Evaluation used (if stated)	Barriers identified in the process
Wuthathi people, traditional owners of Shelburne Bay, Cape York Peninsula: community-driven enterprise (Nursey-Bray, 2005)	Natural resources initiatives	Not stated	▪ An equitable internal consultation process negotiated among traditional owners ▪ Process development to address external engagement with communities of interest in their country ▪ Wuthathi Land Trust hosted a series of meetings where the key cultural groupings from different regions were brought together to reflect on and amend the draft Framework until agreement was reached ▪ Wuthathi Land Trust funded community visits where consultant spoke directly to Wuthathi people to clarify what the community wanted in the Framework.	Social and outcome-based evaluation recommended: (i) ecological soundness (ii) social justice and (iii) political feasibility.	▪ Important to ensure that the nine traditional groups were involved and represented fairly ▪ Difficulty on the part of external parties to action their rhetoric as this would necessitate a sharing of power and knowledge, community sees employment as part of engagement.
Mt Barker, South Australia: Engagement by local council (Collins, 2008)	Zoning of industrial land through Development Planning Amendment	Involve - Consult	▪ Steering committee ▪ Community reference group ▪ Information packs ▪ Public workshops ▪ Public displays.	Not stated	• Community objection to industrial land zoning may not take into account the economic need to make a decision • Time delays diminish success • Difficulty seen in breaking through consultation 'noise' when multiple discussions are underway • Some issues such as heritage listing may not lend themselves to consultation as risk of adverse pre-emptive action by community is too great • Inconsistency in engagement levels is confusing for communities.

Area and engagement partner	Engagement project or purpose	Level of engagement (if stated)	Methods or tools used	Evaluation used (if stated)	Barriers identified in the process
Lockhart River, Queensland: Engagement by Aboriginal Shire Council with support and backing of Government Champion and other agency assistance (Hagan, 2005)	Building Productive Partnerships strategy	'Three Frames' management methodology	▪ Government champion ▪ Learning circles ▪ Immersion of a mentor in the community ▪ Community leadership development ▪ Government and community engagement ▪ Performance systems.	Informal: measures include development of Lockhart River Shared Responsibility Agreement, creation of the first small business within the community, development of demographic specific learning circles, employment of community members in anti-alcohol and drug measures.	▪ Low enthusiasm for previous engagement, ▪ Past relationships seen as passive and not productive ▪ Community faces significant red tape in undertaking projects ▪ Sense there is too much emphasis on monitoring and not enough on mentoring and building capability.
Playford, South Australia: Engagement by local council (MacLeod-Smith, 2008)	Waterproofing Northern Adelaide project	Collaborate - Consult - Involve -Inform	▪ Deliberative dialogue with a design focus ▪ Online and hard copy survey ▪ Education of key user groups by coordinating links and resources from experts ▪ Road-show ▪ Direct mail out and fact sheets ▪ Website and links ▪ Council newspaper, media releases and briefings.	Not stated	▪ Community fear that project would undermine amenity and aesthetics ▪ Concern new project could overturn past community work ▪ There was no latitude around the decision to proceed with the project ▪ There was no legislative requirement to undertake more than a basic community education program.

Area and engagement partner	Engagement project or purpose	Level of engagement (if stated)	Methods or tools used	Evaluation used (if stated)	Barriers identified in the process
Wiluna, Western Australia: Shire of Wiluna, Department of Local Government and Regional Development and other agencies as part of the Wiluna Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA) (Wiluna, 20092010)	Project to transform multiple poor indicators within the community	Not stated	▪ Family mapping undertaken ▪ Communication strategy developed ▪ Posters used in agencies and across town to raise awareness Seven community workshops were held between February and March 2009 attended by more than 120 people ▪ Community helped set priorities for strategic plan for Wiluna	Informal, but success reflected in reported community achievements in health, alcohol and drug abuse, mental health, family and social support, housing and infrastructure and crime reduction	▪ Project started in an environment described as divided, with overlaps and gaps in government services, poor communication and a history of political dysfunction ▪ Diverse and highly mobile Indigenous communities ▪ Project started with extremely poor community conditions, including chronic homelessness, poor health outcomes, high level of crime and limited community political representation

3.4 Community engagement challenges of rural-remote and Indigenous local government

As the preceding case examples demonstrate, there are diverse barriers that may arise when local governments undertake community engagement. Amongst the key themes that emerged were:

▪ The need to address adverse or sceptical community perceptions (Ah Chin, 2005, Hagan, 2005, MacLeod-Smith, 2008, Popping, 2008, Westbrook, 2008)

▪ Weariness or disillusionment on the part of councillors (Collins, 2008, MacLeod-Smith, 2008)

▪ Concerns over the limited ability of the community to influence any final decision (Collins, 2008, MacLeod-Smith, 2008, Nursey-Bray, 2005, Popping, 2008) and

▪ Concern that failed engagement damages future engagement prospects, while successful engagement may unrealistically drive up expectations (Ah Chin, 2005, Collins, 2008, MacLeod-Smith, 2008).

While this is a small sample of engagement activities, the types of barriers revealed accord with those found elsewhere in the literature {see for example Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, 2010 Brackertz & Meredyth, 2008 2009 NSW DLG & LGSANSW, 2007 Thompson, Stenekes, Kruger & Carr, 2009}. McCabe, Keast & Brown (2006) considered a series of community engagement, community development and community capacity building case studies and identified 'initiative deficiencies' in four main areas. These included 'the disconnect between community and government awareness (of) the program design, under-resourced initiatives, short-term objective planning, and internal/external community government program resistance by both community and government' (McCabe et al., 2006 p.17). Similarly, Thompson et al. (2009) summarised common barriers as:

▪ Expectations can be raised unless clear and realistic limits and objectives are set

▪ Cynicism can evolve from 'participation fatigue' or a lack of feedback from past engagement

▪ Resources needed for engagement can be considerable and a lack of resources can lead to failure and

▪ Divergent views mean that engagement may never reach consensus (which should not be its aim).

In her investigation of engagement activities of South Australian councils, Heylan (2007) identified a more extensive range of potential barriers and offered some options to address these (see Table 6).

As this literature review was particularly interested in community engagement in rural-remote and Indigenous local government, examples of Indigenous community engagement (by different agencies) were also considered to see if any unique barriers could be identified. A recent evaluation of service delivery in remote Indigenous communities (Department of Finance and Deregulation, 2009) found that there are 1187 discrete Indigenous communities home to almost 93,000 Indigenous people. Of this population, 85 per cent live in remote and nine per cent live in very remote communities characterised by small populations, underdeveloped economies, physical isolation from major centres, limited infrastructure, and few opportunities for investment. Almost all of the 1112 remote and very remote Indigenous communities are located in the NT (632), WA (266), QLD (120) and SA (82).

Table 6: Community engagement barriers and minimisation strategies

Barriers	Ideas to minimise barriers
Apathy – Willingness to be involved	Ongoing awareness – local government role and what is on offer Motivate through communications Target specific groups
Cynicism – Cannot influence Lack of clarity about what can be influenced	Resident panels to encourage participation Provide reasons for choice/decision Better feedback in a timely manner
Cost – Funding and resources	Build into project funding Share across areas on like issues Rearrange priorities of projects
Time poor community	Strategic consultation on Council wide issues
Limited knowledge/awareness in departments where community engagement is not core business	Community engagement framework Central strategy – contact/advisory person Reference guide Build into projects as a legitimate priority
Self-interest rather than greater good – Biased focus	Ensure broader representation of interests
Geographic distance	Use a variety of methods including IT
Access to transport	Assistance with transport to attend
Voiceless minority	21st Century town meetings Work cafe Citizens juries

Multiple authors noted that governments and government agencies have made increased efforts at different levels to engage with Indigenous communities. In the past, however, this has been hampered by limited or superficial engagement (Hagan, 2005, Ross and Nursey-Bray, 2005). It has failed to fulfil the Brisbane Declaration definition of engagement as a two-way process in which the 'aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors in policy development, planning, decision-making, service delivery and assessment' (IAP2, 2005). The NSW Department of Local Government guide for Indigenous engagement (NSWDLG and LGSANSW, 2007) puts the troubled record of interaction with government into a historical context:

'Since the European occupation of Australia in the eighteenth century, Aboriginal people were consistently denied the right to be involved in making the decisions that impact on their future. They were denied the right to vote and were not included in the census until a referendum was passed in 1967.

Self-determination is a key issue for Aboriginal communities in ensuring the freedom to live well, according to their own values and beliefs, have ongoing choice about their way of life, and be respected by non-Aboriginal Australians.

Attempts at consultation during the later half of last century were often perceived by communities as tokenistic, as they often were. As a result Aboriginal people may be cynical in their attitude to all levels of government and question the genuineness of the consultation being undertaken.

The term 'negotiation' is preferred to 'consultation' as it suggests an equal relationship where parties work together to reach agreement on an issue. It is crucial to the success of council programs that Aboriginal people are involved through a process of negotiation.'

(NSWDLG and LGSANSW, 2007, p.16)

As Hagan (2005) puts it, the traditional government approach to dealing with Indigenous communities 'has often started with a pre-determined solution that is based in good intentions, but 'cooked up' outside the community and at times based on a set of basic assumptions about what is wrong within the community and about what needs to be fixed' with no latitude within the community to adjust the program or approach to suit their actual needs (Hagan, 2005). Ah Chin (2005) argued that this imported expert approach, along with years of promised but not delivered improvements, is corrosive for Indigenous community attitudes towards engagement, which can be dismissed as 'another Indigenous talkfest' (Ah Chin, 2005). Past failures in consultation or participatory experiences breed low expectations and disillusionment about future community engagement.

Much prior research aimed at establishing the barriers and success factors relevant to engaging with Indigenous communities has been done in the field of natural resource management (Nursey-Bray, 2005, Ross and Nursey-Bray, 2005, Rudland et al., 2004). There is also a growing body of literature on engaging Indigenous people in research (Wand, 2008, Anderson-Smith, 2008) and in education (Campbell and Christie, 2009b, Gorman and Garnett, 2009b). Authors discussing the process and problems inherent in Indigenous engagement identify a range of complex issues including, but not limited to:

- **A need to address wider issues:** while a specific project or policy may be the original motivating point, many other matters must also be addressed for the engagement to be successful including 'deeper issues of equity, economy, history, politics, power and knowledge that are embedded within the dialogue about caring for country' *(Nursey-Bray, 2005, p.10).*

- **A need for genuine relationship-building:** ongoing relationships must be developed and be seen to be important *(Campbell and Christie, 2009a).*

- **The importance of place and culture:** place and cultural rules are very specific and engagement protocols are often not appropriate for a place or people, and nor are they designed by the Aboriginal community with which engagement is undertaken *(Carter, 2010).*

- **The complexity of internal political structures:** dysfunctions inherent in the legislative, funding and policy structures of Aboriginal communities can inhibit successful engagement (DIA, 2004, Limerick, 2009). In addition, cultural and historic issues, intertwined with past treatment and movement of Indigenous groups, may mean families who do not have a shared clan or language can live in close proximity, and that even within families there are 'cultural taboos which restrict certain family members talking and working with each other' *(Gorman and Garnett, 2009a, p.95).*

- **Historical factors:** A history of acrimony between parties, entrenched injustice, racial discrimination and erosion of culture continues to contribute to Indigenous disadvantage *(DIA, 2002)*

- **Past engagement failures:** ongoing consultation and outsider involvement in community issues breed distrust, a sense of futility and low expectations of 'another Indigenous talkfest' *(Ah Chin, 2005, p.10)*

- **Outsider confusion:** it can be difficult to establish the 'right' people to talk to when engaging, as some knowledge is vested in specific individuals and cannot be freely given by or shared with others *(Christie, 2009)*

- **Internal division:** not all those who appear or claim to be able to speak for the community are vested with the right to do so, a situation which can be compounded by 'classical Aboriginal political structures (which can mean) people are loyal to their families and clans first and foremost, at the expense of representing the interests of other families and clans' *(Anderson-Smith, 2008, p.21)*

- **A need for remuneration:** there is an increased recognition that 'voluntary' engagement is not necessarily an appropriate approach in some cases and that Indigenous groups may expect engagement to be accompanied by genuine economic benefits such as the employment of local people, payment in recognition of Indigenous expertise or other compensation for the investment of time and energy. In resource states like WA, these payments can be driven up by the 'market' for engagement efforts by mining groups *(Campbell and Christie, 2009a, Fossey, 2009)*

- **An awareness of language:** what may be appropriate terminology for government documents or policy discussion may have limited meaning for Indigenous or rural-remote community members *(De Weaver and Lloyd, 2005)*

- **Poor foundations**: The presence of urgent issues that affect the wellbeing of the community (including crime, safety, homelessness and chronic health issues) must be addressed in advance of or alongside engagement *(DIA, 2004, Wiluna, 20092010)*

3.5 Success factors for community engagement by rural-remote and Indigenous local government

The barriers to successful engagement in RRI communities are many. As governments, government agencies and other groups embark on more engagement these barriers are being increasingly well documented. Less detailed, however, are factors necessary for engagement success.

In part, this is a factor of limited evaluation of engagement programs (Heylan, 2007, McCabe et al., 2006, Rowe and Frewer, 2004). As was seen in the previous case study examples, evaluation is frequently informal or examines people's perceptions of the process rather than assessing the success of the engagement against pre-determined goals. Additionally, meta-studies of engagement practices have noted a lack of evidence on what engagement strategies and techniques are most successful. Control groups are rarely used to weigh up the effectiveness of community meetings, for example, against online surveys or other methods of achieving outcomes (Abelson and Gauvin, 2006, Rowe and Frewer, 2004, Swainston and Summerbell, 2008).

Nonetheless, some groups recommend various engagement strategies or techniques for different levels of engagement - see for example the Queensland Government's 'Engaging Queenslander: Get Involved' community engagement program and series of resources[1]. It is not always clear, however, how evidence supporting these recommendations was gathered. They possibly represent best-practice engagement or describe essential factors for success but this is difficult to verify. The success factors listed here, therefore, represent those highlighted by the existing literature, recognising that the effectiveness of different engagement methods may not have been rigorously evaluated or measured.

Russo (2005) addressed a set of standards for community consultation that were developed by the Community Consultation Network of Local Governments and the LGAQ. The standards were developed primarily by seven south-east QLD councils and the LGAQ, with additional input from 20 other QLD councils. There are different standards for each stage of the engagement process, from encouraging councillors to demonstrate leadership to boosting staff capacity and implementing the engagement program itself. Russo argued that 'setting each standard in place will result in an effective foundation for applying the community consultation policies' increasingly required by governments (Russo, 2005, p.5). One significant section of the standards addresses the relationships needed when engaging with communities. The QLD standards call for:

- Involving the community at all stages of consultation, from planning through to delivery and evaluation
- Anticipating, acknowledging and accepting from the outset that there will be different opinions
- Working through differences together to ensure maximum understanding of the different issues and needs
- Giving credit for great ideas from the community and from within council and
- Promoting our good practice standards approach to consultation with the community. (Russo, 2005, p.4)

The standards developed have been extended and discussed at length in the Queensland Government's guides and factsheets comprising the 'Engaging Queenslanders: Get Involved' resources. Part of this discussion makes specific statements about principles that should govern engagement with Indigenous communities and 'critical success factors' that need to be present. Building trust and mutual respect via the engagement process is highlighted by the guiding principles along with effective engagement fostering reciprocal relationships and partnerships. The principles and critical success factors proposed are:

Guiding principles

- A shared vision – Valuing the experiences and aspirations of Indigenous people in developing a shared commitment for the future.

- Mutual respect – Sharing, listening to and understanding the views, concerns and experiences of others.

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[1] see http://www.qld.gov.au/web/community-engagement/guides-factsheets/

- **Awareness** – Learning community history, cultures, societies, customs and contemporary experiences.

- **Shared responsibility** – Forging relationships in a context of reciprocity, cooperation and obligation.

- **Building capacity** – Empowering Indigenous people in planning, managing and delivering policies, programs and services.

- **Improved coordination** – Developing and delivering related policies, programs and services in a more coordinated and integrated way.

- **Inclusiveness** – Developing initiatives based on the views and aspirations of the whole community, and enabling involvement by those least likely to have a say.

- **Appropriate timeframes** – Allocating appropriate time to establish relationships and facilitate and enable the participation of Indigenous people.

- **Sustainability** – Prioritising initiatives that encourage self-reliance, and sustainable economic and social development, and develop community capacity to deal with issues as they arise.

- **Integrity** – Develop initiatives in ways that build trust and confidence between communities and government.

Critical success factors

Maximising opportunities for successful engagement with Indigenous communities requires:

- establishing relationships and a shared vision
- government and community commitment
- confidence in the process
- clarity of roles and responsibilities
- a clear purpose and objectives with tangible outcomes and
- respecting diversity (Queensland Government, 2011, pp.15-16)

The NSW Division of Local Government guide for Indigenous engagement (NSWDLG and LGSANSW, 2007, pp.16-17) takes a similar position in establishing engagement principles that should be inherent in any strategy. These include:

- Acknowledging the hurt of the past as a result of the policies of all levels of government.
- Acknowledging the vitality and importance of Aboriginal culture and including relevant protocols in the business of councils.
- Protecting Aboriginal heritage, including objects and significant places.
- Acknowledging the existence and contribution of distinct Aboriginal communities, particularly those that appear to be small or 'silent'.
- Acknowledging the Aboriginal custodianship of the land as traditional owners.
- Acknowledging ongoing Aboriginal spiritual relationship to the land.
- Acknowledging and supporting the rebuilding of Aboriginal languages through council naming policies.
- Developing procedures for Aboriginal involvement in land use planning, including agreement on when such involvement would be appropriate.

- Developing procedures for Aboriginal involvement in council service planning and provision, including agreement on when such involvement would be appropriate.

Brackertz & Meredyth (2008) did not focus exclusively on engagement with Indigenous communities but addressed them as part of a broader examination of council engagement with 'hard to reach' groups. They conducted multiple studies of council engagement, producing several recommendations addressing methodology and delivery of engagement as well as intention. Key criteria identified for successful and inclusive public participation are:

- Ability to access, interpret and use demographic and socio-cultural information about constituencies.
- Development or existence of a supportive organisational 'culture of consultation'.
- History and experience of consultation.
- Existence of and adherence to policy and processes that include guidance on establishing equitable, accountable and transparent participatory policy and processes.
- Allocation of sufficient resources.
- Councillors with a positive attitude active involvement in consultation — so both council staff and the decision makers hear the community.
- Access to knowledgeable staff and continuing staff training.
- Communication across organisational 'silos'.
- Knowledge retention and knowledge sharing with council staff within and between different organisational areas and consultants.
- Ability to select and work with consultants experienced in conducting inclusive participatory processes or are experts in engaging particular groups.
- Ability to flexibly adjust participatory processes as unforeseen issues arise. (Brackertz and Meredyth, 2008, p.6)

These macro views of what makes council engagement successful can be added to by the experiences of individual project proponents. For example, Ah Chin (2005)) identified a range of factors that contributed to the success of the NT government's Indigenous Employment Forums that extend beyond advice provided in the Territory's Community Engagement Framework. She argued that while failure appears to breed low expectations, success is the parent of optimism. Despite low expectations initially, the success of the forums saw a significant shift in attitude, particularly amongst the many Indigenous people enlisted into active roles such as coordinators, chairpersons, keynote speakers, record keepers and evaluators throughout the process. Amongst the key lessons learned for successful engagement were:

- policy makers must base all decisions within a community engagement and continuous improvement framework
- the role of government to act as enabler and facilitate local capacity development
- the need to have champions at a senior level
- the need to be responsible for driving and coordinating the process at a local and regional level
- leading by example to influence change
- strategies must be developed at a systemic level
- genuine goodwill of team members must be present

- respect for the views and opinions of others is integral to the process
- reviewing, reflecting and re-focusing by the team and stakeholders must happen regularly
- showcasing small successes will build momentum and influence the culture
- being prepared to think outside the box when seeking resolutions leads to success and
- remember to appreciate and utilise existing community networks. (Ah Chin, 2005, p.12)

Hagan (2005) identified similar factors and noted the impact of the 'Government Champion' whereby chief executives of Government departments are each assigned an Indigenous community so they can work to improve outcomes in their allocated area. Hagan (2005) cited the success of Lockhart River's Government Champion in breaking down community distrust, building relationships, leading by example and developing goodwill about the government-community relationship among community members.

An alternative perspective on engagement with Indigenous communities is provided by literature drawn from the field of natural resources management (NRM). Here, engagement often requires environmental action and tangible changes among the engaged group, so it is possible that the success factors identified differ from engagement that might largely involve discussion and problem solving. Nevertheless, NRM groups have worked widely with Indigenous communities in remote-rural areas and may offer additional useful insights.

Measham et al. (2009, p.131) provided an extensive tool kit of factors they believe underpinned successful NRM engagement in the Lake Eyre Basin. These included:

- understanding 'desert talk'
- relying on face-to-face communication whenever possible and being flexible with technology when face-to-face is not an option
- developing a plan that will make communication inclusive
- recognising 'desert champions' who can make or break NRM projects in remote regions
- building and supporting community advocates
- understanding the experience, respect and credibility attached to long-term staff and
- encouraging on-the-ground natural communicators.

Larson, Measham and Williams (2009, p.16) extended this tool kit for successful engagement in desert regions arguing that while 'these factors represent a mix of desert specific and broader issues … it would seem that even general factors play out differently in remote areas, due to the intensity of challenges where scale and low population density has the potential to exacerbate difficulties in effective NRM engagement'. The combined suite of factors posed for successful engagement in remote areas was:

- developing trust
- adequate resourcing
- effective communication
- being inclusive
- being strategic
- promoting community ownership
- defining the appropriate scale for interaction
- being transparent

- being determined to achieve NRM initiatives
- adapting as required to reach outcomes
- aligning on-ground works with government priorities
- being independent
- respecting desert timeframes
- getting on with the job and
- avoiding burnout.

What can be seen, therefore, is a diverse — although largely empirically untested — array of factors that can play a role in determining the success of engagement, affecting each stage of the process. While not an exhaustive list of success factors, a number of themes are evident. These include:

- **Need for strong engagement processes** (to promote transparency, build trust, allowing for flexibility while following through on commitments, encouraging leadership and fostering good governance)

- **Value of relationships** (to develop strong community links, ensure effective communication, build trust, foster goodwill and encourage openness and sharing)

- **Essential role of respect** (to acknowledge past and ongoing injustice and mistreatment, recognise the importance and depth of Indigenous knowledge and value Indigenous contribution to engagement)

- **Need for sufficient resources** (to allow for appropriate time, prepare for difficult logistics and high costs, allow for remoteness and isolation and ensure engagement is not under-resourced)

- **Importance of champions** — in the engaging body and/or the engaged community (to promote the engagement, cut through red tape, find a path for consensus and advocate for the community)

- **Need for pre-engagement preparation** (to allow for communication of goals, set a shared vision, design an evaluation system, share information that will ensure the right people are included in the engagement process and set up a knowledge retention process that will allow the engagement success or failure to be built on in the future.)

3.6   Knowledge gaps

From this review of the community engagement literature it is clear that there is a wealth of knowledge available on good community engagement principles and approaches at a broad level. There is, however, much less known and understood about community engagement within a local government context generally and in relation to RRI councils particularly. Thus, given the limited knowledge and understanding of the community engagement challenges, policies, practices and support needs of RRI local governments across Australia, the objective of the next stages of this study was to address these key gaps in our knowledge.

4 Research findings

ACELG's *Capacity Building Strategy for Rural-remote and Indigenous Local Government* (Morris, 2011) identified two key actions for building the community engagement capacity of these councils. These were:

1. Review the community engagement challenges and good practice methodologies of RRI local governments and
2. Explore options for improving community engagement by councils in RRI communities.

The findings presented in this section of the report present the perspective of RRI local government on each of these two matters as well as the gaps in community engagement resources and the knowledge amongst this cohort of councils. In addition, it explores two current issues related to local government community engagement – those of integrated planning and social media. A complete set of supporting tables relating to the survey responses can be found in Appendix 6.

In analysing the responses to the online survey a comparative analysis was undertaken to evaluate if there were any differences in the responses by different sub-groups of local governments. A series of three comparative analyses were conducted using chi-square tests and one-way ANOVA tests as appropriate according to the nature of the measurement scales used. Comparative analyses were undertaken for the following three sets of local government sub-groups:

- Jurisdictions –
  - New South Wales
  - Northern Territory
  - Queensland
  - South Australia and
  - Western Australia.
- Type of local government –
  - Rural-remote with little or no Indigenous population
  - Rural-remote with an Indigenous population that is mostly town-based
  - Rural-remote with remote Indigenous communities and
  - An Indigenous council.
- Size of local government –
  - Small/extra small
  - Medium and
  - Large.

The sub-groups were determined on the basis of the self-reported characteristics provided by each participating local government.

Interestingly, across all of the comparative analyses undertaken only three statistically significant differences were found in responses to items in the entire questionnaire – a jurisdictional difference on two perceived challenges to community engagement and a type of local government difference on one perceived challenge to community engagement. However, when the participating councils were divided into only two types of local government – (i) rural-remote with a mostly town-based or little/no Indigenous population and (ii) rural-remote with remote Indigenous communities and

Indigenous councils – significant differences were evident on four perceived challenges to community engagement. On average, survey participants from the second category of local governments comprising Indigenous councils and local governments with remote Indigenous communities rated language barriers, community literacy skills, participation fatigue from over-consultation and past community engagement failures as greater challenges than the first group. In the absence of substantive differences overall across these sub-groups of local governments, the results presented in this report are in aggregate only.

4.1 Community engagement practices of rural-remote and Indigenous local government

The first research question addressed by this study was 'what community engagement occurs in rural-remote and Indigenous Councils in Australia?' The literature review revealed that with the exception of very limited community engagement data available on Queensland and South Australian councils, little is actually known about the extent and type of community engagement undertaken by RRI local governments across Australia. Thus, the online survey endeavoured to address this knowledge gap by asking these local governments about their current policies and practices which included what internal documents and support systems they have in place to support community engagement activities and the frequency with which they undertake different levels of community engagement (i.e. inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower) and engagement that is beyond legislative requirements. It also considered their use of an integrated planning approach and its relationship with community engagement, and their use of social media as an emerging community engagement technique.

Internal community engagement support systems and processes

Figure 1 below summarises the responses from 43 RRI local governments in relation to questions about internal community engagement policies, documents and practices to help gauge the extent to which RRI councils across Australia have robust community engagement processes in place. Without a formal well developed community engagement strategy and/or policy, a guide to help plan and implement community engagement activities and dedicated resources (human and financial) to conduct community engagement activities, local government efforts to engage with their local communities may be inappropriate or ineffective in achieving stated objectives and desired outcomes.

Figure 1:   Internal community engagement policies and systems in rural-remote and Indigenous local government
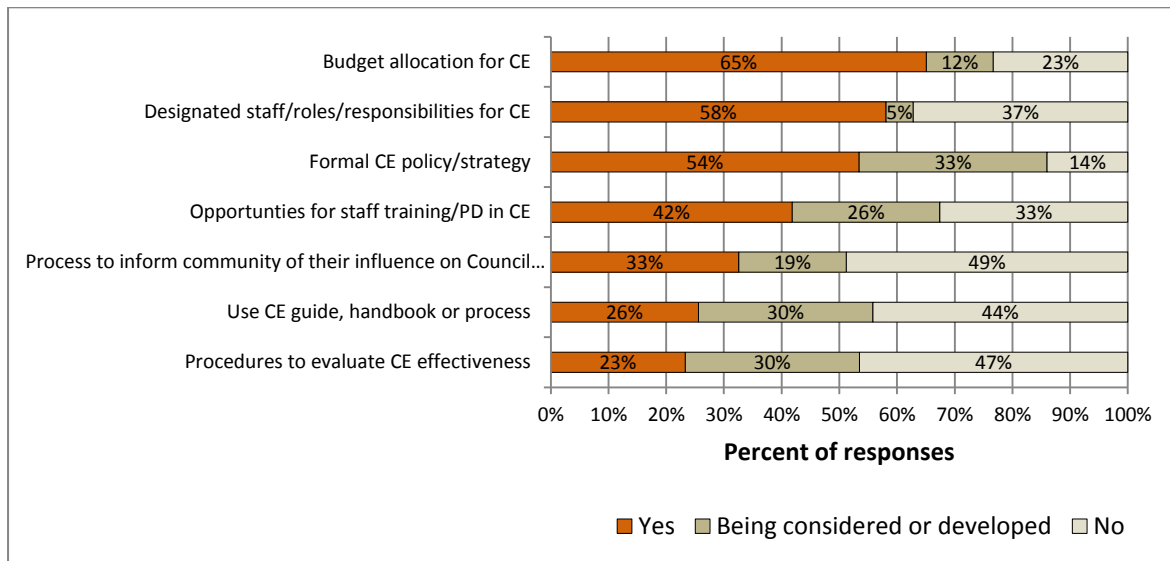
The results show that community engagement by RRI local government in Australia is very much only in its developmental phase. While almost two-thirds of councils (65%) reported dedicating financial resources for community engagement activities in their budgets, only just over half (54%) indicated that they have a formal community engagement policy or strategy document. A similar proportion of councils (58%) said they have designated staff or formal roles and responsibilities for managing their community engagement activities. Less than half of the councils (42%) however provide formal training opportunities for staff to develop their community engagement knowledge and skills. Furthermore, only between one-quarter and one-third of councils have some type of guide, handbook or process to assist staff with planning and implementing community engagement activities, and have a procedure in place for evaluating the effectiveness of these activities and for informing the community about how their input influenced Council decisions.

Importantly, however, a sizeable proportion of councils indicated that they are looking at or working towards getting some of these internal systems and processes in place to better support their community engagement activities. This is particularly the case for developing a formal community engagement strategy or policy document (33%). Nevertheless, almost half of the councils did not have or were not developing or even considering a key resource like a community engagement guide or handbook (44%) or processes for evaluating community engagement activities (47%) and informing the community about how their participation has informed their decisions (49%). The absence of a process for evaluating community engagement activities greatly restricts local governments' understanding of how well their efforts have worked and hence their potential for improving future engagement processes. Similarly, by not having a process in place to inform the community about how their participation influenced the council's decisions may build community cynicism and disinterest in future involvement. Overall, the relatively low level of many internal support systems and procedures raises some concern when the legislative requirement for community engagement by local government in each jurisdiction is taken into account.

Levels of community engagement undertaken

To examine the levels of community engagement undertaken by RRI local government, the IAP2 framework was used. The different levels of community engagement undertaken were defined as follows:

- **Inform** – Provide the community with information about council plans, services, activities or decisions.
- **Consult** – Seek community feedback on existing policies, programs, activities or council decisions.
- **Involve** – Provide opportunities for the community to raise concerns or identify their aspirations.
- **Collaborate** – Provide opportunities for the community to actively help identify and evaluate council policy, program or service options or solutions to problems
- **Empower** – Provide opportunities for the community to help choose the best option or solution for a council policy, program or service.

In addition, councils were asked to indicate the frequency with which they undertake community engagement on issues and matters where it is not required by legislation.

Figure 2 below presents the extent to which these local governments reported undertaking each of the five different levels of community engagement. These results show that the majority of RRI local governments undertake all levels of community engagement to some degree. As might be anticipated, however, this cohort of councils generally undertake higher levels of community engagement (i.e. collaborate and empower) less frequently than those forms involving lower levels of participation (i.e. inform, consult, involve).

Figure 2: Levels of community engagement undertaken by rural-remote and Indigenous local government
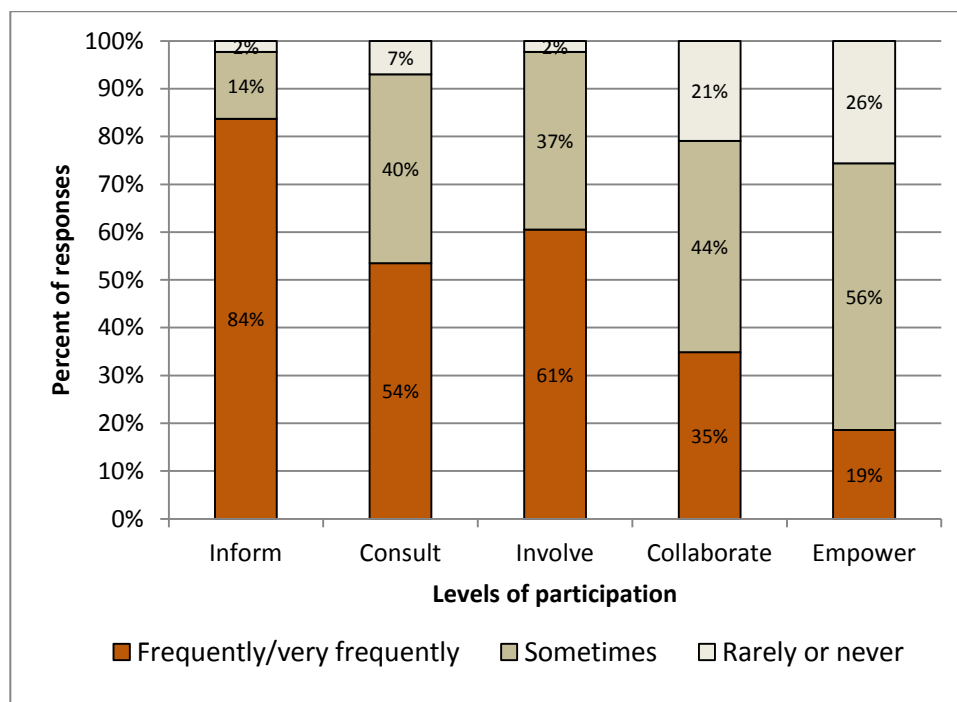
Almost all of the RRI local governments that responded (98%) indicated that they provide information to members of their communities at least sometimes with the vast majority (84%) undertaking this level of engagement frequently or very frequently. Similar proportions of councils reported consulting (93%) and involving (98%) community members at least sometimes with between one-half and two-thirds stating that they consult (54%) and involve (61%) their communities frequently or very frequently. For the two higher levels of community engagement, approximately one-third collaborate and almost one-fifth empower their communities frequently or very frequently. A further 44% collaborate sometimes and 56% empower their communities sometimes. Furthermore, 91% of councils indicated that they at least sometimes engage their communities on matters and issues where community consultation is not a legislative requirement. Just over one-third of the councils (37%) undertake voluntary community consultation frequently or very frequently (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Frequency of rural-remote and Indigenous local government voluntary community engagement
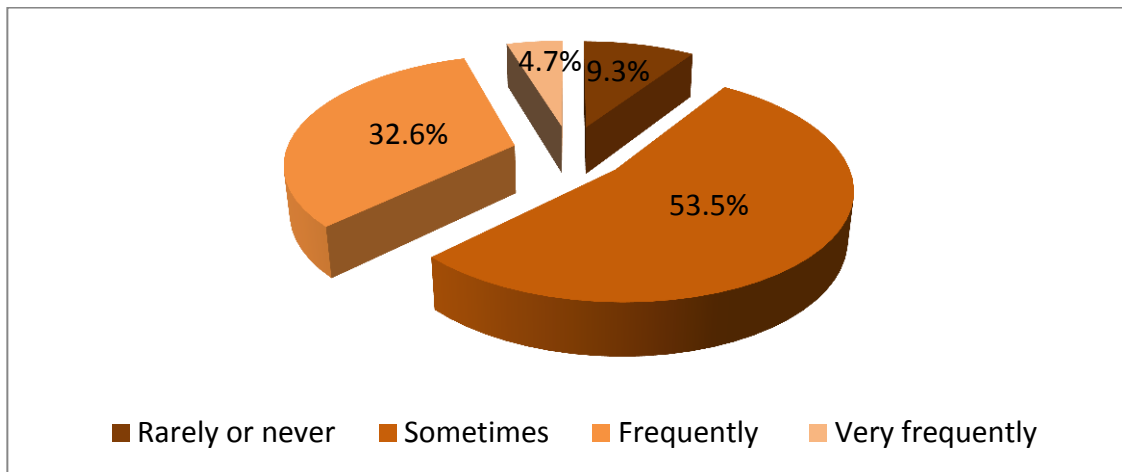
In considering the overall community engagement policies and practices of these local governments, it was found that:

- Councils with robust internal community engagement systems and processes in place undertake community engagement more frequently (r = .425 p = .004) but do not necessarily voluntarily engage their community on issues any more than councils with less robust systems in place (r = .274 p = .075).
- Councils that undertake more community engagement across all levels of the IPA2 spectrum voluntarily engage their communities much more frequently (r = .787 p < .001).

4.2   Challenges to community engagement

The second research question addressed by this study was 'what barriers and unique challenges do rural-remote and Indigenous councils face when trying to engage their communities?' This question was considered in the context of community engagement in general as well as the specific challenges to using social media as a communication and engagement tool. This section focuses on the challenges to community engagement in general. Challenges associated with using social media are addressed later in Section 4.6.2.

Community engagement challenges of rural-remote and Indigenous local government

A list of 26 potential challenges to community engagement was generated from the stakeholder interviews and the literature review conducted in the first two phases of this study. These challenges were then tested in the online survey across the 105 target RRI local governments to evaluate the extent to which these councils perceived them as unique community engagement challenges. The survey participants were also given the opportunity to identify any other challenges not included in this list. A factor analysis of the 26 items rated failed to reduce them into a smaller group of central themes. Thus, they are examined individually and categorised according to their degree of perceived challenge and their nature. A complete list of the challenges ranked in order of their average rating can be found in Table 7 in Appendix 6.

Overall, of the 26 challenges tested quantitatively:

- Four were rated as a major challenge by at least one-third of councils
- Nine were rated as a major challenge by at least one-quarter of councils
- Thirteen were rated as either a major or a moderate challenge by at least half of councils
- Twenty-two were rated as either a major or a moderate challenge by at least one-third of councils and
- Four were rated as either a minor or no challenge by more than three-quarters of councils.

The pursuing discussion outlines those factors that emerged as the greatest challenges to RRI local government community engagement. Other substantive challenges are then considered.

The top challenges to community engagement

The top challenges to community engagement are shown in Figure 4 in descending order of council ratings as major/moderate challenges. These were identified as the items with an average rating of at least 2.5 (the mid-point on the 4-point rating scale used where 4 = major challenge and 1 = not a challenge) and had at least 50% of the participating councils rating them as a major (4) or moderate (3) challenge. These top challenges to RRI local government community engagement appear to fall into three main types of constraints – internal council capacity, community capacity and other external factors. Half of the top 12 barriers identified related to internal council capacity issues. Each of these three groups of challenges is discussed below. The percentages reported in brackets refer to the proportion of survey participants rating the challenge as major (4) or moderate (3).

Figure 4: **Top challenges to rural-remote and Indigenous local government community engagement**

Challenge	Major/moderate challenge	Minor/no challenge
Appropriate internal support systems	79%	22%
Community resistance	79%	21%
Financial cost	76%	24%
Adequately skilled staff	76%	24%
Community participation fatigue	71%	29%
Competing council priorities	69%	31%
Community understanding council role	67%	33%
Fear raising community expectations	57%	43%
Technology/telecommunications	55%	45%
Engaging 'hard to reach' groups	55%	45%
Community literacy skills	52%	48%
Distance/remoteness	50%	50%

Internal capacity constraints

The main internal capacity issues challenging RRI local government engagement with their communities principally related to internal support systems and resourcing constraints. Specifically, these local governments considered that their internal support systems were inadequate to effectively support community engagement activities (79%), that the staff were either not available or inadequately knowledgeable and/or skilled to undertake this activity (76%) and that the financial resources available for this activity are insufficient (76%).

The challenge of internal support systems relates to having in place appropriate processes, procedures and mechanisms to support the conduct of community engagement. This includes information systems with a capability of capturing community engagement data particularly that relating to community, enquiries, complaints and requests. This challenge was found to be significantly positively correlated (p < .05) with all but five of the other 25 challenges rated in the survey. It was very strongly correlated with the challenge of having adequately skilled staff (r = .764), quite strongly correlated (.5 < r > .7) with two other top internal capacity constraints – fear of raising community expectations and competing Council priorities - and moderately correlated (.367 < r > .427) with the top community and external capacity constraints except distance and remoteness with which it had no significant correlation (see Appendix 6).

In relation to staff knowledge and skill, there was a view that staff particularly lacked knowhow on 'how' to engage their communities (55%). This notion was further supported by the relatively high percentage of local governments that also identified staff resistance or lack confidence in trying new or less conventional community engagement methods (45%) as another substantive barrier although to a lesser extent (see Figure 4). A fear by council of raising community expectations was a further major internal capacity challenge (see Table 7).

Table 7: Major internal capacity challenges to rural-remote and Indigenous local government community engagement

Challenges to community engagement (n = 42)	Percentage rated as a major/moderate challenge (Rated 3 or 4)	Mean rating	Standard deviation	Rank order by mean
Having appropriate support systems available inside the Council to do this work	78.5%	3.07	.84	1
Cost – not enough funds available for this work	76.2%	3.05	.96	2
Adequately skilled staff to do this work	76.2%	3.02	.95	3
Competing Council priorities	69.1%	2.95	.83	6
Fear of raising community expectations	57.2%	2.79	.90	8
Level of knowledge or understanding of different ways to engage the community especially hard to engage members	54.8%	2.64	1.01	11

Community capacity constraints

Four key factors were considered to pose significant community capacity constraints to council engagement with their communities. The two most important challenges related to participation fatigue from over-consultation and community resistance to participation as a product of apathy, scepticism and/or cynicism (see Figure 4 above and Table 8 below). These community capacity challenges were moderately (.3 < r > .5) to weakly (r < .3) correlated with the strongest correlations being between participation fatigue and literacy skills (r = .446) and community resistance and community understanding of Council's role (r = .404).

Table 8: Major community capacity challenges to rural-remote and Indigenous local government community engagement

Challenges to community engagement (n = 42)	Percentage rated as a major/moderate challenge (Rated 3 or 4)	Mean rating	Standard deviation	Rank order by mean
Participation fatigue – some community groups (e.g. Aboriginal groups) over consulted	71.4%	3.02	.95	4
Community resistance – disinterest, scepticism or cynicism	78.6%	3.00	.86	5
Community understanding of Council's role – the purpose and limits of engagement	66.7%	2.81	.92	7
Literacy skills of some parts of the community	52.4%	2.76	.82	9

Qualitative feedback from councils suggested that the two major community capacity challenges of participation fatigue and community resistance were especially problematic when trying to engage with remote Indigenous communities, as captured by the following comments:

'The biggest problem is that there are too many state and federal agencies constantly endeavouring to consult with our communities, seldom with any interagency coordination and often at cross-purposes. Most often the community sees no outcome from the discussions and so when we turn up there is often a sceptical element who see us as just another bunch of white fellas who want to take up their time and will deliver nothing.'

'There is a community perception that consultation is a token expectation due to State and Commonwealth government interventions and decrees. [There is a] feeling of disempowerment and that true results of community consultation will not be fed back to agencies as the results would not reflect what the government wants. In essence [it is] a waste of time.'

'In the 26 COAG sites the Australian government has 'intervened' and under the Local Implementation Plan requirement there is over-bearing and persistent consultation about everything.' This participant goes on to suggest that there is a need to understand 'the political framework in these sites and the complex arrangements in place where remote service delivery is through multiple channels and not just council.

A lack of understanding by community members of the purpose and limitations of community engagement by local government was also seen as a significant challenge. Furthermore, and perhaps not surprisingly, a low level of literacy amongst at least some sectors of the community was identified as a major issue. This was seen to greatly limit the ability of councils to rely on traditional forms of engagement.

Other external factors
From a logistical perspective technology/telecommunications along with the distance/remoteness of some communities were rated as major challenges (see Figure 4 above and Table 9 below). These two external constraints, however, were not found to be significantly correlated (r = .162).

Table 9: Major external challenges to rural-remote and Indigenous local government community engagement

Challenges to community engagement (n = 42)	Percentage rated as a major/moderate challenge (Rated 3 or 4)	Mean rating	Standard deviation	Rank order by mean
Technology and telecommunications available for doing this work in remote communities	54.8%	2.71	.97	10
Distance or remoteness of some communities	50.0%	2.57	1.13	12

Other substantive challenges
Figure 5 summarises the responses to other factors identified as substantive challenges by RRI local government but to a lesser degree than those identified as the top challenges. These issues were rated as major (4) or moderate (3) challenges by between one-third and one-half of councils participating in the online survey and had an average rating below 2.5.

Figure 5: **Other substantive challenges to RRI local government community engagement**
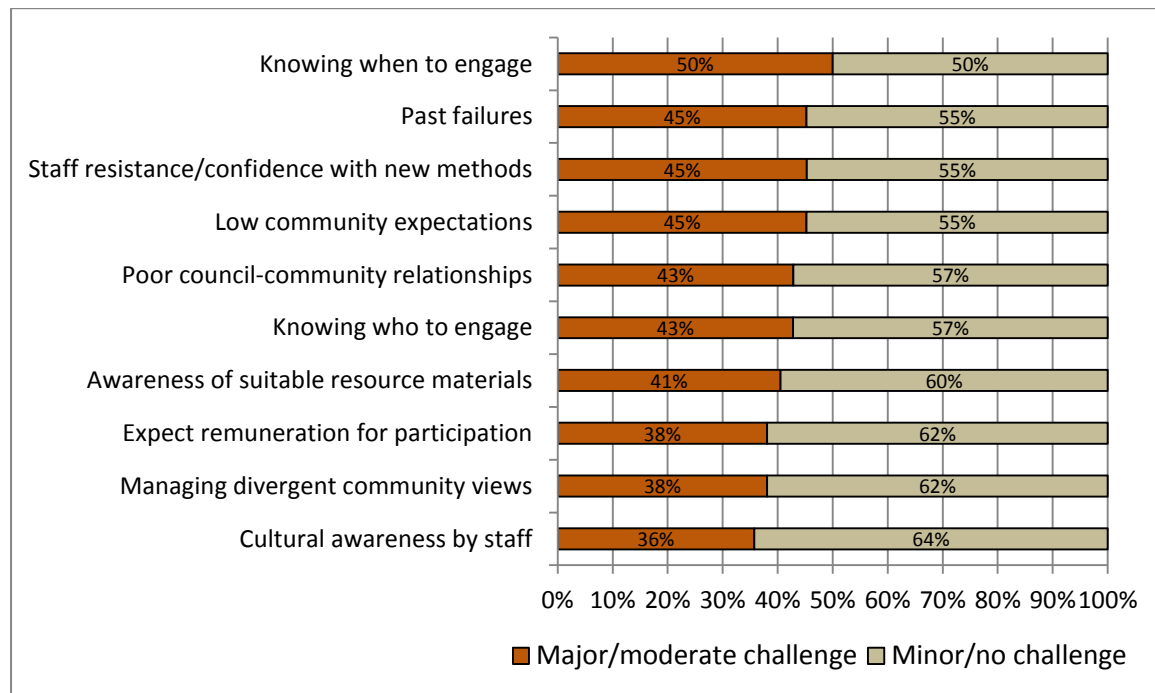
All but three of these secondary substantive challenges related to internal council capacity issues. The exceptions were 'low community expectations for council to engage' (45%), 'poor council-community relationships' (43%) and 'an expectation of remuneration for participation' (38%). Most of the internal council capacity challenges were associated with the adequacy of staff skill and knowhow in community engagement processes. This issue is discussed in more detail in Section 4.5 of this report. Other key factors related to staff being reluctant or unconfident about trying new methods (45%), inadequate cultural awareness and understanding by staff (36%), concerns about managing divergent community views (38%) and having experienced past failures (45%).

As might be expected the array of community engagement challenges in RRI communities were generally found to be interrelated. Not only were several of the top internal, community and external capacity constraints found to be moderately to strongly correlated with each other, but so were many of the secondary capacity challenges. In addition, there were moderate to strong correlations between many of the secondary substantive internal challenges and the major internal capacity issues previously identified, especially 'having appropriate support systems available inside council', 'adequately skilled staff to undertake community engagement', 'understanding how to engage with the community especially hard to engage members' and 'fear of raising community expectations' (see Appendix 6).

Interestingly, there were four factors perceived as being only a minor challenge or no challenge to community engagement by more than three-quarters of councils. These were:

- Language barriers (76%)
- Community engagement not viewed as 'core business' by elected members (76%) or the senior management team (83%) and
- Having no legislative compulsion to engage with the community (90%).

When given the opportunity to identify other major challenges to community engagement, most participants simply elaborated on barriers already included in the list provided, especially challenges relating to community apathy, resourcing issues, and the logistical issues of remoteness, distance and isolation.

These findings suggest that generally RRI local governments recognise the central role of community engagement in supporting council to effectively perform its role and that even though their communities are culturally diverse, many of them have developed an awareness of and are at least attempting to accommodate these cultural differences in undertaking their community engagement activities. It must be recognised, however, that this comment is based only on local government perceptions and has not been tested from the community perspective. Nonetheless, the bottom line is that it appears that this cohort of councils are making positive efforts to engage with their communities but generally acknowledge that there are key challenges faced, most of which are internal capacity constraints, that need to be addressed if their community engagement practices and effectiveness are to be improved.

4.3   Rural-remote and Indigenous local government approaches to community engagement – the good, the bad, the ugly

A third research question addressed by this study related to 'what community engagement strategies and methodologies do rural-remote and Indigenous local governments find effective?' To explore this issue, participants were asked in the online survey to provide examples of community engagement that their local government had used that had either worked well or had not worked at all well. Furthermore, they were asked to self-nominate their interest in providing more information about their community engagement experiences by way of a telephone interview which could form the basis of a brief case study to be shared with other RRI local governments. Six organisations were selected from this self-nominated group to develop a small set of case examples to provide some insight to the community engagement approaches of a selection of RRI local governments. The successful and unsuccessful experiences of the local governments that participated in the survey, together with the case studies presented later in this report (see Section 5.0), provide a range of perspectives on what works and what doesn't as well as a possible benchmark for helping other RRI local governments to consider ways that they may benefit from extending or modifying their current approach.

Successful community engagement experiences

Just over half (58%) of the councils responding to the survey provided some brief examples of engagement techniques or tools that work well for them. Overall, however, there was a clear message from several participants that effective community engagement usually requires using a variety of methods for different groups and different situations, and that what may work well for one group or situation may not work well for others. The key thing is a preparedness to try different approaches and to be flexible enough to make adjustments during the engagement process when it is clear that something is not attaining the desired information, level of community participation and/or outcomes.

Although a number of participants stated that they 'generally use standard means like Council's Community Newsletter and public meetings with a mixed response' or considered that they are 'not doing anything special that puts them above the rest', several respondents offered examples where

they believed that conventional methods were working well while others reported successfully using less traditional innovative approaches that produced good outcomes. One respondent, for example, commented:

> 'We have successfully used the Zing meeting facilitation system which our community has really taken to because it soothes the dominant voices and gives everyone an opportunity to express their views.'

Also, when it came to engaging Indigenous communities it was clear that cultural awareness, understanding and sensitivity is crucial. There was a strong consensus amongst councils with an Indigenous population that informal methods and techniques that employ verbal and/or visual pictorial communication tools work best. Furthermore, developing a relationship over an extended period of time that is based on mutual respect and trust is central to effective engagement with Aboriginal people. In talking about engaging with Aboriginal people one participant stated:

> 'One of the keys is to follow the Aboriginal hierarchy of decision making and engage the Elders and if the community doesn't follow them as they once would have show respect for the lost cultural ways and still honour them. Then discuss with the influential Aboriginal people in the community to get their buy-in.'

It was also pointed out that 'Aboriginal people like to make decisions as a community and this process needs to be honoured to get the best outcome.'

A content analysis of the successful engagement examples provided revealed six main themes. These were:

- Information dissemination mechanisms
- Engagement environment
- Community leaders/champions
- External assistance
- Non-traditional innovative approaches
- Engaging Indigenous people

Table 10 summarises the examples given under each theme.

Table 10:   Community engagement approaches that have worked well

Theme	Examples
Information dissemination mechanisms	▪ Informal face-to-face meetings ▪ Council Newsletters – colourful and feature local people ▪ Local radio station ▪ Local newspaper ▪ Notices on noticeboards or laminated posters in strategic locations frequented by target audiences
Engagement environment	▪ Put on food and drink at community meetings (sausage sizzle in the main street on pay day, BBQ at the Sport & Recreation Centre) ▪ Meetings at places that people frequent, have easy access and feel comfortable ▪ Make the engagement process fun and interesting for participants
Community leaders/ champions	▪ Consult with special interest groups or smaller target groups on specific issues ▪ Identify and engage with community leaders and champions ▪ Key champions on staff and in the community having casual conversations with community members about a project ▪ Use properly resourced local boards/advisory groups ▪ Partnering with other key stakeholders like the local school
External assistance	▪ Buy in appropriate skill and expertise ▪ Use external consultants/facilitators with an understanding of local circumstances to portray independence and drive the process
Non-traditional innovative approaches	▪ A graffiti wall - conversation starters written on a blackboard at the local supermarket ▪ Ran a charette with a variety of workshops held over a week – day and evening ▪ Disposable cameras used to engage with community members with low literacy and numeracy skills – visual evidence combined with other consultative processes ▪ Use of interactive technologies like 'Zing' (an interactive, collaborative, portable meeting system) and 'Qwizdom' for youth engagement (an interactive voting technology that captures instant honest feedback) ▪ Dialogue cafes
Engaging Indigenous people	▪ Face-to-face discussions sitting 'under a tree' or 'in the dust' ▪ Local Indigenous radio station – very effective in getting information out with local people reading out council Minutes or decisions ▪ Ask community leaders how people want to be engaged ▪ Let people engage in the process 'in their time and comfort zone' ▪ Provide detailed maps/drawings or pictogram type resources well ahead of the consultation event – give people time and space to absorb and process the information and their ideas ▪ Evening community 'get-togethers' ▪ Ensure a positive outcome from every discussion and deliver on each and every undertaking made to avoid losing credibility and community disengagement ▪ Having the Shire President whose presence is well received accompany staff ▪ Monthly Aboriginal community forums where participants choose discussion topics

Unsuccessful community engagement experiences

Slightly less than half (44%) of the councils responding to the online survey provided examples of community engagement that had not work at all well for them. In most instances the participants simply cited particular techniques or tools that they have found ineffective but in some cases they outlined a particular experience or situation where efforts to engage the community had failed or created issues.

A content analysis of the unsuccessful engagement examples provided revealed four main themes. These related to:

- Engagement tools
- Tokenism
- Planning and preparation
- Over-consultation

Table 11 summarises the examples given under each theme.

In addition to these key themes, one council noted a problem created by high staff turnover. According to this person, this resulted in 'new faces visiting them [Aboriginal communities] creating confusion and suspicion'. This respondent also reflected on the level of indifference and anger that had come from communities when there were insufficient funds to do work in the communities.

Table 11:   Community engagement approaches that have not worked well

Theme	Examples
Engagement tools	▪ Public forums (unless a controversial or high interest issue) ▪ Public attendance at council meetings ▪ Paper surveys (except for the elderly) and other traditional format surveys ▪ Posters and pamphlets ▪ Business reference group ▪ Aboriginal Affairs committee ▪ DVDs and CDs to be played at home ▪ Websites
Tokenism	▪ Where CEO and/or Council members have failed to attend community meetings or make genuine efforts to gain public participation ▪ When there has been a 'tokenistic partnership' formed by an external organisation/agency resulting in a one sided engagement agenda ▪ Where a history of no perceived outcomes from prior consultation processes generated community resistance and scrutiny that undermined a subsequent engagement process ▪ Traditional Owners take exception to external organisations securing funding for projects requiring community consultation without their (or council's) knowledge resulting in serious failures in the consultation process and long term ill feeling and angst in the community which have major ramifications for future council efforts to engage its Indigenous community

Planning and preparation	▪ Being ill-prepared for community consultation events
	▪ Failure to plan, not arriving on time and assuming that the community's networks will pass on information
	▪ Holding larger community meetings without an agenda and a good chairperson
	▪ The timing of community engagement is not well planned or inappropriate, for example:
	  o Just before or after council elections
	  o Busy farming/pastoralist seasonal times
	  o When this clashes with Native Title or other relevant cultural business meeting dates
	  o Consultation events during working hours

Overconsultation	▪ Community suffering survey (consultation) fatigue when different entities (e.g. resources sector, state and federal agencies, council) constantly endeavour to consult with no coordination or at cross-purposes

4.4   Gaps in community engagement resources and knowledge

A fourth research question addressed by this study was 'what gaps are there in the knowledge and resources required to improve community engagement by rural-remote and Indigenous councils?' This issue was investigated in both the key stakeholder interviews and in the online council survey.

The general consensus amongst representatives of key stakeholder organisations interviewed was that ample material resources in the way of practical community engagement guides and 'how to'

handbooks already exist. Several general community engagement material resources were noted in recent reports prepared for ACELG on local government and community engagement in Australia (Herriman and Pillora, 2011 UTS Institute of Sustainable Futures, August 2011). In addition, a number of resources relating to engaging with Indigenous communities were discussed in the literature review undertaken as part of this study. Many of these material resources are readily available and easily accessible to council personnel interested in developing their knowledge of how to plan, implement and evaluate community engagement activities. Amongst the most well recognised material guides and handbooks cited by stakeholders interviewed for this study were:

- The *'Community Engagement Handbook'* developed by the LGASA and the SA government (Heylan and Chappell, 2008) available at http://www.lga.sa.gov.au
- The *'Engaging Queenslanders'* series of guides developed by the Queensland Government Department of Communities (http:///www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au/) which includes online resources on engaging with rural and regional communities and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities and
- Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) *Consultation and Engagement* website that provides extensive resource material online (http://www.vlga.org.au/Resources/Consultation_and_Engagement.aspx)

With the ready availability of these types of material resources established through the stakeholder interviews and prior works, the online survey focussed on determining the:

- Extent that the level of knowledge and understanding of community engagement is perceived as a challenge and
- Extent that awareness of where suitable community engagement resources can be accessed is perceived as a challenge.

The survey results revealed the following key findings:

Awareness of community engagement resources

Awareness of where to access suitable resources to help council personnel plan and implement community engagement activities was a major challenge for nearly one-fifth of councils (16.7%), a moderate challenge for nearly another one-quarter of councils (23.8%) and a minor challenge for nearly one-half of councils (47.6%). Only slightly more than one-tenth of councils (11.9%) considered this not to be a challenge they faced. These results suggest that there is some need to build awareness amongst RRI local government of the material resources available and where they can be accessed, especially those most relevant to engaging RRI communities. To help build this awareness website links to useful material resources could be incorporated as a feature of a sector wide interactive online community engagement portal for RRI local government that can be promoted to the sector. The notion of having an interactive online community engagement portal was one support option tested in the survey and will be examined further in the next section of this report.

Gaps in community engagement knowledge

As noted earlier in Section 4.2 on challenges to RRI local government community engagement, the availability of adequately skilled staff to undertake these activities was seen as a major challenge for more than one-third of councils (35.7%) and a moderate challenge for four in ten councils (40.5%).

Only about one-tenth of councils (9.5%) did not consider this to be an issue. Based on participant ratings of what were seen as key challenges to undertaking community engagement, the main gaps in staff knowledge and understanding appear to be in the following areas:

- **How to engage** - There is a perceived need for council staff to develop their knowledge of different ways of engaging with their community especially with those members who are traditionally 'hard to engage'. Just over half of the respondents (54.8%) viewed this as a major challenge (23.8%) or a moderate challenge (31%). Only 14% indicated that this does not pose a challenge to their council.

- **When to engage** – Knowing and understanding when council should engage with the community was a second key gap in staff knowledge. Half of the council respondents identified this as a major challenge (7.1%) or a moderate challenge (42.9%). Less than one-fifth of the responding councils (16.7%) did not consider this to be a challenge for their organisation.

- **Who to engage** – Knowing who council should engage with was a further knowledge gap identified by just under half of the councils (43.8%) responding to the survey with nearly one-tenth (7.1%) considering this as a major challenge and just over one-third (35.7%) seeing it as a moderate challenge. Nearly one-third of the responding councils (31%), however, did not view identifying the key stakeholders with whom they need to engage as problematic.

- **Engaging diverse communities** – A final gap in staff knowledge identified by a substantive group of councils responding to the survey was a lack of cultural awareness or understanding which for engaging with RRI communities is particularly important. Although not many councils considered this to be a major challenge (2.4%), one-third of councils saw it as a moderate challenge and almost half (45.2%) felt it was a minor challenge. Less than one-fifth of councils (19%) did not consider this to be a challenge at all in undertaking community engagement.

Overall, these findings clearly indicate that RRI local government recognises that there are some substantive community engagement knowledge gaps amongst their staff and that this is an area in which support is needed to help them improve their community engagement practices. Key areas of support that the survey participants identified as potentially most useful in helping to redress the knowledge gaps of council staff is presented in the next section.

4.5   Support for improving rural-remote and Indigenous council community engagement

A final research question addressed by this study was 'what options are available for improving community engagement by rural-remote and indigenous local government (including consideration of community education on the roles and responsibilities of local government and councillors)?' To investigate this issue, the target local governments were asked in the online survey to rate the usefulness of 11 different options for improving their community engagement practices. These options were generated from an analysis of the stakeholder interviews. The participating councils were also given the opportunity of suggesting any other support or actions that they believed would assist them.

Figure 6 presents the responses to the 11 options rated. Each option was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = little or no use to 5 = very useful). Overall, all options were perceived to have substantial value in supporting this cohort of councils to improve their community engagement practices. Ten of the 11 options rated were considered as useful or very useful (i.e. rated 4 or 5) by more than half of the survey participants and nine of the 11 options had an overall average rating above 3.5. The mentoring program option received the lowest overall rating but was still perceived as useful/very useful by only slightly less than half the respondents (47%). This option, together with training on building relationships with Indigenous communities, however received average ratings above the mid-point level of three (3.29 and 3.39 respectively).

Figure 6: **Usefulness of options for improving rural-remote and Indigenous local government community engagement practices**
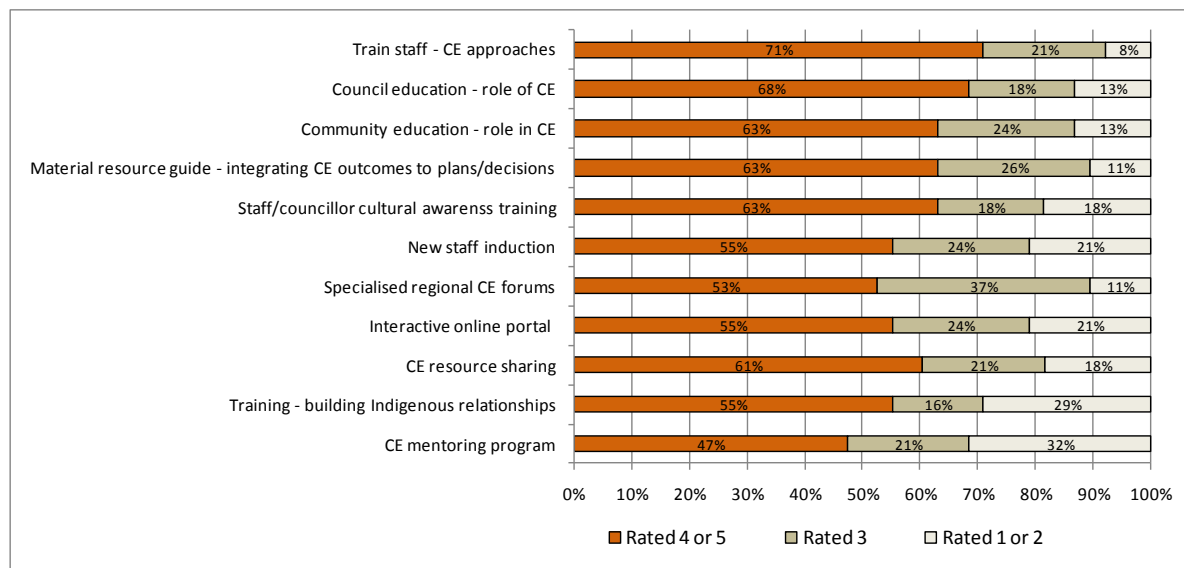
Note: Rating scale – 1 = little or no use to 5 = very useful

Although these 11 support options did not cleanly factor analyse, three groupings of options were evident. These related to:

- Council and community education
- Internal community engagement skill development and
- Engaging culturally diverse groups.

Council and community education
Three of the top five most useful options identified related to supports that would assist councils to build council and community understanding of the role of community engagement (see Table 12). There was a strongly held view that the community engagement practices of this cohort of councils could be greatly assisted through the development and implementation of an education program that not only educates the community on their role in this process but also educates council members on the role of community engagement in good governance and decision-making. The usefulness of a material guide on how to integrate community engagement outcomes into council planning and decision-making also rated highly.

Table 12:   Support options for rural-remote and Indigenous council and community education

Usefulness of options for improving community engagement practices (n = 38)	Percentage rated as useful/very useful (4 or 5)	Average rating	Standard deviation	Rank order
Community education program on their role in community engagement (including what councils should consult them about and the role of local boards or advisory groups)	63.1%	3.79	1.166	2
An education program on the role of community engagement in good governance and council decision-making	68.4%	3.76	1.173	3
A material resource guide on how to integrate community engagement outcomes in council planning and decision-making	63.2%	3.68	1.118	4

Internal community engagement skill development

Secondly, this group of participants considered that developing staff knowledge and skill in community engagement approaches supported by a 'community of practice network in RRI local government community engagement' would be most useful. The key elements of this support option are listed in Table 13.

Table 13:   Support options for developing internal rural-remote and Indigenous local government community engagement skill

Usefulness of options for improving community engagement practices (n = 38)	Percentage rated as useful/very useful (4 or 5)	Average rating	Standard deviation	Rank order
Staff training and development on different community engagement approaches	71.0%	4.03	1.052	1
Induction of new staff on community engagement, cultural awareness and communication	55.2%	3.66	1.279	6
Specialised rural-remote ad Indigenous council regional forums for sharing community engagement issues and practice	52.6%	3.66	1.047	7
A sector wide interactive online portal for rural-remote and Indigenous councils to share community engagement ideas, experiences and issues	55.2%	3.55	1.201	8
Identifying opportunities for resource sharing by groups of Councils to do community engagement work	60.5%	3.53	1.156	9
A mentoring program between rural-remote and Indigenous councils and larger experienced councils with effective community engagement practices	47.4%	3.29	1.334	11

Training in community engagement approaches is needed for both existing and new staff. This type of support is likely to assist in addressing the challenges noted earlier around the adequacy of staff knowledge and skill in community engagement and their reluctance or lack of confidence in trying new and less conventional engagement methods. The most valued aspects

for developing a 'community of practice network' were specialised regional forums (53%), an interactive online portal through which council staff could post questions and exchange ideas and experiences (55%), and identifying opportunities for sharing community engagement resources between groups of councils (61%). Although the notion of a mentoring program was not as strongly supported by the respondents this may have been affected by the suggestion that the mentoring would be provided by larger experienced councils with effective community engagement practices. One respondent noted in the qualitative feedback provided that he would have rated this option more highly if the mentoring was to be provided by another similar sized local government facing similar circumstances rather than by a larger council.

Engaging culturally diverse groups

The third broad type of support for improving community engagement practices that was seen as valuable related to developing council capacity for engaging culturally diverse groups, especially Indigenous communities. Although cultural awareness by staff was not identified as one of the top ranking challenges to community engagement by the participating councils, training of elected members and staff in cultural awareness (63%) and building relationship with Indigenous communities (55%) were still considered useful supports for helping these councils improve their community engagement practices (see Table 14).

Table 14:   Support options improving rural-remote and Indigenous council cultural relations

Usefulness of options for improving community engagement practices (n = 38)	Percentage rated as useful/very useful (4 or 5)	Average rating	Standard deviation	Rank order
Cultural awareness training of elected members and staff	63.1%	3.68	1.317	5
Training on building relationships with Indigenous communities	55.2%	3.39	1.443	10

In response to the opportunity to suggest additional support options, about one-quarter of the survey participants provided some feedback. The following ideas were offered as other potential supports:

- Guidance on cost effective ways of using the media to engage the community
- Create an Outback Region portal website
- Develop a facilitated and funded Remote Council Local Government Association within ALGA
- Work with Indigenous communities – Aboriginal hierarchy, community leaders, family groups - to help identify engagement methods that their members will embrace
- More equitable access to 21st century technology
- Improve the understanding by other tiers of government of the cost and unique issues associated with RRI local governments undertaking community engagement to gain better support for more adequate funding and realistic timeframes for these activities within remote area communities and
- Improved coordination of consultation processes across levels of government and government agencies.

In regard to the last suggestion, one participant proposed that a 'Coordinator General or some such position in the State public sector that directly oversees and makes accountable the executive functions of government agencies needs to be established [since there is a] lack of coordinated project management for a single solution across agencies'.

In summary, the broad support options discussed above have the capability of helping to address several of the major challenges previously identified (see section 4.2). Table 15 summarises the likely linkages between the support options and the main challenges. It should be noted that several of the challenges can be at least partially addressed through a combination of these support options.

Table 15: **Linkages between the support options and key rural-remote and Indigenous local government community engagement challenges**

Support options	Challenges addressed
Council and community education	▪ Community understanding of council's role – the purpose and limits of engagement ▪ Low community expectations for council to engage ▪ An expectation of remuneration by community members for their involvement ▪ Council concern about managing divergent community views ▪ Having appropriate support systems available inside the council to do this work ▪ Competing council priorities ▪ Poor council-community relationships especially with Aboriginal communities
Internal community engagement skill development	▪ Adequately skilled staff to do this work ▪ Level of knowledge or understanding of different ways to engage the community especially hard to engage members ▪ Level of knowledge or understanding of when council should engage the community ▪ Level of Knowledge and understanding of who council should engage ▪ Staff resistance or lack of confidence in trying new and less conventional engagement methods ▪ Awareness of where to access suitable material resources to help plan and implement community engagement activities ▪ Fear of raising expectations ▪ Council concern about managing diverse community views ▪ Past community engagement failures ▪ Community resistance – disinterest, scepticism or cynicism ▪ Literacy skills of some parts of the community ▪ Poor council-community relationships especially with Aboriginal communities
Engaging culturally diverse groups	▪ Cultural awareness or understanding by staff ▪ Poor council-community relationships especially with Aboriginal communities ▪ Community resistance – disinterest, scepticism or cynicism

4.6   Community engagement – related issues

Integrated planning and social media are two special issues closely related to community engagement and of particular interest in the current local government sector environment. Thus to gain some preliminary insight to the use of these practices in RRI local government, data related to

these issues was gathered as part of the online community engagement survey. The findings relating to these issues are presented below.

4.6.1   Integrated planning and community engagement

In the ACELG 2011 capacity building strategy for RRI local government (Morris, 2011) a major capacity building challenge identified was the unsustainable level of demands and expectations placed on these councils. It is well recognised that a key role of local government is to determine the service delivery priorities of its community. To do this effectively, councils need to employ some type of integrated planning process, that is, a robust community, corporate and strategic planning process that links to long term financial planning. This planning approach can help councils make more informed decisions about what scale and scope of services to deliver. An integral part of an integrated planning process is community engagement whereby community members are given opportunities to help determine the strategic direction of their community and to have input to Council decision making about their future. Thus, the issue of integrated planning by RRI local government was investigated as an adjunct to this community engagement study. To gauge the robustness and the level of maturity of this planning process within RRI local government, three key issues were investigated, namely:

- Whether an integrated planning approach is used
- The level of understanding of how an integrated planning approach can assist councils and
- The perceived need for integrated planning tools and frameworks tailored to the circumstances of RRI local governments.

To ensure that all of the survey respondents had a common understanding of what an integrated planning approach means, this term was explained prior to asking them to respond to the questions on this issue.

In response to the use of an integrated planning approach , just over one-quarter of the target local governments (26%) indicated that they have been using this approach for some time, almost another six in ten councils (58%) stated that they had just started using it and about 16% stated they were not yet using this approach (see Figure 7).

Figure 7:   Rural-remote and Indigenous council use of an integrated planning approach
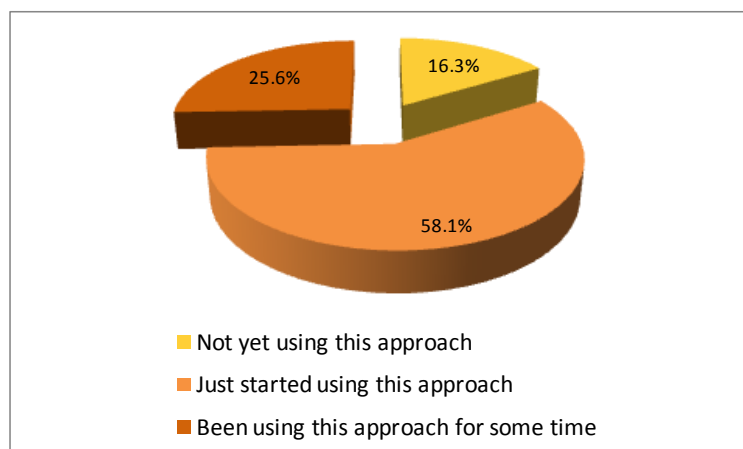
The relatively high level of use of integrated planning most likely reflects the fact that in all jurisdictions covered by this study local government already is or will soon be required by legislation to use an integrated planning approach to plan for the future to meet the aspirations and needs of their community in a sustainable way. Nonetheless, given that about three-quarters of these RRI councils are either not yet using or have just started using this planning process, they are likely to be still developing a sound understanding of how best to undertake this process and how it can assist their council. This was clearly reflected in their survey responses.

Understanding of benefits of an integrated planning approach

Figure 8 summarises the council responses to how well they understand the benefits of integrated planning in some key areas. Overall, less than half the councils considered that they had a good/very good understanding (4 or 5 rating) of how using an integrated planning approach can help their council understand community needs and aspirations (49%), assess the full cost of delivering different levels of services (39%), choose what mix of services to deliver (37%) and manage the expectations of the community (42%) and other tiers of government (30%). These findings point to the need for an educative program for councils on the scope of the benefits of integrated planning and how this process can be used to achieve these outcomes.

Figure 8:   Rural-remote and Indigenous local government understanding of the benefits of integrated planning
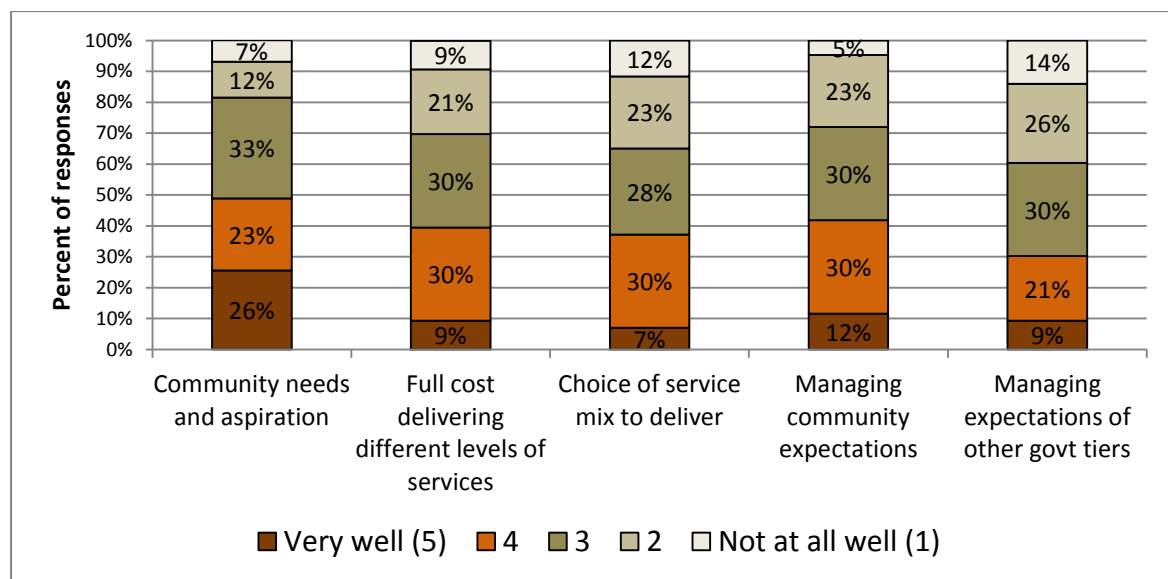
Need for tailored integrated planning tools or frameworks

When asked whether there was a need for some practical integrated planning tools and frameworks tailored to the circumstances of RRI local government, four in ten councils provided a definitive 'yes' response while almost another one-third (32.6%) indicated that these resources do not exist but may be helpful. Just over one-quarter believed that these were not required as they already existed (see Figure 9). This response is consistent with the high value given by the survey participants in having a material resource guide on how to integrate community engagement outcomes in council planning and decision-making as reported in Section 4.5 of this report.

Figure 9: **Rural-remote and Indigenous local government need for tailored integrated planning tools and frameworks**
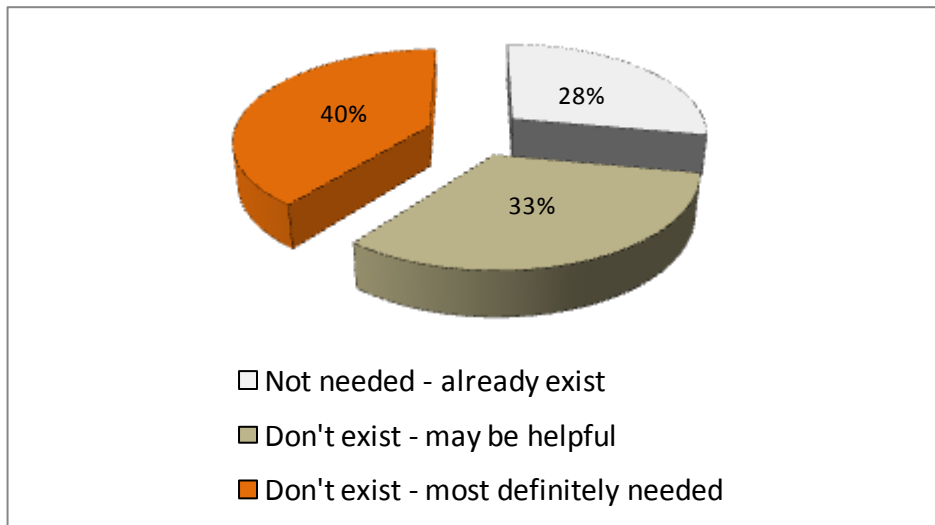
4.6.2   Social media – an emerging communication and engagement tool

With social media being an emerging communication and community engagement technique especially for reaching some demographic groups who do not normally engage with local government, the use of this medium was explored as a further adjunct of this study and to help inform another study undertaken for ACELG (Howard and Howard, publication pending).

As might be anticipated, the overall uptake of social media by RRI local government was found to be very low. As can be seen in Figure 10, almost half of this cohort of councils was found to neither have a social media policy (47%) nor use of social media to communicate and engage with their constituents (49%). Less than one-third (30%) of these councils actually use social media and less than one-fifth (19%) have a social media policy. Interestingly, however, despite the challenges reported slightly more than one-third of these councils (35%) are considering or developing a social media policy and about one-fifth (21%) are now considering the use of social media.

Figure 10:   **Rural-remote and Indigenous local government use of social media**
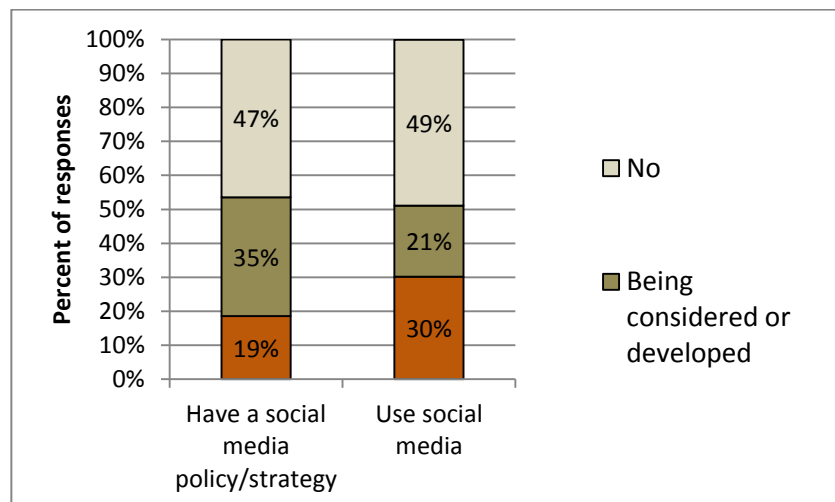
Forms of social media used

Amongst the 13 councils that indicated that they are using social media, the most common form in use is Facebook (85%). One council also reported using YouTube and another was using Twitter. Some councils (31%) stated that they were using their council website but did not specify exactly what form of social media on their website was being employed. Others referred to using email and a fortnightly electronic newsletter (each 8%).

Purpose of social media used

These councils used social media for various purposes but only a relatively small number appeared to be using it as an interactive communication medium. Rather, most respondents cited mainly using it for disseminating information (62%). Far fewer said they used social media to gain feedback from the community (31%), as a marketing/promotional tool (23%), as an extra communication channel (8%) and to target different demographic groups within the community (8%).

One council representative reported that their main aims in using this medium were to 'open dialogue with a different demographic' and 'to provide for ease of comment/feedback'. Another reported a variety of uses but expressed some disappointment with its take-up commenting that they use it:

> 'For information distribution, to counter arguments, for community events, for community engagement BUT only got 110 friends on Facebook ... sigh...'

Challenges to using social media in rural-remote and Indigenous communities

A number of issues were identified by the survey participants in relation to using social media as a communication and community engagement tool. The overwhelming challenge revealed by these RRI local governments was digital literacy and access (44%). Other challenges included resourcing issues (21%), abuse/misuse concerns (7%), population demographic (7%), other effective communication channels (7%), legislative constraints (5%), and security and governance concerns (each 2%).

- **Digital literacy and access** – access to adequate technology and telecommunications combined with households generally not owning or having access to personal computers or mobile phones were cited as major barriers to the use of social media. Although some councils noted that the situation has improved with the roll out of the 3G mobile phone broadband network, others had not seen and were not expecting any improvements in the near future. Low levels of literacy generally and digital literacy and fluency specifically, were seen to exacerbate these technological challenges. These issues were especially problematic in the more remote areas and Indigenous communities.

- **Resourcing** – the availability of adequate financial and human resources to develop, implement and maintain social media was a second major challenge identified. The cost and time taken for the expected returns was questioned by some councils. Others expressed difficulties with finding suitably qualified staff with the interest, time and skill to use social media, keep information up to date and to maintain these systems.

- **Abuse/misuse** – some councils cited the abuse or misuse of social media by either staff or the community as a genuine concern and challenge in trying to manage the use of this mode of communication and engagement. One survey participant stated that the perceived overuse of social media by staff in the workplace prompted the council to ban its use. It was noted, however, that this action came at a cost as it 'reduced the ability of council staff to interact with members of the community on a less formal basis, as well as making it harder to stay in touch with community opinion and to influence it.' Another participant expressed concerns about staff responding incorrectly or inappropriately through social media and the community using this medium to 'slander council'. It was also believed that the use of social media could generate and exacerbate community tensions. One participant cited an example where 'tensions are created within family and clan groups where inappropriate text messages are transmitted which ultimately result in serious disagreements and fights which can involve large numbers of people'. Another council expressed concern that 'towns may start to compare what happens in each (population, facilities and programs are different to meet different needs) but residents don't always appreciate/understand that and it could be easy for different towns to feel they are getting more/less than others'.

- **Population demographic** – some councils viewed the demographics of their population as the main challenge with social media being unsuited to the elderly and transient Aboriginal members. One participant suggested that 'whilst social media is considered to be the 'way of the future' council is not clear of the degree of engagement that would be gained by this means. With the demographics of the council area there are older members who do not embrace IT so social media would not 'pick them up''. Another council noted, however, that 'the demographics and recent surveys clearly indicate that approximately 75% of people would not and will not use this. However, with a median age about to change to a lower median age due to impending mining operations this will change'.

- **Other effective communication channels** – a small number of councils perceived that for their communities other channels of communication were more effective than social media. It was suggested that particularly in small communities Councillors gain extensive informal feedback on an ongoing basis through social gatherings, phone calls and when out in public on the streets and that this is seen by many elected members as adequate consultation. Other participants cited the local radio station and the Council Newsletter as the most reliable or effective mediums for keeping their Indigenous people who comprise the bulk of the population informed.

- **Legislative requirements** – a key reason for not using social media identified by one council related to the issue of being able to ensure the council's Record Keeping Policy was adhered to and the ability to retain records in accordance with the Local Government Act. Another participant with responsibility for the management and local governance of unincorporated areas in a jurisdiction stated that a substantive challenge faced in using social media to disseminate information in a timely manner was external controls with not being an independent local government entity.

- **Security** – concern about the security of social media systems was a further challenge identified by another participant.

▪ **Governance** – one governance issue raised by one council related to differing values and a lack of aligned positions between local government roles, Traditional Owner cultures and the prescribed body corporate. This situation was seen to create 'difficulties in achieving aligned communications and engagement around a bureaucratic structure especially in discussion with Indigenous Land Councils with Heritage and Native Title determinations'. The alignment of strategic directions and the capacity of these groups to engage communities were also raised as challenges.

4.7 ACELG's role in supporting rural-remote and Indigenous councils in community engagement

From the study findings presented in this report, a critical issue for ACELG is to determine what role it might play in supporting RRI local government to improve their community engagement practices. About two-thirds of the councils that participated in the online survey offered their thoughts on this matter. A number of participants simply stated that the survey was a good start to better understand the unique challenges of community engagement by RRI local government and to determine areas that need to be addressed. Others indicated that any assistance that ACELG can provide would be appreciated as this continues to be a huge challenge for them. It was also proposed that establishing the supports put forward in the survey formed a good starting point. Amongst those councils offering more specific suggestions, the following key themes emerged:

Resource development and training role – a key role identified for ACELG was to collaborate with peak local government entities like the Local Government Associations and Regional Organisations of Councils to support the design and development of community engagement resources such as templates of practical community engagement policies and strategies as well as training programs that would assist them in developing their internal community engagement capabilities. It was argued by some that providing 'on-site training' would be essential due to the prohibitive cost of travelling long distances to participate in training programs. Nonetheless, others suggested that appropriate training might be achieved by using video/ teleconferencing facilities. A further suggestion was for ACELG to collaborate with experienced local government practitioners to develop and market test community engagement models tailored for RRI local government. Although most of the respondents highlighted a specific community engagement resource development and training role for ACELG, one council argued that:

> 'The most effective role that ACELG could play would be to assist Councils in rural-remote areas in developing strategies to attract and retain high quality staff. This is the biggest barrier that we have to undertaking community engagement on a more effective basis. Part of that strategy could include increasing the capacity of local Indigenous communities to develop young leaders amongst their ranks who could either work for the local council in various roles or act in other leadership capacities in other organisations that councils engage with.'

Advocacy role – there were two discrete areas in which it was suggested that ACELG could undertake an advocacy role. One was the continued promotion of good practice in effective community engagement processes to RRI local governments by encouraging and supporting the sharing of information, knowledge and experiences and providing practical case study examples from which they could learn.

The second area involved 'communicating with State and Federal decision makers on the issues facing remote and isolated communities'. Here it was suggested that these communities are taken for granted by the sectors' urban and regional counterparts even though they are quick to capitalise on the wealth generated by these areas. It was also felt that ACELG could engage with State and Federal governments regarding the need for a 'whole of government approach' to planning in remote areas that includes engaging local governments and their remote communities as a central element.

Mentoring role – the notion of ACELG providing some type of a mentoring role in helping RRI local government improve their community engagement practices was another idea presented by several council representatives although the specific form that this might take was not made very clear.

Promoting Indigenous representation and participation – a final role suggested was for ACELG to encourage greater Indigenous participation in local government and to help Indigenous councils to understand, appreciate and develop their role as an elector organisation that advocates the particular interests of their communities.

Overall, while some participants proposed an active role for ACELG in the development of resources and training to support improved community engagement practices, most saw this being principally one of 'advocacy, facilitation and collaboration with peak bodies within the sector'.

5 Approaches to community engagement – case examples

Aurukun Shire Council, QLD

Photo Coutesy of Aurukun Shire Council

Aurukun Shire Council is located in Far North Queensland in the Western Region of Cape York and covers an area of 7,375 square kilometres. It is a discrete Indigenous community and one of the largest Indigenous Shires in Queensland. With an estimated resident population of 1,203 (ABS, March 2012), it is made up of five clan groups and 15 sub-groups. Originally an Aboriginal reserve administered by the Presbyterian Church as a mission, the Queensland government created the Shire of Aurukun under a leasehold arrangement in 1978. The community has high levels of unemployment and is high on the Social and Economic Information for Areas (SEIFA) list of disadvantaged communities.

Approach to community engagement

Undertaking community engagement with an Indigenous community has its challenges. These include low education and literacy levels, entrenched social norms and culturally different perceptions. The Council representative interviewed for this case study noted that:

> 'Until two years ago school attendance here in Aurukun was less than 50% and it had been like that for many years ... now we have got about 67% ... So how are you going to get your information over to a community where you know there is very low literacy in language and a very low education level?'

The Council has come to recognise that it needs to have a face-to-face approach and use the local language. 'Language is very strong in the community. The community uses its local language – it is dominant and for most people English is a second language, possibly a third.' So, even though Europeans attend community consultation meetings, 'the Mayor and Councillors encourage the use the local language to get messages across. In some cases they will use English but mostly they will use the local language. That's where we get the feedback'.

To add to the complexity of community engagement in Aurukun there are entrenched social norms. Some clan groups and family groups who live in distinctly different areas in town do not get on with one another. This presents difficulties for the Shire. For example, while social housing allocations are needs based within an Indigenous community sometimes needs based does not meet the community norm as people will not go into social housing if it is in the wrong area. 'Yet they are all residence within the same Shire and as such they have to be treated with the same consideration.'

Further to these factors, a cultural challenge that Aurukun Council has encountered in trying to engage its community is overcoming a community reluctance to tell council what they would like for

their community. A council representative noted that in the Shire's recent Community Plan consultation process there was a strong sense amongst many community members that 'Council looks after that – Council decides that'. Many people do not seem to recognise or understand the role they can or need to play in the council's decision-making processes. The CEO commented that it is hard 'getting people to realise that there are many things that Council cannot do without them indicating what they would like'.

In addition, about 18 months ago the Council tried to do a personal interview survey using local people speaking in local language. The surveyors found that people did not want to have what they said recorded. 'The general feeling was that they didn't want to have their name associated with things that were made even though it was completely anonymous in the feedback – it is a very small community and there was a concern that they could get blamed if it didn't work.' So Council responded by 'talking to people and trying to remember what they were saying overall'.

Overall, the Shire has discovered that a way around these issues 'is to use community engagement approaches that the community would like to see'. Importantly, it has learned that to actively engage its community it had to move right away from using a traditional Western format of consultation and employ a much more informal approach. This involves 'community meetings, functions, a bit of talk on the side, more of a social aspect than a formal process ... so when we go out to engage the community we speak with groups, discuss with individuals, have public meetings, get feedback and record what people are saying in those public meetings. There are smaller meetings as well with various groups and the information is fed back ... we don't bombard people with leaflets ... It appears to be working.'

The Council has found that in Aurukun 'it is difficult to put notices around the town ... they get removed ... but the verbal approach and circulating the word around town is quite effective.' The Shire admits that the message can sometimes get distorted but having a lot of informal conversations has helped people feel that if there is something they would like to put forward there is an opportunity to do that. 'What I've noticed in the last couple of years is that people tend to come forward now'.

Recently when Aurukun Council confronted difficulties in trying to progress its Community Plan it tried out a new community consultation technique. The Community Plan consultation process first started in late 2009 before the arrival of the current CEO. An Aurukun Council representative explained that Council had engaged European consultants from Cairns and Townsville who tried using mainstream consultation methods - the 'Western approach' – 'lots of brochures handed out with a lot of it in English, big slides on overhead data projections, big drawings on notice boards and these sorts of wonderful things – but they just weren't getting people engaged. We had people out there talking and encouraging people to attend meetings but attracting people was extremely difficult. In the end no-one was turning up. We got some response but not the sort of feedback we were looking for'.

So in 2010 Council sat with the consultants and said 'How can we do this? How can we get people coming to us? An innovative approach suggested was to use disposable cameras. We had a camera marked 'these are the good things I like to see in Aurukun' and another camera marked 'these are the bad things or the things I don't like within Aurukun'. We handed cameras out to a range of age

groups even young teenagers. People didn't have to write huge tomes or fill in sheets – they just photographed things they liked and things they didn't like – and then we got those photographs in and we got the cameras developed. The photos showed what they liked and what they didn't. It gave us an idea of areas around town where people were dumping rubbish for example – they don't like it. The airport which is quite a nice entry into town – they do like it. It showed that they were looking for the town to be cleaner in some way. There were a lot of similarities between different age groups. Town cleanliness was right across the board and people felt safer as we have got TV cameras around the place and lighting. However youth were looking for more things to do. The aged and their carers were saying the aged care facility needs to be fixed up, we need easier crossings and we've got to do something with the drainage so the electric scooters in town can get around during heavy rains. We knew about these things but it was good to get feedback from the community pointing these things out and identifying them as priorities. From those cameras we got much greater community involvement and a lot of good information. I thought it was a bit innovative – a bit more expensive but it gave us the type of information that we were looking for'.

In addition to community meetings, as part of its community engagement approach Aurukun Shire has tried to broadcast on the local radio aiming for around four hours a day. During this time it provides information about what is or will be happening in the community. It finds this method quite effective in getting out short messages and is now looking at using it to broadcast Council information in language. Also, because nearly everyone in the community has a TV, the Shire has used its ability to break into the National Indigenous Television Network (NITV) to broadcast education and health videos and DVDs from government agencies to disseminate this information. This avenue of communication is about to be lost however, with digital television replacing the current analogue system.

Furthermore, the Council very recently extended its community engagement approach to include meetings with some key community groups including the justice group, the FRC, the APN and the Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) which represents the Traditional Owners as a group. 'We are cranking up these meetings on a regular basis so it increases our feedback ... Council has recently started meeting on a regular basis with the PBC and hearing what they have to say and getting Council's point across.'

Overall, some key things that Aurukun Council has found helps to improve engagement with its Indigenous community are:

▪ With low literacy and education levels a face-to-face informal verbal process works well.
▪ A very basic courtesy is to provide Aboriginal people with information that is in their own language.
▪ Be cognisant that all Aboriginal people are not the same – although they are Indigenous within our country they come from a range of cultures and backgrounds ... so they need to be looked at differently and approached in different ways ... that is critical.

We need to bear in mind that 'each community is different ... there are different dynamics and different norms' and perhaps most important 'I think for true community engagement - it is determined by how that community would like to engage with Council not by how Council would like to engage with the community ... There's this clash between the Western and the Indigenous

constructs – there will be for a long time until we start engaging with the community in the way it wants to be engaged … you really need to investigate the process of gathering the information first … and my experience in Indigenous communities is that doesn't happen … We are continually assessing how we can effectively engage.'

Barkly Shire Council, NT

Photo courtesy of Barkly Shire Council

Barkly Shire was one of the eight new local government entities established in 2008 under local government structural reform in NT. It stretches 620 kms from west to east and 570 kms from north to south covering an area of 323,514 km^2. There are about 8,210 people living in the area (ABS, March 2012). Tennant Creek, located about 1,000 kilometres south of Darwin and 500 kilometres north of Alice Springs, is the largest town with a population of 3,560. Elliott is the next largest and the Shire has another eight minor communities, seven family outstations and 49 pastoral stations and a number of mining operations and commercial properties. Barkly has a predominantly Indigenous and linguistically diverse population. There are 10 different languages used in the region with English being the third or fourth language for most Aboriginal people.

Approach to community engagement

When the region's smaller local governing bodies were dissolved and subsumed into the Barkly Shire, the Council was acutely aware that these communities felt disenfranchised presenting a real challenge to community engagement. In response, the Council has adopted a predominantly three-pronged approach. Firstly, it has tried to make Local Boards a central element in its community engagement strategy. Secondly, whenever possible it tries to employ local Indigenous people and involve Shire staff in engagement processes. Thirdly, it acknowledged that Council's community engagement is not very good so recently restructured its staffing to help improve this. These key strategies are supplemented with other conventional methods including Council committees, stakeholder forums, public meetings and media based communications that include a Council newsletter, local and Territory newspapers, community radio stations, Service centre noticeboards and the Council website.

Local Boards

Barkly Shire directed considerable effort into establishing and fostering Local Boards in each major community. Local Boards provide a voice on local issues and priorities enabling local communities to actively contribute to Council's planning and decision-making. It also has a policy that ensures senior staff and elected members attend Local Board meetings and report Council actions on Local Board recommendations back to them. Council also rotates its scheduled meetings between Tennant Creek and its larger communities. 'The idea was to try and give the local people the feeling that they did have a local forum or panel they could go to.'

The Shire acknowledges that so far only about half of its Local Boards (4 out of 7) function reasonably successfully. These Boards meet monthly, have a strong well respected local leader who is interested in what the local community thinks and have community members who view a local forum as important. Over time Council has developed confidence in its more successful Boards and

now comfortably refers local matters to them. For example, the Council recently referred funding received for swimming pools in two communities to Local Boards to canvass community views on matters relating to the facility such as its location and any restrictions they wanted put in place. The Council considers that with further strengthening, Local Boards could be a really effective community engagement mechanism.

Local employment and Shire staff involvement

According to Barkly's CEO, employing local Indigenous people and involving Shire staff in community participation activities fosters community engagement. However, the organisation must have flexible work practices that display a strong cultural understanding and appreciation, and ensure key employees have a cross-cultural understanding. While the CEO doesn't get around to the smaller communities as much as he would like, the Shire's Director of Community Services gets out at least once a week. Fortnightly teleconferences are also held with Departmental and Shire Service Managers living and working in the local communities to foster a greater sense of being part of the team and to provide Council with feedback on local issues across the Shire. The Shire Service Managers are also brought into Tenant Creek approximately every four months to allow them to discuss new policies and common problems, to network and to foster the feeling that they are 'not on their own'. In addition, Council brings the region's Night Patrol personnel together in Tennant Creek twice a year to discuss what they are doing, why they are doing it and the outcomes sought. This recognises the valuable contribution of the local night patrol personnel and helps to further build Council awareness of local issues.

Community liaison officer

About 12 months ago the Council decided to restructure its staffing to provide a dedicated Shire employee charged with working with all communities outside Tennant Creek. The CEO believes 'you need a catalyst' to foster good Boards and improve community engagement, commenting:

> 'I'd like to get a full-time community liaison person – an Aboriginal person in our case – who is able to go out and sit under the tree and have the time to talk to the old ladies and find out what it is that is troubling them – flesh out the issues and then be able to come back ... to raise those issues as a lever ... somebody to generate that enthusiasm ... and introduce the rationale for why we should have it.'

For cultural reasons, Barkly Shire sees the community liaison approach as potentially more effective because:

> '... the way I think is not necessarily the way an Aboriginal person would think. They don't have the same priorities ... when you are trying to engage them you are trying to engage them on our terms. That's not necessarily what they want. You need someone who has the level of understanding and the time. We rush in'.

Choosing the right type of person as a community liaison officer is critical.

'It comes down to getting the right person who understands the culture ... I wouldn't limit it to being an Indigenous person but it should be someone who has got a lot more than a basic understanding of the local situation – and someone who the community feels entirely comfortable with - and more importantly someone who isn't on another agenda. Somebody who can ... spend time developing the trust of the community ... We don't take the time to listen and develop that trust. Relationship

building is at the centre – we've got to go at their pace ... That to me is good engagement. Once you've got that it's easy.'

Although Barkly Shire is not quite at this point yet, this is what it is trying to move towards with the staff restructure. 'It is starting to work very well because [this person] knows everyone in these communities and knows the work that needs to be done and he is very passionate about it.'

Even though Barkly Shire has some successful Local Boards and is making headway in improving its community engagement, it certainly has its 'ups and downs'. Referring to its 2011 electoral review process, that CEO lamented that ''you can think you've got total engagement but then discover the correct message just didn't get through'. The Barkly Shire ward structure meant that one larger community did not have a representative on council so Council decided to consult the local constituents about creating another ward. They went into the community and some Indigenous Councillors helped explain in language what was involved and what the community needed to do to nominate a local candidate for the next election. The community was hugely enthusiastic but when nominations closed no eligible candidate from the community had nominated. Further inquiry revealed that the community could not decide who to nominate and in the consultation process nobody had grasped the idea that more than candidate could be nominated. Despite the involvement of Indigenous Councillors to assist with translation, that message failed to get through and by the time it was recognised it was too late. A more 'hands on' approach like playing an electoral game, having a mock council or bringing three or four luminaries (older more vocal community members) to Tennant Creek to observe a real Council meeting and explain the process as it unfolded in front of them might have communicated the message more clearly.

In conclusion, 'I don't think there is any special secret. I will say that community engagement is something that you have to keep working at to maintain.'

Central Desert Shire Council, NT

Photo courtesy of Central Desert Shire Council

Central Desert Shire Council was another of the eight new local government entities created in 2008 as part of the structural reform of local government in the NT. The Shire took in a large area of unincorporated land as well as six Aboriginal communities that were previously managed by their own local governing bodies. There are nine major communities or Shire delivery centres in the Shire and many pastoralists with strong historical links. The Shire covers an area of 282,093 kms^2 and is bordered by Western Australia to the west and Queensland to the east. About 4,887 people live in the region (ABS, March 2012). The population is mostly Indigenous, culturally strong and linguistically diverse. Three major Aboriginal languages are spoken and for many people English is a third or fourth language. Eight male and female skin groups determine the kinship systems operating in the region. This underpins how people relate to one another, their roles, responsibilities and obligations to each other, to ceremonial business and to country.

Approach to community engagement

Central Desert has a formal Community Engagement Strategy and Policy framework that is modelled on the IAP2 spectrum. This document provides a clear statement of the council's commitment to community engagement, when this will occur, what level of engagement will occur and how this process will be managed (Central Desert Shire, February 2011). This document provides a simple but comprehensive template for planning and implementing the Shire's community engagement activities. The central governance principles that guide the council's activities are respect for cultural diversity, working together and service to all residents. Four key principles are to underpin all council community engagement activities:

- They are a two-way process and everyone's business
- They are an integral part of Shire planning
- They meet the diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational needs and community development aspiration of residents and
- Communications are clear, open, truthful and respectful to all target audiences.

Central Desert identifies the massive variation in education, understanding, background and involvement of different community groups - Indigenous communities, pastoralists and business owners - as one of its biggest challenges in engaging its community. Engaging the Indigenous population which forms the vast majority of residents is perhaps where the greatest challenge lies. The council uses a variety of techniques in its efforts to achieve this.

The Shire views its local boards, which are formalised in the *NT Local Government Act 2008*, as a central mechanism for engaging its communities. Local boards play a fundamental role in informing, consulting and actively involving communities in the Shire's planning and decision-making processes.

The Shire maintains a flow of information from its communities through its local board reports which are the first items discussed at each Council meeting. This helps to keep council aware of what is happening in the communities and keeps the local boards in the forefront. In speaking about the role of their local boards in helping them engage their communities, a Central Desert Shire representative commented:

'We are reasonably lucky in that the traditional power structures in the community are reflected in the local board membership so we can often go to the local board Chairman and say 'what's happening?' – 'what do you reckon about this'? We do that for things we need a reality check on.' The council also noted that 'community leaders are usually not too difficult to find – the real problem is that you often find that they are massively over-subscribed – everyone wants to talk to them'.

Although local boards are a primary method of engaging communities, Central Desert also uses a variety of other channels and engagement techniques including community meetings, council staff and elected members, word-of-mouth, posters and local radio as outlined below.

Community meetings

Informal community meetings are regularly used as these can be held more frequently than local board meetings. This form of engagement is used when council has particular problems in a community such as unfilled employment positions or no nominations for council elections. These meetings are used to ask local residents what is going on in the community and what council could do to resolve the issue at hand.

In holding these very informal meetings Central Desert emphasises that it is always important to 'hold it in a neutral spot', to 'hold it in the community so they are not required to travel out of the community' and that 'we try to encourage language'. To overcome the challenge of language Central Desert utilises its Indigenous employees and/or councillors as interpreters whenever possible. The council 'will often get one of our Indigenous councillors to do whatever they can to provide translation and a lot of discussion is held in language so we really only find out at the end what was discussed'.

To further tackle literacy and language issues, Central Desert employs graphical communication strategies using a lot of pictures to communicate information. It also makes the process as hands on, practical and relevant to people's community and environment as possible. An example of this approach related to using the Central Desert logo as a tool in the council's 2011 electoral review process. The logo combines traditional images to portray the Western concept of people coming together around a Board table. This pictorial image was used to talk about how the symbols in the logo represent the wards and councillors, and how the councillors are associated with a ward. This provided a springboard for talking about whether or not the community thought there was the right type or number of councillors, if the wards needed to be broken up because of the different communities within them. To make this process as relevant and acceptable as possible to the people, they avoided academic talk and referred to specific communities and specific councillors to get the ideas across.

Shire service managers and other council staff

Each of Central Desert's nine main communities has a service manager located in the community and outstation work is carried out by other council staff. The Shire uses these employees as much

as possible to help disseminate a lot of information to its residents. Being based in the communities, the Shire service managers listen to what is happening in the community and have people approach them to raise council matters. This information is reported back to the council and provides very useful information and feedback.

Word-of-mouth, posters and local radio

The majority of Central Desert's Indigenous communities don't have high levels of internet use or computer usage or even telephones so the council uses all possible ways it can to get information out into the community – word-of-mouth, posters on the wall at the shop, and when there is an opportunity local Indigenous radio. The Shire representative commented that: 'When you have communities of 100 houses the shock is that you can walk around the community, you can hang around the shop for an hour and you would have met most people. And if you haven't met them you have met their brother or their son or their daughter or their wife so most of the time you can get the information out just through making sure you are at the right places.'

When it comes to engaging with pastoralists and the mining sector, Central Desert relies on email and mail particularly to let them know about things that are happening within the Shire. The most important thing to remain incredibly conscious of for these community members is the time it can take for information to reach them, especially the pastoralists. It can sometimes be two weeks or more before they receive mail and so this needs consideration in planning lead times for communicating information and seeking feedback.

Reflecting on the effectiveness of its approach to community engagement Central Desert offered the following thoughts:

- When trying to engage your Indigenous communities you can 'often have a community meeting where you hear what they think you want to hear so it takes a lot of effort to walk through that ... it is all about relationships – there are no shortcuts'.

- 'Cultural business and sporting activities all have massive impacts on the number of people that you can actually achieve at a community meeting at any time. There are certain times you must avoid. If cultural business is happening it's not worth even trying ... it could happen any time ... whatever your plans are they have to be very, very flexible.'

- 'I am not entirely sure that we have got any answers. It is an incredibly difficult thing to do and there is no way in the world that I think we have got it right yet but we are trying'.

Shire of Wiluna, WA

Photo courtesy of Shire of Wiluna

The Shire of Wiluna is a remote mining and pastoralist area on the edge of the Western Desert in Western Australia covering 184,000 square kilometres. It is located about 966 kilometres northeast of Perth at the gateway to the Canning Stock Route and Gunbarrel Highway. The Shire comprises the main town of Wiluna, several mining villages and a number of remote Aboriginal communities. The high mobility of the Shire's population makes it difficult to provide accurate population figures. In the 2001 Census the estimated total population in the Shire was 1644 although this figure was somewhat inflated by a large contingent of fly-in fly-out mining workers living in mining villages (Wiluna, 2012). In 2011 the estimated resident population was 759 (ABS, March 2012) with about 300 living in the main town of Wiluna.

Approach to engaging the Martu community in Community Planning
In early 2009 the Shire of Wiluna set about developing its first Strategic Plan. At this time, Shire officers estimated via a household survey that there were some 400 people living in town of whom up to 75% was Martu. To ensure the strategic plan truly reflected the community's aspirations for the Wiluna of the future, the Shire was intent on engaging the Martu people in its planning process.

The Shire recognised that engaging people who traditionally do not take part in formal local government processes can be challenging regardless of whether they are Aboriginal people or non-Indigenous. They knew they needed to find an approach with which the local Martu community would feel comfortable. They decided the best approach was to 'build a yellow brick road that was lively to travel'. In discussion with Martu leaders in the community a tight two month planning schedule was set to maintain community interest and momentum.

A communication strategy that built an 'educational pathway' was developed and rolled out into the community. This involved four main steps:

1. Laminated posters placed in strategic locations the Martu people frequented – post office, medical centre, art gallery, hotel, shop, CDEP office and Shire office. The posters posed the question 'How would you change Wiluna to look like the town you want now and in the future?', and provided a map of the town to help people pinpoint locations for their suggestions. Marker pens were provided to encourage people to write down their ideas and allowed them to engage in the process in their own time and comfort zone.

2. Key champions on staff and in the community were identified and engaged to have casual conversations with community members about the project explaining the process and the importance of their involvement. Communicating with the Martu people in 'their way' was most important and this involved having many conversations that could be taken and shared among family groups.

3. The Shire partnered with the local school to do a project on the process whereby students' posters were produced and displayed at local shops in the weeks leading up to a series of formal workshops conducted by the council. This lead time gave the children time to discuss ideas amongst themselves and with their families. This gave the Martu people space to process their suggestions, prioritise what they thought was important for their community and to make a decision as a community which is a process the council has found they prefer and, when honoured, provides the best outcome.

4. Seven community workshops were held at various venues including the Wiluna Hotel. Lunch was provided for all active participants. These were attended by at least 120 people.

The most important outcomes identified from the community engagement approach used for this project were:

- A high level of community participation in the engagement process with up to 50% of the community actively participating in the formal workshops and other engagement activities.
- A visible level of excitement about the project and enjoyment in the process evidenced by the number of people talking about it and voluntarily participating.
- A high level of acceptance of the final Community Strategic Plan by the Martu people evidenced by reports that many people continued to proudly display the full colour document that included photos of local Martu people in their homes for quite some time afterwards.

Key factors the former Shire CEO believes contributed to the success of this engagement process were:

- Recognising and honouring traditional cultural ways that include -
  - Tapping into an approach with which the community is comfortable.
  - Communicating information simply and visually.
  - Following the Aboriginal hierarchy of decision making and engaging the Elders and still honouring and showing respect for lost cultural ways if the community does not follow them.
- Making the process fun.
- Engaging influential Aboriginal people in the community to get their buy-in.
- Giving people a practice run and space to process their suggestions allowed a natural vetting and prioritisation of ideas so the final tasks of prioritising and matching these with an annual five year list of priorities and a budget, and adopting these into council's Strategic Plan were more easily completed.
- The relatively short timeframe set to maintain interest and momentum.

McKinlay Shire Council, QLD

Photos courtesy of McKinlay Shire Council

McKinlay Shire is a remote pastoralist area located west of Townsville and east of Mt Isa in the North West Region of Queensland. It covers an area of 40,885 km^2. There are about 951 people living in the Shire (ABS, March 2012). The Shire comprises four townships these being Julia Creek (360), McKinlay (20), Kyuna (15) and Nelia (<10) (McKinlay, 2010b) but about half of its total population lives on a large number of cattle stations. Over the past decade the region has experienced a steadily declining population. About 95% of the Shire's population is Australian born and just over 4% is Indigenous. In addition, although the community sits around the national average level of disadvantage on the SEIFA index, almost four in every 10 people fall within the most disadvantaged quintile of the index (McKinlay, 2010b, p.9).

The Queensland Government's 2010 annual return on community engagement (Queensland Government, 2010b) reported 26 councils to have robust community engagement processes in place. Eight of these local governments were rural-remote and McKinlay Shire was amongst these. The Queensland Local Government Act 2009 requires councils to prepare long term Community Plans that express the community's vision, aspirations and priorities identified through community participation (Queensland Government, 2010a). With the introduction of this legislation, McKinlay Shire Council was one of the first local governments to complete its plan for which it received Ministerial recognition. This case example looks at McKinlay Council's approach to community engagement especially in relation to the development of its Community Plan.

Approach to community engagement
The McKinlay Shire Council (MSC) has a formal Community Engagement Policy in which the IAP2 spectrum forms the basis of its community engagement framework. This document formally expresses Council's commitment to effective, inclusive and consistent engagement of the McKinlay communities in its decision-making processes (McKinlay, 2010a, p.2). It also identifies what levels of engagement Council will undertake for different activities that include statutory processes, policy and strategy development, community strategic planning, and Council projects, programs and activities. Nine principles underpin the Shire's community engagement activities:

- Inclusiveness
- Capacity building
- Appropriate engagement

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- Informed comment
- Sufficient time
- Receptivity
- Transparency and feedback
- Privacy and
- Evaluation.

The policy also identifies the key challenges to planning and conducting effective community engagement in the Shire and stipulates Council's commitments to addressing these. These challenges 'are largely related to resource issues, governance approaches, barriers, and community and Council attitudes' (McKinlay, 2010a, p.6).

In 2010 the Shire set about engaging the community in developing its Community Plan which was built in conjunction with its Infrastructure Plan. This collaborative approach enabled the Shire to ensure the vision, goals, priorities, strategies and actions of each plan were aligned. The Council acknowledged that there are minimum requirements under the Local Government Act 2009 for community planning consultation but wanted to exceed these (McKinlay, 2010b).

The community engagement approach used for this project involved:

1. Using an external consultant to assist with the process.
2. Establishing a Community Plan working group.
3. Using a variety of community engagement techniques to get broad community participation.
4. The consultants travelling all around the Shire.
5. Continuous communication during the project to keep the community informed on progress.
6. Ongoing consultation and liaison with key stakeholders that included the Community Reference Group, State government officers and BHP Billiton Cannington staff to facilitate implementation of the Community Plan.

The rationale behind using an external consultant for this project was that the Council 'didn't want to be the driver ... we wanted the community to tell their story and not for us to go out with a script ... so we thought that an independent planning operation would do a better job at that ... allowing whoever they talked to in the community the freedom to say whatever they wanted to.'

The types of tools used to engage the community included conversations, face-to-face meetings, direct calling, workshops and surveys. Many community conversations were held all around McKinlay Shire - in the smaller townships, in the pubs, on stations, at the school, at the Council offices, at the 'Dirt and Dust' festival and many other locations. As all the stations are quite well connected by satellite, the Council was able to use an online survey backed up by mail drops to inform community members about the survey and to provide reminders to promote participation. Once completed, the outcomes of the engagement process in the form of the Community Plan were made available on the Council website and promoted in the Council's monthly Newsletter.

Although the engagement methods employed in this process are quite conventional, they attained relatively high participation rates (McKinlay, 2010b). Overall, about one-quarter of the people within

the Shire participated in at least one part of the community engagement process. Although this might not be outstanding, the Council was pleased with this level of active participation as it is a lot better than that attained in many larger centres.

The Council indicated that 'now everything we do is cross-referenced back to the Community Plan'. For instance, the Shire recently lost the Queensland Country Credit Union. With population attraction and retention a top priority in the Community Plan, the loss of the only financial institution in area threatened this community aspiration. Thus, the Council again engaged with the community to attract a new bank. This involved a similar approach to that used in the community planning process which was:

- Running four or five community information sessions and workshops
- Conducting a community petition
- Having an independent consultant do a banking survey to assess the level of demand for a bank
- Keeping the community aware of progress through a regular flow of information via media releases on the ABC radio, articles in the local newspaper and a monthly local community publication, and mail box drops
- Preparing a good business case to present to prospective banking institutions.

The Council again attained about a 25% participation rate in this engagement process.

Amongst the other techniques the McKinlay Shire uses to engage its community are:

- Building good relationships and communication between Councillors and community members.
- The CEO maintaining an 'open door policy' for community members to raise concerns.
- A high level of Council involvement in community services whereby the community health nurse, Sport and Recreation officer and HACC coordinator provide a good mechanism for building and maintaining a two-way flow of information between the Council and community to keep Council aware of community issues.
- Establishment of a Health Advisory group that meets monthly and is chaired by a Councillor.
- Conducting one Council meeting a year in one of the smaller townships which generally attracts more people than meetings held in the main town of Julia Creek.

In reflecting on how to achieve more effective community engagement, the McKinlay Shire CEO suggested:

> 'Don't try to do it yourself. A lot of my neighbours are and they are about two years behind us. We went out and got somebody independent but very importantly you have to choose somebody that the community can talk to – that doesn't have a big city attitude ... you need an independent one but you need the right one ... A lot of councils shy away from that because they think it is too costly. Do you want a quality product or do you want a budget – that's the decision of the council ... but also how much control do you want over the process? If you really think what the process is about you have got to let go and not try to do it yourself.'

Outback Communities Authority (OCA), SA

Photos courtesy of Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (South Australia) and OCA

The Outback Communities Authority (OCA) was established pursuant to the Outback Communities (Administration and Management) Act 2009 (the Act). It commenced operations on 1 July 2010 and replaces the Outback Areas Communities Development Trust. Under this new legislation, the OCA took on powers afforded to local governments under the South Australian (SA) Local Government Act 1999. The central role of the OCA is to:

- Manage the provision of services and facilities to outback communities
- Promote improvements in providing public services and facilities where required
- Represent the views, interests and aspirations of outback communities and
- Manage its resources and meet its legislative responsibilities.

The OCA is responsible for the management and local governance of 31 outback communities and numerous grazing and farming properties not serviced by local councils. About 3,800 people live in this unincorporated area (ABS, March 2012) which covers 625,000 km^2 or about 65% of SA. The OCA is ministerially appointed Board that is supported by administrative staff from the South Australian Department for the Premier and Cabinet. It has a unique structure in the Australian context in that it straddles all tiers of government - it is predominantly funded by the Commonwealth, reports to the State and delivers local government services. Unlike most local government areas, however, the unincorporated areas of SA do not pay rates. However, the new legislation has for the first time provided a legal mechanism to charge a levy for the provision of infrastructure services in the region. The OCA has not implemented this mechanism as yet.

Each OCA community has an incorporated Progress Association or similar which is a peak body of volunteers in each community that determines community needs and priorities, and where resourcing permits, maintains community facilities and services as well as undertaking important town management roles. The OCA recognises one principal association in each locality and co-existing Aboriginal community groups in three towns– Marree, Oodnadatta and Copley - that are 80-90% Indigenous but are not technically recognised as Aboriginal communities. It assists with providing local government type services through service level agreements made with these community groups.

Approach to community engagement

Under the Act, the OCA has a legal obligation to consult with its communities on a range of matters - public consultation policy, strategic management plans, annual business plans and budgets, changes to financial arrangements, and Community Affairs Resourcing and Management (CARM) agreements. Following its creation, one of the first things the OCA developed and consulted on was its community engagement policy. This policy, modelled on best practice in community engagement and the IAP2 framework, confirms the OCA's commitment to open, accountable and responsive decision making informed through community consultation, building partnerships and developing local arrangements that suit local needs. It outlines the principles and procedures it will follow to engage the outback community and proposes the OCA will also engage communities on significant proposed changes and local and regional issues beyond the minimum requirements of the Act (OCA, 2012).

The OCA acknowledges that 'there are considerable challenges in finding ways to effectively engage people in some outback areas, particularly those in small settlements and in remote locations, and those who have historically been hard to reach' (OCA, 2012). The General Manager commented 'unfortunately in engaging people in any social environment you only get a certain participation rate ... we're talking in the single digit percentage of the outback population'. Thus, the OCA embarked on working with and talking to people throughout the outback to find better ways to engage and work out solutions, and sees this as an ongoing task.

In 2011 the OCA engaged a consultant to undertake a communications study on which it could develop a communications strategy to supplement its community engagement policy. Telephone interviews were conducted with a variety of people across the region to assess the effectiveness of current engagement techniques and to identify communication preferences. This revealed that 'no 'one size fits all' for people in the bush because of varying levels of education, varying levels of computer literacy and access to computers and that sort of stuff'. The communications strategy developed identifies two stakeholder groups:

1) Internal stakeholders - people or groups residing in the OCA region – 31 communities, pastoralists, businesses, service providers, government employees, school communities and other groups and
2) External stakeholders - groups from outside the region with an interest in connecting with OCA outback communities – mining companies, Adelaide based government agencies, NGOs and neighbouring councils.

Preferred forms of communication were identified for each stakeholder group. For example the Progress Associations mostly want email, word-of-mouth, radio, internet and mobile or satellite phones where available, posters in communities and 'the grapevine' (face-to-face).

An interesting dilemma for the OCA in using media as an engagement tool is that 'the radio and television is from Queensland or the NT ... and [the outback people] don't associate with Adelaide based newspapers ... less than one percent of the SA population live in the outback and the western side just as soon associate with Queensland or the NT, the eastern side associates with Broken Hill and the far west [west of Ceduna] just live in a world of their own'.

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At a broad level, the OCA engages its outback communities through their respective Progress Associations. In its three Aboriginal communities, however, there are two incorporated bodies the OCA recognises and tries hard to engage equally. These groups vary substantially in how easy they are to engage as they have very different levels of functionality and are different types of people 'so you have to treat them all differently in the way you engage'. One of the OCA's biggest issues is that 'with some 30 communities and ... 50 individual social or geographical groups that are fairly parochial about their own world and don't associate with each other it is difficult to try and unite one outback'. It is difficult to engage the Indigenous groups because there is a 'bit of a have and a have not' situation as Oodnadatta receives MUNS funding but Maree and Copley don't.

When it comes to engaging the outback communities the OCA has found that there is no substitute for face-to-face and building close relationships. The GM commented '... there's no substitute for making the effort to travel to one of those remote towns ... people believe that you need to come to them so we do. We spend a huge proportion of our time to make sure the message – especially if it is an important message – we will go and speak to the people. We're not at that micro level of visiting every pastoral lease but we do have engagement with them by phone or email ... there's not that many ... 220 pastoral leases and I actually know most of them anyway.'

The OCA says that to engage its Aboriginal communities 'building relationships and credibility is critical ... but it is hard to build that rapport. It's not difficult to maintain but the trouble is if you cross them you will lose it very quickly'. Through projects undertaken in Oodnadatta by its community development arm, the OCA has 'achieved some good things ... and that's built some good bridges in relation to engagement. The danger we have is changing staff – you start from square one again'.

Amongst the key tools that the OCA uses to engage with its communities are:

- A database of people interested in OCA activities that is updated each time community consultation is undertaken
- A small megabyte monthly e-newsletter that was developed in response to community feedback in the communications study
- A quarterly coffee table type printed newsletter for less 'technologically inclined' community members
- A 4-5 year cycle of four Board meetings a year held at four different outback communities combined with informal community forums with refreshments provided
- GM and staff visits to every community – GM at least once every two years and staff at least once a year which is usually exceeded
- An untied community project grants scheme where communities have relative autonomy on how the funds will be spent under a service level agreement with the OCA
- Collaboration between the OCA and volunteer community groups on municipal service delivery and support in developing cultural aspects of community existence

Some simple things that have helped the OCA more effectively engage with its outback communities are:

- 'You need empathy and understanding of their situation'
- 'Kicking some goals' in communities – our community development arm conducts bush mechanics workshops for Indigenous women and computer literacy and governance training, and the OCA offers untied community grants
- Avoid overwhelming the community with information overload from 'giving too much information too quickly' – the OCA is trying to encourage government agencies to work through them so it can filter and distribute pertinent information to appropriate target groups or communities
- 'Know what their issues are and always have an answer for them when you get there … do your research before you get there'
- 'Give their issues the respect it deserves … their issues might be micro in the scheme of things but they are important to them'
- 'You need to dress down … don't turn up in a suit and a tie … so you are not seen as a bureaucrat' and
- 'One thing so simple but it works is we took our government plates off our cars and put on personalised OCA plates … gives them some ownership and gives us a bit of credibility … and they're not ostentatious cars'.

6 Conclusions and future directions

The Local Government Acts in all jurisdictions covered by this study set out the minimum legislative responsibilities for community engagement by all local governments including RRI councils. Although the specific legislative requirements differ across jurisdictions, there has been a recent trend towards a more explicit and stronger commitment to community engagement in local government decision making processes, especially in relation to long-term community strategic planning. Within this environment, undertaking effective community engagement and integrating the outcomes into council planning and decisions has become increasingly important. Thus, understanding the unique challenges of RRI local governments that impact on their capacity to engage with their communities is vital to identifying what type of support will best assist these councils to improve their community engagement activities.

The overall findings of this study into community engagement by RRI local government reveals that across all jurisdictions this cohort generally recognise the need for and importance of community engagement to support councils to effectively perform their role. It appears that a substantial number of RRI local governments are making some headway in developing and actively trying to improve their community engagement practices. Even though many rural-remote communities are culturally diverse, on the whole RRI local governments have developed an awareness of and in many cases are endeavouring to accommodate these cultural differences in how they undertake their community engagement activities although this view is based only on the data provided by these local governments and has not been tested from a community perspective.

Nonetheless, the bottom line is that it appears that RRI local government in Australia is making some positive efforts to engage with their communities but generally acknowledge that there are a number of key challenges that need to be addressed if their community engagement practices are to be improved. Many of these challenges relate to internal capacity constraints. If the right type of support is provided and if RRI local government stakeholders are willing to embrace this support, improvements can be achieved in the community engagement practices of RRI local government by building their capacity in those areas that will address the these challenges.

Although extensive material resources that provide guidance on community engagement approaches, techniques and effective methods for different circumstances are already available, this study suggests that there remains a real need for building the knowledge and understanding of community engagement amongst members of both the community and local government. RRI local government staff would benefit from having more opportunities to learn about new approaches to community engagement especially if this can be done through active 'hands on' involvement in the planning, conduct and evaluation of community engagement activities. This education and professional development could be supported by a professional network of local government personnel who have experience in undertaking community engagement in similar circumstances as those councils needing support. Nevertheless, developing staff capacity in community engagement practices is only part of the equation. At least in part, however, the effective conduct of community engagement also relies on having in place suitable information systems that enable the organisation to efficiently capture, manage and process relevant community engagement data such as community enquiries, complaints, requests and to provide timely feedback to the community. Thus, the need for developing staff capacity in community engagement practices is closely associated with

the need for developing and installing internal information systems programs that are adequately supported by a suitable and robust telecommunication network. This study, however, revealed the inadequacy of the telecommunications infrastructure and networks in many remote areas especially those located in the NT and northern QLD which would greatly constrain the effective functioning of these internal systems especially across multiple remote communities.

In addition to the need for up-skilling local government staff on community engagement approaches and techniques supported by efficient and effective internal information systems, it is apparent that there is a need for educating elected members and staff on how to embed and integrate community engagement outcomes into council decision-making processes and decisions. Furthermore, within these councils there is a need to develop the level of understanding of how community engagement links with integrated planning to support better council decision-making on service delivery and to manage the expectations of the community and other tiers of government. This educative approach also needs to be extended to the community, especially where there is a substantial Indigenous population, to build understanding around the role of community members in local government engagement and decision-making processes.

Based on the insights gained from this study, it is recommended that ACELG design a second stage to progress the options identified as most valued by RRI local government to help them meet their community engagement challenges and to build their capacity to develop robust community engagement systems and practices. It is proposed that the next phase of this project should include:

A review of the availability of:

- Community engagement training and development programs suitable for RRI local government staff
- Community education tools/programs on the community's role in council engagement and decision making processes
- Council education tools/programs on the role of community engagement in good governance and council decision-making
- Cultural awareness tools/programs for rural-remote communities.

The purpose of this review is to identify where there is a lack of suitable programs and thus areas where further development is required. Then, where gaps exist, ACELG may consider collaborating with peak bodies in the various jurisdictions to fill these. This may include:

- Developing suitable practical staff training and development programs in community engagement approaches especially in less conventional methods and techniques

- Developing a model community education program on the community's role in local government community engagement

- Developing a model RRI council education program on the role of community engagement in good governance and council decision-making

- Developing a model cultural awareness training program for local government staff and elected members in remote areas

- Developing a practical material resource guide suitable for RRI local government on how to embed and integrate community engagement outcomes into council planning decision-making, and

- Establishing a dedicated RRI local government site on ACELG's *Innovation Knowledge Exchange Network* (IKEN) website and promote this as a sector wide interactive online portal for this cohort of councils to share their community engagement issues, ideas, practices and experiences.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Cohort of rural-remote and Indigenous local governments in ACELG program research

Appendix 2 – The IAP2 spectrum

Appendix 3 - RRI local government community engagement challenges - inter-item correlations

Appendix 4 – Stakeholder interview information sheet

Appendix 5 – Online survey cover letter and questionnaire

Appendix 6 – Supporting tables for the online survey responses

Appendix 1 – Cohort of rural-remote and Indigenous local governments in ACELG program research

NT	2011/12 ACLG	QLD	2011/12 ACLG	WA	2011/12 ACLG	SA	2011/12 ACLG	NSW	2011/12 ACLG
Barkly Shire	RTM	Aurukun Shire Council	RTM	Shire of Ashburton	RTL	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY)	RTM	Bourke Shire Council	RAM
Belyuen Shire	RAS	Balonne Shire Council	RAL	Shire of Broome	RTL	District Council of Ceduna	RAM	Brewarrina Shire Council	RAM
Coomalie Shire	RAS	Barcaldine Regional Council	RTL	Shire of Coolgardie	RTL	District Council of Cleve	RAS	Central Darling Shire Council	RTM
Central Desert Shire	RTM	Barcoo Shire Council	RTX	Shire of Cue	RTX	District Council of Coober Pedy	URS	Cobar Shire Council	RTL
East Arnhem Shire	RTL	Blackall-Tambo Regional Council	RTM	Shire of Derby-West Kimberley	RTL	District Council of Elliston	RAM	Coonamble Shire Council	RAM
MacDonnell Shire	RTL	Boulia Shire Council	RTS	Shire of Dundas	RTM	The Flinders Ranges Council	RAS	Walgett Shire Council	RAL
Roper Gulf Shire	RTL	Bulloo Shire Council	RTX	Shire of East Pilbara	RTL	District Council of Franklin Harbour	RAS	Wentworth Shire Council	RAL
Tiwi Islands Shire	RTM	Burke Shire Council	RTS	Shire of Exmouth	RTM	Gerard Community	RTX		
Victoria-Daly Shire	RT	Carpentaria Shire Council	RTM	Shire of Halls Creek	RTL	Kangaroo Island Council	RAM		
Wagait Shire	UFS	Cherbourg Aboriginal Council	RTM	Shire of Laverton	RTS	District Council of Kimba	RAS		
West Arnhem Shire	RTL	Cloncurry Shire Council	RTL	Shire of Leonora	RTM	District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula	RAS		
		Cook Shire Council	RTL	Shire of Meekatharra	RTM	District Council of Karoonda East Murray	RAS		
		Croydon Shire Council	RTX	Shire of Menzies	RTX	Maralinga Tjarutja Community Inc.	RTX		
		Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council	RTM	Shire of Mount Magnet	RTS	Nepabunna Community Incorporated	RTX		
		Diamantina Shire Council	RTX	Shire of Murchison	RTX	Northern Areas Council	RAL		
		Etheridge Shire Council	RTS	Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku	RTM	District Council of Orroroo Carrieton	RAS		
		Flinders Shire Council	RTM	Town of Port Hedland	RTL	Outback Communities Authority	RTL		
		Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council	RTS	Shire of Roebourne	RTL	District Council of Peterborough	RAM		
		Kowanyama Aboriginal	RTM	Shire of Sandstone	RTX	Municipal Council of Roxby	URS		

NT	2011/12 ACLG	QLD	2011/12 ACLG	WA	2011/12 ACLG	SA	2011/12 ACLG	NSW	2011/12 ACLG
		Shire Council				Downs			
		Lockhart River Aboriginal Shire Council	RTS	Shire of Shark Bay	RTS	District Council of Streaky Bay	RAS		
		Longreach Regional Council	RTL	Shire of Upper Gascoyne	RTX	District Council of Tumby Bay	RAM		
		Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council	RTX	Shire of Wiluna	RTS	District Council of Wudinna	RAM		
		McKinlay Shire Council	RTS	Shire of Wyndham East-Kimberley	RTL	Yalata Community	RTX		
		Mornington Shire Council	RTM	Shire of Yalgoo	RTX				
		Mt Isa City Council	UFS	City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder	URS				
		Murweh Shire Council	RTL						
		Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council	RTS						
		Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council	RTM						
		Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council	RTM						
		Paroo Shire Council	RTM						
		Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council	RTS						
		Quilpie Shire Council	RTM						
		Richmond Shire Council	RTS						
		Torres Shire Council	RTL						
		Torres Strait Island Regional Council	RTL						
		Winton Shire Council	RTM						
		Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council	RTM						
		Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council	RTX						
		Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council	RTM						
TOTAL = 105	11		39		25		23		7

NOTE: RTX = Rural Remote Extra Small   RTS = Rural Remote Small   RTM = Rural Remote Medium   RTL = Rural Remote Large
RAS = Rural Agricultural Small   RAM = Rural Agricultural Medium   RAL = Rural Agricultural Large
UFS = Urban Fringe Small   URS = Urban Regional Small   URM = Urban Regional Medium

Appendix 2 – The IAP2 spectrum

Increasing level of public participation and impact →

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Goal: To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	**Goal:** To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	**Goal:** To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	**Goal:** To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred	**Goal:** To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise: We will keep you informed	**Promise:** We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	**Promise:** We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	**Promise:** We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	**Promise:** We will implement what you decide.
Sample techniques: Fact sheets Web Sites Open houses	**Sample techniques:** Public comment Focus groups Surveys Public meetings	**Sample techniques:** Workshops Deliberate polling	**Sample techniques:** Citizen advisory committees Consensus building Participatory decision-making	**Sample techniques:** Citizen juries Ballots Delegated decisions

Source: www.iap2.or.au

Appendix 3 - RRI local government community engagement challenges - inter-item correlations

Challenges to community engagement (n = 42)	Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Having appropriate support systems available inside the Council to do this work	1	-														
Cost – not enough funds available for this work	2	.359*	-													
Adequately skilled staff to do this work	3	.764**	.293	-												
Participation fatigue – some community groups (e.g. Aboriginal groups) over consulted	4	.427**	.293	.513**	-											
Community resistance – disinterest, scepticism or cynicism	5	.408*	.237	.360*	.360*	-										
Competing Council priorities	6	.499**	.556**	.375*	.219	.380*	-									
Community understanding of Council's role – the purpose and limits of engagement	7	.367*	.315*	.285	.173	.404**	.375*	-								
Fear of raising community expectations	8	.507**	.266	.378*	.464**	.444**	.513**	.393**	-							
Literacy skills of some parts of the community	9	.380*	.231	.258	.446**	.243	.091	.327*	.359*	-						
Technology and telecommunications available for doing this work in remote communities	10	.386*	.250	.325*	.140	.176	.257	.376*	.488**	.341*	-					
Level of knowledge or understanding of different ways to engage the community especially hard to engage members	11	.522**	.270	.391*	.187	.340*	.419**	.426**	.345*	.219	.267	-				
Distance or remoteness of some communities	12	.085	-.003	.010	,214	-.076	-.075	.320*	.124	.335*	.509**	.162	-			
Past community engagement failures	13	.365*	.304	.350*	.490**	.342*	.419**	.029	.429**	.389*	.137	.224	-.118	-		
Awareness of where to access suitable material resources to help plan and implement community engagement activities	14	.561**	.335*	.408**	.184	.218	.320*	.454**	.299	.374*	.451**	.708**	.286	.102	-	
Level of knowledge or understanding of when Council should engage the community	15	.536**	.272	.467**	.168	.133	.407**	.225	.337*	.106	.319*	.764**	.234	.109	.569**	-
Low community expectations for Council to engage	16	.305*	-.026	.265	.358*	.481**	.102	.462**	.257	.404**	.277	.420**	.175	.224	.412**	.264
Council concern about managing divergent community views	17	.502**	.418**	.438**	.229	.193	.516**	.521**	.400**	.294	.414**	.506**	.226	.325*	.573**	.529**
Staff resistance or a lack of confidence in trying new or less conventional engagement methods	18	.261	.443**	.381*	.120	.058	.143	.271	.012	.115	.295	.410**	.128	.054	.587**	.419**
An expectation of remuneration by community members for their involvement	19	.203	.096	.193	.348*	.369*	.322*	.401**	.417**	.387*	.385*	.181	.272	.310*	.256	.239
Poor Council-community relationships especially with Aboriginal communities	20	.318*	-.012	-.006	-.130	.359*	.100	.307*	.320*	.040	.338*	.459**	.215	-.077	.322*	.385*
Level of knowledge or understanding of who Council should engage with	21	.494**	.226	.419**	.074	.294	.469**	.344*	.469**	.212	.475**	.796**	.233	.082	.670**	.786**
Cultural awareness or understanding by staff	22	.355*	.020	.293	.060	.332*	.168	.397**	.377*	.304	.497**	.528**	.319*	.000	.599**	.470**
Language barriers	23	.116	.193	-.061	.352*	.212	.031	.080	.180	.231	.191	.207	.420**	.214	.209	.148
Community engagement is not viewed as 'core business' by the elected Council	24	.370*	.290	.375*	.118	.063	.221	.321*	.263	.184	.344*	.481**	.130	.000	.584**	.615**
No compulsion (legislation) to engage the community	25	.258	.317*	.313*	.313*	.225	.215	.003	.317*	.377*	.071	.301	.020	.245	.299	.452**
Community engagement is not viewed as 'core business' by the senior management team	26	.198	.093	.214	.181	.186	.046	.130	.119	.269	.300	.187	.245	.087	.441**	.292

Challenges to community engagement (n = 42)	Item	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Having appropriate support systems available inside the Council to do this work	1											
Cost – not enough funds available for this work	2											
Adequately skilled staff to do this work	3											
Participation fatigue – some community groups (e.g. Aboriginal groups) over consulted	4											
Community resistance – disinterest, scepticism or cynicism	5											
Competing Council priorities	6											
Community understanding of Council's role – the purpose and limits of engagement	7											
Fear of raising community expectations	8											
Literacy skills of some parts of the community	9											
Technology and telecommunications available for doing this work in remote communities	10											
Level of knowledge or understanding of different ways to engage the community especially hard to engage members	11											
Distance or remoteness of some communities	12											
Past community engagement failures	13											
Awareness of where to access suitable material resources to help plan and implement community engagement activities	14											
Level of knowledge or understanding of when Council should engage the community	15											
Low community expectations for Council to engage	16	-										
Council concern about managing divergent community views	17	.450**	-									
Staff resistance or a lack of confidence in trying new or less conventional engagement methods	18	.242	.374*	-								
An expectation of remuneration by community members for their involvement	19	.467**	.384*	.044	-							
Poor Council-community relationships especially with Aboriginal communities	20	.333*	.119	.124	.161	-						
Level of knowledge or understanding of who Council should engage with	21	.351*	.532**	.356*	.272	.491**	-					
Cultural awareness or understanding by staff	22	.402**	.367*	.414**	.287	.493**	.635**	-				
Language barriers	23	.337*	.175	.127	.363*	.284	.142	.335*	-			
Community engagement is not viewed as 'core business' by the elected Council	24	.149	.463**	.475**	.278	.169	.592**	.532**	.019	-		
No compulsion (legislation) to engage the community	25	.166	.187	.157	.252	-.019	.395*	.287	.051	.485**	-	
Community engagement is not viewed as 'core business' by the senior management team	26	.164	.228	.499**	.392*	.156	.238	.545**	.149	.621**	.375*	-

Appendix 4 – Stakeholder interview information sheet

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN RURAL-REMOTE AND INDIGENOUS COUNCILS

You may be aware that in 2010 the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) commissioned several scoping studies to investigate the capacity building needs of rural-remote and Indigenous councils across Australia. This research provided an evidence base for developing ACELG's *Capacity Building Strategy for Rural-Remote and Indigenous Local Government*. A copy of this strategy can be found in the 2011 publications on ACELG's website - www.acelg.org.au.

This earlier research showed low levels of Indigenous community participation and community engagement in small rural-remote and Indigenous councils. It also revealed a generally poor understanding of effective community engagement methodologies, especially for engaging hard to reach community groups. Thus, a key priority highlighted in ACELG's capacity building strategy was the need to improve community engagement to underpin council decision-making.

ACELG has now engaged Dr Robyn Morris from Edith Cowan University (ECU) to undertake research on this important issue. The purpose of this study is to review the challenges of community engagement and to identify good practice methodologies in rural-remote and Indigenous councils. It will consider options for improving engagement and provide councils with practical guidance for overcoming barriers to the effective conduct of engagement in their communities.

The first phase of this research involves interviews with key stakeholders including representatives from local government associations and departments of local government in the different jurisdictions, and from Indigenous and non-Indigenous rural-remote councils. We invite you to take part in this stage of the study. Dr Robyn Morris will make contact with you shortly to seek your participation in a telephone interview that should take about 30-45 minutes.

The topics to be discussed in the interview include:

- Barriers and unique challenges to engagement in small rural-remote and Indigenous councils.
- Examples of effective engagement in small rural-remote and Indigenous councils.
- Resources available to help these councils with community engagement.
- Gaps in knowledge and resources needed to promote better community engagement in these councils.
- Options for improving community engagement by rural-remote and Indigenous local government.

Participation in an interview is voluntary. All individual comments are confidential and will be reported in combination with those made by other stakeholders. Any comments quoted in the final report will be in an unidentifiable form unless prior written agreement is given by stakeholders concerned.

This study meets ECU's ethical research requirements. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the study you can contact the Research Ethics Officer at Edith Cowan University on 6304 2170. If you need further information or have any questions about this study please contact Dr Robyn Morris at Edith Cowan University on 0417 986 038 or r.morris@ecu.edu.au.

Appendix 5 – Online survey cover letter and questionnaire

RURAL-REMOTE AND INDIGENOUS COUNCIL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

Background Information

Early in 2011 the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) released 'A Capacity Building Strategy for Rural-Remote and Indigenous Local Government'. This strategy identified governance and community engagement as one of ten priority areas in which councils identified a capacity building need. ACELG in partnership with Edith Cowan University is seeking your help in identifying what would help rural-remote and Indigenous councils to build their capacity to improve their community engagement.

This questionnaire asks about the community engagement practices of your Council, what challenges it faces in engaging with your community, what resources your council has to support its community engagement activities, what community engagement approaches have worked and haven't worked for your council and what extra support is needed to help your Council to improve its community engagement.

We ask that either you as CEO or another suitably informed member of your staff take the time to complete our online survey by clicking on the following link –

https://ecuau.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_d6TbKvSbAwu3BcM

Please note that:

- Participation is voluntary.
- Individual responses are confidential and will only be reported in aggregate.
- By completing the questionnaire you agree to your responses being used in this study.
- You can exit and resume the survey within 2 weeks without having to start again.
- Your responses will be automatically recorded. As you complete the survey a thank you message and acknowledgement that your responses have been recorded is provided.

We appreciate your response as early as possible but preferably by no later than **14 February 2012**.

For information about ACELG or the capacity building strategy please visit www.acelg.org.au. For more information about this study you can contact Dr Robyn Morris at Edith Cowan University on 0417 986 038 or email r.morris@ecu.edu.au. This study has university ethics clearance. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the study you can contact the Research Ethics Officer at ECU on 6304 2170.

Thank you for your time and valuable input.

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT
www.acelg.org.au

RURAL-REMOTE AND INDIGENOUS COUNCIL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

For the purpose of this study:

'A community is defined broadly to include anyone who lives, works, conducts business, studies, visits, owns property in or uses the services offered in the local government area and so has an interest in or is affected by the decisions and activities of the Council.'

and

'Community engagement is the umbrella term used to cover a variety of activities used by Councils to interact with its community. These include providing information, seeking feedback and actively involving community members and/or groups in the Council's decision-making processes.'

Please note that:

- Participation is voluntary.
- Individual responses are confidential and will only be reported in aggregate.
- By completing the questionnaire you agree to your responses being used in this study.
- You can exit and resume the survey without having to start again within two weeks.
- Your responses will be automatically recorded - a thank you message is provided on completion.

Thank you for your time and interest.
Please continue.

A. ABOUT YOUR COUNCIL

Q1. In which State or Territory is your Council located?

NSW	NT	QLD	SA	WA	VIC	TAS
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q2. Which ONE of the following best describes your type of local government?

○ Rural-remote (little or no Indigenous population)

○ Rural-remote with an Indigenous population mostly town based

○ Rural-remote with remote Indigenous communities

○ An Indigenous Council

Q3. Which of the following Australian classification codes for local government applies to your Council?

○ Rural remote extra small (RTX)   ○ Rural agricultural medium (RAM)

○ Rural remote small (RTS)   ○ Rural agricultural large (RAL)

○ Rural remote medium (RTM)   ○ Urban regional small (URS)

○ Rural remote large (RTL)   ○ Urban fringe small (UFS)

○ Rural agricultural small (RAS)   ○ Other - please state here -

B. CURRENT PRACTICES

Q4. Does your Council have:

	Yes	Being considered or developed	No
A formal community engagement policy or strategy document.	○	○	○
A community engagement guide, handbook or process that staff use to plan and implement community engagement activities.	○	○	○
Designated staff or formal roles and responsibilities for managing its community engagement activities.	○	○	○
Allocated funding in its budget for community engagement activities.	○	○	○
A procedure for evaluating the effectiveness of its community engagement activities.	○	○	○
A process for telling the community how their input influenced a Council decision.	○	○	○
Opportunities for staff training and professional development in community engagement.	○	○	○

Q5. How often does your Council:

	Rarely or never	Sometimes	Frequently	Very frequently
Provide the community with information about Council plans, services, activities or decisions	○	○	○	○
Seek community feedback on existing policies, programs, activities or Council decisions.	○	○	○	○
Provide opportunities for the community to raise concerns or identify their aspirations.	○	○	○	○
Provide opportunities for the community to actively help to identify and evaluate Council policy, program or service options or solutions to problems.	○	○	○	○
Provide opportunities for the community to help choose the best option or solution for a Council policy, program or service.	○	○	○	○
Engage your community on issues or matters where community consultation is not a legislative requirement.	○	○	○	○

Q6. An important role of local government is to determine the service priorities of its community. Councils need a robust community, corporate and strategic planning process that links to their long term financial planning to help them make decisions about what scale and scope of services to deliver. This integrated planning approach already is or will soon be required in all jurisdictions in Australia.

To what extent does your Council undertake some sort of integrated planning?

Not yet using this approach	Just started using this approach	Been using this approach for some time
○	○	○

Q7. On a scale from 1 - 5 where 1 = not at all well and 5 = very well -

How well does your Council understand how an integrated planning approach will help it to:

	Not at all well (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very well (5)
Understand community needs and aspirations	○	○	○	○	○
Assess the full cost of delivering different levels of services including services that may be delivered on behalf of other agencies	○	○	○	○	○
Choose what mix of services to deliver	○	○	○	○	○
Manage community expectations	○	○	○	○	○
Manage the expectations of other tiers of government	○	○	○	○	○

Q8. To what extent does your Council need practical integrated planning tools or frameworks tailored for the circumstances of rural-remote and Indigenous councils?

○   Not needed as they already exist for our use

○   These don't exist but may be helpful

○   These don't exist so are most definitely needed

Q9a. Social media involves the use of web-based and mobile technologies for interactive communication. Its use is growing rapidly and today some Councils are using it as a tool to engage with their communities.

Does your Council:

	Yes	Being considered or developed	No
Have a social media policy or strategy.	○	○	○
Use social media to communicate with its constituents	○	○	○

Q9b. What forms of social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs etc) is your Council using? (Please write your response in the box below)

Q9c.   For what purpose/s is your Council using each form of social media?
(Please write your response in the box below)

C. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES

Q10a. To what extent do the following things pose a challenge to your Council in undertaking community engagement?

	Not a challenge	A minor challenge	A moderate challenge	A major challenge
Cost – not enough funds available for this work	○	○	○	○
Adequately skilled staff to do this work	○	○	○	○
Having appropriate support systems available inside Council to do this work	○	○	○	○
Level of knowledge or understanding of when Council should engage the community	○	○	○	○
Level of knowledge or understanding of who Council should engage with.	○	○	○	○
Level of knowledge or understanding of different ways to engage the community especially hard to engage members.	○	○	○	○
Staff resistance or a lack of confidence in trying new or less conventional engagement methods.	○	○	○	○
Technology and telecommunications available for doing this work in remote communities	○	○	○	○
Awareness of where to access suitable material resources to help plan and implement community engagement activities	○	○	○	○
Poor Council-community relationships especially with Aboriginal communities	○	○	○	○
Community resistance – disinterest, scepticism or cynicism	○	○	○	○
Cultural awareness or understanding by staff	○	○	○	○
Language barriers	○	○	○	○
An expectation of remuneration by community members for their involvement	○	○	○	○
Participation fatigue – some community groups (e.g. Aboriginal groups) over consulted	○	○	○	○
Literacy skills of some parts of the community	○	○	○	○
Distance or remoteness of some communities	○	○	○	○
Low community expectations for Council to engage	○	○	○	○
Community understanding of Council's role - the purpose and limits of engagement	○	○	○	○

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Council concern about managing divergent community views	○	○	○	○
Competing Council priorities	○	○	○	○
Fear of raising community expectations	○	○	○	○
Past community engagement failures	○	○	○	○
No compulsion (legislation) to engage the community	○	○	○	○
Community engagement not viewed as 'core business' by the senior management team	○	○	○	○
Community engagement not viewed as 'core business' by the elected Council	○	○	○	○

Q10b. **Are there any other factors not listed above that make it particularly difficult for your Council to engage its community?**
If so, please list these in the box below.

>

Q11. **As a rural-remote or Indigenous Council, does your Council have any unique challenges (internal or external) in using or wanting to use social media to engage the community that other urban or larger regional Councils may not encounter?**
(Please write your response in the box below)

>

D. SHARING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCES

Q12a. **Are there any examples of community engagement approaches that have WORKED REALLY WELL for your Council that you can share with other Councils. Please describe these below.**

>

Q12b. **Are there any examples of community engagement approaches that have NOT WORKED very well for your Council that you can share with other Councils. Please describe these below.**

>

Q12c. **If required, would your Council be prepared to provide us with more detailed information about these examples so we could to write up a case study that could be placed on a sector wide online portal for sharing knowledge and experience with other Councils?**

YES   NO

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IF YES please provide the contact details of an appropriate person in your Council who we could contact for this purpose - person's name, Council name, email, telephone.
 (Please note: to ensure confidentiality these details will be separated from the other survey responses once processed.)

E. IMPROVING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES

Q13a. On a scale from 1-5 where 1 = Little or no use to 5 = Very useful -
Please indicate the extent to which your Council would find the following options to be useful strategies for supporting and improving community engagement by your organisation.

	Little or no use (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very useful (5)
Induction of new staff on community engagement, cultural awareness and communication	○	○	○	○	○
Staff training and development on different community engagement approaches	○	○	○	○	○
Cultural awareness training for elected members and Council staff	○	○	○	○	○
Training on building relationships with Indigenous communities	○	○	○	○	○
An education program on the role of community engagement in good governance and Council decision-making	○	○	○	○	○
Community education program on their role in community engagement (including what Councils should consult them about and the role of local boards or advisory groups)	○	○	○	○	○
A sector wide interactive online portal for rural-remote and Indigenous Councils to share community engagement ideas, experiences and issues.	○	○	○	○	○
A material resource guide on how to integrate community engagement outcomes in Council planning and decision-making.	○	○	○	○	○
A mentoring program between rural-remote and Indigenous Councils and larger experienced Councils with effective community engagement practices	○	○	○	○	○
Identifying opportunities for resource sharing by groups of Councils to do community engagement work	○	○	○	○	○
Specialised rural-remote and Indigenous Council regional forums for sharing community engagement issues and practices	○	○	○	○	○

Q13b.   Do you have any other practical suggestions on what can be done to help rural-remote and Indigenous Councils improve their community engagement practices?

Q14.   What role do you think ACELG (Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government) could play to help rural-remote and Indigenous Councils build their capacity to improve the level, quality and effectiveness of their community engagement?

Appendix 6 – Supporting tables for the online survey responses

Table 1: Internal community engagement policies and systems

Current practices – Council has ...	Yes	Being considered or developed	No	Total responses
A formal community engagement policy or strategy document	53.5%	32.6%	14.0%	43
A community engagement guide, handbook or process that staff use to plan and implement community engagement activities	25.6%	30.2%	44.2%	43
Designated staff or formal roles and responsibilities for managing its community engagement activities	58.1%	4.7%	37.2%	43
Allocated funding in its budget for community engagement activities	65.1%	11.6%	23.3%	43
A procedure for evaluating the effectiveness of its community engagement activities	23.3%	30.2%	46.5%	43
A process for telling the community how their input influenced a Council decision	32.6%	18.6%	48.8%	43
Opportunities for staff training and professional development in community engagement	41.9%	25.6%	32.6%	43

Table 2: Levels of community engagement undertaken

Community engagement activities - (n = 43) How often does your Council	Rarely or never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Frequently (3)	Very frequently (4)	Mean rating	St dev.
Provide the community with information about Council plans, services, activities or decisions	2.3%	14.0%	55.8%	27.9%	3.09	.718
Seek community feedback on existing policies, programs, activities or Council decisions	7.0%	39.5%	44.2%	9.3%	2.56	.765
Provide opportunities for the community to raise concerns or identify their aspirations	2.3%	37.2%	46.5%	14.0%	2.72	.734
Provide opportunities for the community to actively help identify and evaluate Council policy, program or service options or solutions to problems	20.9%	44.2%	27.9%	7.0%	2.21	.861
Provide opportunities for the community to help choose the best option or solution for a Council policy, program or service	25.6%	55.8%	16.3%	2.3%	1.95	.722
Engage your community on issues or matters where community consultation is not a legislative requirement	9.3%	53.5%	32.6%	4.7%	2.33	.715

Table 3: Rural-remote and indigenous local government use of integrated planning

An important role of local government is to determine the service priorities of its community. Councils need a robust community, corporate and strategic planning process that links to their long term financial planning to help them make decisions about what scale and scope of service to deliver. This integrated planning approach is already or soon will be required in all jurisdictions in Australia.

To what extent does your Council undertake some sort of integrate planning?

Response	Frequency (n = 43)	Percentage
Not yet using this approach	7	16.3%
Just started using this approach	25	58.1%
Been using this approach for some time	11	25.6%

Table 4: Understanding of how integrated planning can help councils

Understanding of how an integrated planning approach can help your Council (n = 43)	Not at all well (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very well (5)	Mean rating	St dev.
Understand community needs and aspirations	7.0%	11.6%	32.6%	23.3%	25.6%	3.49	1.20
Assess the full cost of delivering different levels of services including services that may be delivered on behalf of other agencies	9.3%	20.9%	30.2%	30.2%	9.3%	3.09	1.13
Choose what mix of services to deliver	11.6%	23.3%	27.9%	30.2%	7.0%	2.98	1.14
Manage community expectations	4.7%	23.3%	30.2%	30.2%	11.6%	3.21	1.08
Manage the expectations of other tiers of government	14.0%	25.6%	30.2%	20.9%	9.3%	2.86	1.19

Table 5: Need for tailored integrated planning tools and frameworks

To what extent does your Council need practical integrated planning tools and frameworks tailored to the circumstances of rural-remote and Indigenous Councils?

Response	Frequency (n = 43)	Percentage
Not needed as they already exist	12	27.9%
These don't exist but may be helpful	14	32.6%
These don't exist so are most definitely needed	17	39.5%

Table 6: Social media

Does your Council ... (n = 43)	Yes	Being considered or developed	No
Have a social media policy or strategy	18.6%	34.9%	46.5%
Use social media to communicate with its constituents	30.2%	20.9%	48.8%

Table 7: Challenges to rural-remote and Indigenous local government community engagement

Challenges to community engagement (n = 42)	Not a challenge (1)	A minor challenge (2)	A moderate challenge (3)	A major challenge (4)	Mean rating	St dev.
Having appropriate support systems available inside the Council to do this work	4.8%	16.7%	45.2%	33.3%	3.07	.838
Cost – not enough funds available for this work	9.5%	14.3%	38.1%	38.1%	3.05	.962
Adequately skilled staff to do this work	9.5%	14.3%	40.5%	35.7%	3.02	.950
Participation fatigue – some community groups (e.g. Aboriginal groups) over consulted	7.1%	21.4%	33.3%	38.1%	3.02	.950
Community resistance – disinterest, scepticism or cynicism	7.1%	14.3%	50.0%	28.6%	3.00	.855
Competing Council priorities	2.4%	28.6%	40.5%	28.6%	2.95	.825
Community understanding of Council's role – the purpose and limits of engagement	9.5%	23.8%	42.9%	23.8%	2.81	.917
Fear of raising community expectations	4.8%	38.1%	31.0%	26.2%	2.79	.898
Literacy skills of some parts of the community	0.0%	47.6%	28.6%	23.8%	2.76	.821
Technology and telecommunications available for doing this work in remote communities	9.5%	35.7%	28.6%	26.2%	2.71	.970
Level of knowledge or understanding of different ways to engage the community especially hard to engage members	14.3%	31.0%	31.0%	23.8%	2.64	1.008
Distance or remoteness of some communities	21.4%	28.6%	21.4%	28.6%	2.57	1.129
Past community engagement failures	11.9%	42.9%	28.6%	16.7%	2.50	.917
Awareness of where to access suitable material resources to help plan and implement community engagement activities	11.9%	47.6%	23.8%	16.7%	2.45	.916
Level of knowledge or understanding of when Council should engage the community	16.7%	33.3%	42.9%	7.1%	2.40	.857

Challenges to community engagement (n = 42)	Not a challenge (1)	A minor challenge (2)	A moderate challenge (3)	A major challenge (4)	Mean rating	St dev.
Low community expectations for Council to engage	11.9%	42.9%	35.7%	9.5%	2.43	.831
Council concern about managing divergent community views	4.8%	57.1%	28.6%	9.5%	2.43	.737
Staff resistance or a lack of confidence in trying new or less conventional engagement methods	21.4%	33.3%	31.0%	14.3%	2.38	.987
An expectation of remuneration by community members for their involvement	31.0%	31.0%	14.3%	23.8%	2.31	1.158
Poor Council-community relationships especially with Aboriginal communities	31.0%	26.2%	31.0%	11.9%	2.24	1.031
Level of knowledge or understanding of who Council should engage with	31.0%	26.2%	35.7%	7.1%	2.19	.969
Cultural awareness or understanding by staff	19.0%	45.2%	33.3%	2.4%	2.19	.773
Language barriers	33.3%	42.9%	21.4%	2.4%	1.93	.808
Community engagement is not viewed as 'core business' by the elected Council	42.9%	33.3%	19.0%	4.8%	1.86	.899
No compulsion (legislation) to engage the community	38.1%	52.4%	4.8%	4.8%	1.76	.759
Community engagement is not viewed as 'core business' by the senior management team	57.1%	26.2%	16.7%	0.0%	1.60	.767

Table 8:   Support for improving rural-remote and Indigenous local government community engagement

Usefulness of options for improving community engagement practices (n = 38)	Little or no use (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very useful (5)	Mean rating	St dev.
Staff training and development on different community engagement approaches	2.6%	5.3%	21.1%	28.9%	42.1%	4.03	1.052
Community education program on their role in community engagement (including what Councils should consult them about and the role of local boards or advisory groups)	5.3%	7.9%	23.7%	28.9%	34.2%	3.79	1.166
An education program on the role of community engagement in good governance and Council decision-making	7.9%	5.3%	18.4%	39.5%	28.9%	3.76	1.173
A material resource guide on how to integrate	7.9%	2.6%	26.3%	39.5%	23.7%	3.68	1.118

Usefulness of options for improving community engagement practices (n = 38)	Little or no use (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very useful (5)	Mean rating	St dev.
community engagement outcomes in Council planning and decision-making							
Cultural awareness training of elected members and staff	10.5%	7.9%	18.4%	28.9%	34.2%	3.68	1.317
Induction of new staff on community engagement, cultural awareness and communication	5.3%	15.8%	23.7%	18.4%	36.8%	3.66	1.279
Specialised rural-remote ad Indigenous Council regional forums for sharing community engagement issues and practice	2.6%	7.9%	36.8%	26.3%	26.3%	3.66	1.047
A sector wide interactive online portal for rural-remote and Indigenous councils to share community engagement ideas, experiences and issues	5.3%	15.8%	23.7%	28.9%	26.3%	3.55	1.201
Identifying opportunities for resource sharing by groups of Councils to do community engagement work	7.9%	10.5%	21.1%	42.1%	18.4%	3.53	1.156
Training on building relationships with Indigenous communities	15.8%	13.2%	15.8%	26.3%	28.9%	3.39	1.443
A mentoring program between rural-remote and Indigenous Councils and larger experienced Councils with effective community engagement practices	10.5%	21.1%	21.1%	23.7%	23.7%	3.29	1.334

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ABOUT ACELG

ACELG is a unique consortium of universities and professional bodies that have a strong commitment to the advancement of local government. The consortium is based at the University of Technology, Sydney, and includes the UTS Centre for Local Government, the University of Canberra, the Australia and New Zealand School of Government, Local Government Managers Australia and the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia. In addition, the Centre works with program partners to provide support in specialist areas and extend the Centre's national reach. These include Charles Darwin University and Edith Cowan University.

PROGRAM DELIVERY

ACELG's activities are grouped into six program areas:

- Research and Policy Foresight
- Innovation and Best Practice
- Governance and Strategic Leadership
- Organisation Capacity Building
- Rural-Remote and Indigenous Local Government
- Workforce Development

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