Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)
Whole of Community Engagement Initiative

COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Background

The Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) - Whole-of-Community Engagement (WCE) initiative is funded by the Australian Government. WCE is led through the Office of Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University (CDU) in partnership with North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance Ltd (NAILSMA), NT Department of Education (DoE), Batchelor Institute (BI) and the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges in Education (ACIKE).

WCE aims to engage up to six selected remote and very remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory to build aspiration, expectation and capacity to participate in higher education. This will be conducted as a multi-site participatory action research project (and ethics approval has been obtained through CDU Human Research Ethics Committee).

The participating communities include:
- Yirrkala
- Galiwinku
- Maningrida
- Gunbalanya
- Tennant Creek
- Yuendumu

These communities were identified using a number of selection criteria related to educational outcomes, partner interest and engagement, existing infrastructure and community interest and readiness.

It is recognised that a whole of community engagement initiative such as WCE, particularly given the nature of working in remote and very remote Indigenous contexts, can be complex and involve a combination of different approaches. For this reason, it is important to have an agreed set of principles and actions that underpin the ways in which all stakeholders communicate and engage with each other at all stages throughout the WCE initiative. This strategy is to be used as a reference document by all WCE stakeholders.

There are a range of communication and engagement issues to consider as part of the WCE initiative. The purpose of this Communication and Engagement Strategy is to:
1. Identify the most likely communication approaches;
2. Outline key communication and engagement principles and actions that will be used during the planning, implementation and evaluation of the WCE initiative;
3. Explain the development of WCE community engagement models;
4. Explain the way that key individuals and organisational stakeholders have been identified; and
5. Describe indicative communication and engagement strategies with key stakeholder groups through WCE

6. Describe the different communication principles and preferred communication processes between the WCE team members.

1. Communication Approaches

It is recognised that a range of oral and written communication approaches will be used throughout the WCE initiative. Some of these will support strategic decision-making. Some will support day-to-day operational functions. Others will support research activities. The list below is indicative of the likely communication approaches to be adopted:

- Individual meetings (e.g. face-to-face discussions, interviews)
- Group meetings (e.g. community meetings/workshops, yarning sessions, Steering Group meetings, story-telling, focus groups, monthly WCE team meetings)
- Phone conversations and/or teleconferences
- Videoconferencing (e.g. Skype, Blackboard, WebEx, Facetime)
- Written correspondence (e.g. service agreements, MOUs, project plans, partnership plans, briefs, letters, emails)
- Group forums (e.g. wiki, wordpress blogs)
- Formal reporting (e.g. project status reporting, progress reporting, evaluation reporting)
- Social media use and engagement (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Linkedin)
- Audio and visual media (e.g. photographs, recordings)
- Research tools (e.g. surveys, diaries, observational techniques)
- Artwork (e.g. paintings)
- Songs
- Dance
- Academic writing and presentations (e.g. research papers, conference presentations, other research translation activities)

2. Communication Principles and Actions

A WCE Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Workshop was held on 29 September 2014, which involved 25+ key stakeholders. This included representatives from partner organisations, various Faculty representatives from across CDU and WCE staff. Two key activities undertaken during this workshop included (a) the review of draft communication principles and development of underpinning communication actions; and (b) a community stakeholder mapping exercise. Other issues to arise out of the workshop discussions included the need to carefully manage stakeholder expectations; striking a balance between practical outcomes and systemic influence; ensuring bottom-up approaches that support and respect community decision-making; and understanding learner beliefs and concepts about education.

All communication (external and internal) will be:

- **Thoughtful –** this will involve adopting a consultative and strengths-based approach; communication will be timely, consistent and regular.
- **Genuine –** this will involve taking time to establish relationships with community leaders and families that are built on trust and respect; expectations will be carefully managed; communication will be community focused, inclusive and transparent.
- **Meaningful –** this will involve clear and concise messaging (not too academic); with the support of community leaders communication will be delivered in local language, wherever possible.

- **Ethically appropriate –** this will involve a commitment to community engagement and decision-making that is guided by national and global Indigenous ethical frameworks; this also involves acknowledgement and ownership of intellectual property.
- **Culturally respectful (in both approach and delivery) –** this will involve an awareness of matriarchal and patriarchal decision-making processes, which will ensure responsiveness to local cultural practices; community leaders will be adequately remunerated for sharing and contributing Indigenous knowledges.
- **Participatory –** this will involve project partners working collaboratively ('with' not 'on' or 'about') to enhance a sense of ownership and minimise feelings of disempowerment; this will ensure that outcomes are directed by, and benefit, the local community
- **Considerate of, and responsive to, first languages –** this will involve honouring primary/first languages; the use of trained interpreters will also be supported.
- **Underpinned by two-way learning approaches** – this will involve engaging with both Indigenous and Mainstream/Western (academic) knowledge systems equally, with a view of supporting the co-creation of knowledge and aspiration development.

Communication between WCE team members will also carry the above communication principles. It will be detailed in section 6.

3. Developing Community Engagement Models

Community engagement can mean different things to different people. Invariably this relates to different strategies or mechanisms of engagement – e.g. to inform, consult, involve and collaborate. In the spirit of partnership, the WCE initiative has adopted the general definitions used by BI. These include:

Inform – To provide the community with appropriate information to keep them informed.

Consult – To capture community input to guide planning and future directions (e.g. strategic directions, issues, policies, priorities and projects).

Involve – To work on an ongoing basis with the community to ensure that community ideas, concerns and aspirations are listened to, understood, and where possible incorporated into decision making processes.

Collaborate – To place the final decision-making in the hands of the community, where possible.

We acknowledge that there are a variety of community engagement models already in existence. The WCE team does not intend to reinvent, duplicate or recreate existing models. Rather we want to learn from, and build upon, such approaches. Yet, we also recognise the need for community engagement processes that are sufficiently flexible to meet the diverse needs of different remote and very remote Indigenous community contexts. To support our thinking in this space, we have been reviewing literature about community engagement (particularly in Indigenous education contexts) and seeking advice on different community engagement models recently used in remote education contexts across the NT. We are committed to using the *Brisbane Declaration - United Nations Declaration on Community Engagement* (2005) as an international exemplar for conceptualising community engagement. The nine-step *Community Engagement Approach* adopted by the Community Engagement team within the Department of Education has also been a useful guide. Likewise, the *Cultures of Collaboration* model formally adopted through the Centre for School Leadership at CDU in partnership with the NT Department of Education has been an equally useful guide.

Whole of Community Engagement Initiative

The WCE team has agreed that community engagement models for this initiative need to be bottom-up, reflect a both-ways learning model, and be interactive in their design and function. Work is currently underway to document and refine the proposed community engagement model/s across WCE sites throughout the establishment phase of the initiative. Initial community consultations have marked the beginning of this process, negotiated with key cultural authorities within each of the community settings.

We recognise that effective community engagement is central to the WCE initiative. We invested in this concept by establishing three Community Engagement Leader positions as part of the initiative. These roles work alongside other WCE staff and a range of community-based stakeholders, such as Indigenous leaders, families and service providers. These roles also involve working with stakeholders who influence educational opportunities and outcomes, or can support building further education pathways, within each community. WCE is premised on education being a community endeavour. It is not just about the school education goes beyond the business of the School, involving broader range of actors and agencies. That is, it involves a range of individual and organisational stakeholders both within and outside of the education system. Identification of key stakeholders is an essential first step to achieving effective community engagement.

4. Identification of, and relationship building with, stakeholders

During the formative stages of the WCE initiative, WCE staff are expected to identify and build relationships with local and organisational stakeholders, including those identified in the six remote Indigenous communities.   To document this process, the WCE staff will undertake comprehensive stakeholder and network mapping tasks, enabling analyses of relationship building and shifts in relationships. Stakeholder and networking mapping processes will be undertaken at key intervals throughout the duration of the WCE initiative. This will assist WCE staff to strengthen existing relationships, build and participate in relevant networks, and identify and address stakeholder relationships that hold tension. This will provide greater support to enable collaboration and partnership development.

5. Indicative communication and engagement between groups of stakeholders

Communication and engagement between project partners

- Formal partnership agreements will be established between CDU and each project partner.
- A Steering Group consisting of a representative from each partner organisation will meet at least quarterly to discuss and guide progress. This group will also include nominated community-based representatives.
- There is regular written and verbal communication between WCE initiative partners.
- There is a commitment to open and frequent communication.

Communication and engagement between WCE team members

- A joint WCE team induction facilitated in September 2014,
- The current communication and engagement strategy then has been reviewed in March 2015 and October 2015 with the WCE campus-based members.
- All WCE staff members are to meet together via teleconference or in person on a monthly basis.

- WCE regional teams and individual staff to meet with the Program Manager on a fortnightly basis.
- Community Engagement Leaders are encouraged to meet regularly.
- Mentor and Enrichment Officers are encouraged to meet regularly.
- WCE team members are encouraged to meet regularly about specific projects
- WCE team members are encouraged to meet face to face to solve any arising dilemma and to respect the agreed communication principles before talking to the Program Manager
- WCE staff to act as the primary conduit with remote/very remote Indigenous staff employed through the initiative (e.g. researchers/leaders/mentors/interpreters).
- Face-to-face team forums planned and held at least every six months.

Communication and engagement with internal stakeholders within CDU
- WCE staff meet regularly with internal stakeholders on a frequent basis. This includes representatives from various areas of the University such as Faculties and Schools, the Northern Institute (NI), Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods (RIEL), Centre for School Leadership (CSL), Menzies School of Health Research (MSHR), Office of Research and Innovation (ORI), Media Advancement and Community Engagement (MACE), Research Centre for Health and Wellbeing (RCHW), among others.
- Formal Service Agreements established with the School of Health and RIEL. These will support evaluation, research and program functions and deliverables associated with WCE.
- WCE staff, where appropriate, to be nominated to attend CDU-wide committees and forums – e.g. School Engagement Committee.
- WCE staff to communicate through existing internal governance structures, such as Faculty Research and Research Training Committees, Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees and Faculty Executive Groups.

Communication and engagement with external stakeholders
- WCE staff to work with stakeholders external to the University.
- WCE staff to present at relevant conferences and contribute research outputs associated with the initiative as a research translation endeavour.

As the initiative unfolds, it is envisaged that additional external collaborators will be identified and engaged to support the achievement of objectives of the initiative.

Communication and engagement with remote and very remote Indigenous community-based stakeholders and staff
- WCE staff to engage a range of Indigenous leaders, families and service providers prior to, during, and post community-visits.
- WCE staff to visit each participating community at least once per month, based on community needs, expectations and preferences.
- WCE staff to commit to a two-way learning approach in all community interactions. This includes a commitment to engaging in Participatory Action Research (PAR) approaches in accordance with respective ethics clearances.
- WCE staff to develop community partnership agreements in consultation with key community stakeholders. This will outline preferred communication and decision-making mechanisms and strategies (e.g. Community Reference Group).
- WCE staff to acknowledge that local Indigenous people are the custodians of Indigenous knowledges and practices in their community and bring with them unique

understandings and research contributions. It is expected that local Indigenous leaders/researchers/mentors will be employed on a casual and/or part-time basis to achieve WCE objectives; and that WCE staff will implement research methodologies and approaches that value and recognise Indigenous knowledges and perspectives.

- WCE staff to record meetings and/or engage qualified interpreters to support communication in local language when, or wherever, deemed necessary.

Note: the examples provided above are indicative only. The WCE team acknowledges that additional communication and engagement practices will be used throughout the initiative.

6. WCE Internal communication principles and communication process within the WCE team (campus-based and community-based staff)

Following the review of the communication and engagement strategy document in March and October 2015 with WCE campus-based staff, it was agreed that all communication between WCE team members will follow the principals initially agreed for the overall WCE initiative which are, as follow:

- **Thoughtful –** this will involve adopting a consultative and strengths-based approach; communication will be timely, consistent and regular.
- **Genuine –** this will involve taking time to establish relationships with team members that are built on trust and respect; expectations will be carefully managed; communication will be team and project focused, inclusive and transparent.
- **Meaningful –** this will involve clear, constructive and concise messaging
- **Ethically appropriate –** this will involve a constructive and positive-based approach as well as respectful.
- **Culturally respectful (in both approach and delivery) –** this will involve an awareness of matriarchal and patriarchal decision-making processes, which will ensure responsiveness to local cultural practices; and also understand of the WCE team multi-cultural structure at the local, national and international level.
- **Participatory –** this will involve team members working collaboratively ('with' not 'on' or 'about') to enhance a sense of ownership and towards a team work and inputs.
- **Considerate of, and responsive to, first languages –** this will involve honouring primary/first languages; and be aware of assumptions or interpretations of non-English native speaker's communications and messages (emails, phone or any other ways).
- **Underpinned by two-way learning approaches** – this will involve engaging with both Indigenous and Mainstream/Western (academic) knowledge systems equally, with a view of supporting the co-creation of knowledge and aspiration development.