



Pre-Budget Submission 2021-2022

Submission by First Nations Media Australia to the Australian Treasury

29 January 2021

“For every dollar invested in First Nations broadcasting and media, \$2.87 of cultural, social and economic value is returned.”

– Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – A Community Asset*, 2017

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Introduction

About First Nations Media Australia

First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) is the peak body for Indigenous media and First Nations Media Australia is the peak body for Indigenous media and communications. FNMA supports and amplifies the First Nations media sector and its objectives. Our purpose is empowering Australia's First Nations people through our culturally connected media industry. Our activities include resource and policy development, skills development, networking events and meetings, content-sharing, promotion, regular communications, annual awards, research activities and representation. As part of its industry leadership role, FNMA seeks to ensure First Nations communities have access to information required to make informed decisions. The crossover of infrastructure, digital literacy and access to information between telecommunications and media is significant. Therefore, First Nations Media Australia advocates for the digital inclusion and connectivity needs of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As at January 2021 our membership includes 64 organisations and 163 individuals working in or alongside the industry as broadcasters, freelance journalists, photographers, filmmakers and allies.

About the First Nations broadcasting and media sector

First Nations broadcasters are not-for-profit community organisations providing a primary and essential service to their communities. The sector is based in local communities and employs local people as broadcasters and media producers. It is a local and trusted voice, attracting listeners who want to hear about their own communities, in their own language, sharing positive Indigenous stories.¹ Social Ventures Australia found that strengthening First Nations broadcasting strengthens community through communication, culture and employment. For this reason, First Nations broadcasting returns an average \$2.87 in social outcomes for every \$1 invested, with many organisations returning a rate much higher than this nearly 3:1 average ratio.² The communications sector provides enabling services to support opportunities and outcomes in service sectors, such as health and education, and promotes inclusiveness and participation.³

A strong First Nations owned media industry enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to **access to relevant news, information services and emergency**

¹ *ibid.*

² Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

³ Department of Communications and the Arts, *The Communications Sector: recent trends and developments*, Bureau of Communications Research, Commonwealth Government, Canberra, October 2016

warnings and to actively participate in the appropriate delivery of media and information services for their communities. In the remote context, First Nations media is the most reliable and ubiquitous radio and media service available to audiences. The sector reaches significant audience share with 91% of people in remote Indigenous communities being regular listeners to radio services and watching ICTV at least once per month.⁴

First Nations channels offer a wide range of programming, including news and current affairs reporting from a First Nations perspective, in over 25 languages nationally through the following formats:

Radio

The First Nations radio sector comprises 28 urban and regional radio services, 8 remote media organisations servicing 138 remote communities. These radio services are community-owned, not-for-profit organisations who collectively reach around 320,000 First Nations people, including around 100,000 very hard to reach people in remote Indigenous communities, or approximately 48% of the First Nations population. They broadcast live shows, plus interviews, radio documentaries, news, emergency information, community events, government and other messaging within community broadcasting guidelines through these platforms:

- 157 stations broadcasting on FM
- 4 stations broadcasting on AM
- 13 broadcasting via VAST satellite, in addition to FM services.
- 5 metropolitan services broadcasting via DAB+, in addition to FM services in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and Darwin.
- Almost all offer online streaming via a dedicated station website.
- Many offer on-demand content either through the station's own website, or Soundcloud or podcast sites.
- 26 stations can be streamed via the indigiTUBE website and app. Some stations also have their own application or use the TuneIn or iHeartRadio apps to reach audiences.

Screen

First Nations media workers produce cultural and language-based content for broadcast & online distribution. Television distribution is primarily through a regional satellite television service reaching 240,000 remote households (ICTV) and a free to air national TV service (NITV), as well as local TV services (Goolarri TV at Broome, Larrakia TV at Darwin).

Print & Online

In addition, the sector publishes print media including Koori Mail and the National Indigenous Times, online news sites such as IndigenousX. The industry has a strong

⁴ McNair yellowSquares, *Indigenous Communications and Media Survey*, 2016

web presence with First Nations broadcasters publishing content on social media daily. Plus indigiTUBE, a dedicated online platform showcasing aggregated content complimented by an app, each of which streams 25 radio services.

First Nations broadcasting and media provide a voice for their communities. They are uniquely placed to hear and share communities' strengths, priorities and concerns. In providing news and information to a community, they provide the community with the information they need.⁵

⁵ <https://www.irca.net.au/about/social-value-study-2017>

Summary of Budget Request

This budget submission seeks funds to grow the sector's capacity to serve our audiences, grow our audiences, deliver excellent social return on investment outcomes and increase financial sustainability.

On behalf of the First Nations media sector, First Nations Media Australia requests that the Commonwealth support the sector's objectives to:

1. Respond to market gaps in communication services
2. Increase jobs and skills
3. Improve the capacity and sustainability of our industry
4. Preserve culture and language

1	Respond to market gaps	
	Strengthen news services	\$1m per annum
	COVID-19 emergency financial relief	\$4.3m
	Contingency funding for extreme events	\$0.5m per annum
	Expanding local media services	\$3m per annum
2	Increase jobs & skills	
	Expanding training programs	\$1.3m per annum
	Grow employment opportunities	\$4.4m per annum
	Align Award wages	\$2.2m per annum
3	Improve sustainability in the media industry	\$8m per annum
	Urgent infrastructure upgrades	\$2m
4	Preserve culture & languages	
	Digital archiving	\$2.5m per annum for 3 years
	Content production	\$2m per annum
	TOTAL BUDGET REQUEST:	
	2021-22	\$31.2m
	2022-23	\$24.9m
	2023-24	\$24.9m
	2024-25	\$24.9m
	2025-ongoing	\$22.4m

Budget Item Details

1. Respond to Market Gaps in Communications Services

The role that First Nations media organisations perform in the delivery of essential information cannot be overestimated. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasters translate and relay key information in languages that are accessible to communities around the country every day.

First Nations media organisations address a market gap through providing essential information to many remote communities not serviced by any other form of media. This includes the dissemination of vital emergency, health and government information. In 82 regions across the country, First Nations radio is the only radio service available. In a further 16 locations, First Nations radio is the only local service available, in addition to ABC services retransmitted from other regions. Indigenous Australians have relatively low digital inclusion and it has not improved in recent years. The digital inclusion gap between Indigenous Australians and other Australians is evident across access, affordability and digital ability considerations. In 2020, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index score for Indigenous Australians is 55.1, a total 7.9 points below the national average with affordability being a key barrier.⁶

More than 2.5 million Australians remain offline.⁷ This includes 24.7% of Indigenous Australian households who do not access the internet from home, compared with the national average of 14.7%. Levels of home internet access for Indigenous Australian households diminish further with remoteness, with up to 45.2% of households in remote and very remote locations unable to access the internet⁸. In this context, First Nations media is the primary information source for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences in many remote communities.

First Nations media exists due to the failure of mainstream media to adequately reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in news and public discourse. First Nations communities were first granted community broadcast licenses in the 1970s and 1980s as a policy response to the lack of opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have their voices heard in media outlets.

This imbalance in participation in the media still permeates Australia's media landscape today. First Nations broadcasting and media has a vital role in providing balanced and culturally appropriate reporting in order to promote awareness and understanding among non-Indigenous Australians, participate in the truth-telling

⁶ Roy Morgan, Centre for Social Impact – Swinburne University & RMIT University, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide – The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2020*, Telstra, November 2020.

⁷ Roy Morgan, Centre for Social Impact – Swinburne University & RMIT University, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide – The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2020*, Telstra, November 2020.

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2016*

process, encourage participation in democratic processes and promote reconciliation. First Nations news reporting is public interest journalism.

In 2021-22, the First Nations media sector requests funding to enable adequate responses to:

- the retraction of public interest journalism;
- increasing requirements for public health messaging, in particular relating to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- localized responses to increasing extreme weather events (fires, floods, cyclones); and
- First Nations contributions to national events such as the upcoming Census 2021 and consultations on an Indigenous Voice.

Strengthening News Services

First Nations media organisations are the primary providers of First Nations news and current affairs to their communities and are the key providers of mainstream news and current affairs to their communities in forms that are appropriate and relevant. First Nations media is the preferred channel for receiving news and government messaging as it transgresses language and cultural barriers to connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences in a way that resonates in their local setting. No other media outlet provides news services in Indigenous languages.

Meanwhile, 32 per cent of the general community cites the media as their main source of information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.⁹ Yet all too often the information reported is unbalanced in a negative way, misinformed and/or excludes First Nations perspectives. The Australian Press Council, with regards to its Advisory Guideline on Reporting of Race noted that, *"The Australian Press Council often receives complaints about the reporting of the race, colour, ethnicity and nationality of individuals or groups, and these raise important questions about the responsibility of the press in our multicultural society. ... In the Council's view, in general, the press needs to show more sensitivity in reporting issues when minority groups are perceived in the community to be more "different" or when they are the subject of particular public debate."*¹⁰

Recent research undertaken by the ACMA shows a tendency for news consumers more generally to avoid news due to perceptions of news sources being depressing, over-dramatised, untrustworthy, irrelevant and/or repetitive.¹¹ These are troubling findings from a community engagement perspective and highlights a need to counter this trend with the availability of more balanced and independent news sources.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Australia Press Council, *Guideline: Reporting of Race*, September 2001

¹¹ ACMA, *News in Australia: Diversity and Localism*, Australian Government, December 2020

First Nations media services counter the lack of balance in mainstream media outlets when reporting on matters relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While they do report challenges and negative stories, they also take pride in reporting successes and in doing so showcase examples of good news within First Nations communities. Seventy-seven per cent of surveyed listeners indicating their primary reason for listening to First Nations radio was to hear positive stories on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹² The result is high levels of audience engagement.

The closure of over 157 newsrooms in the past 2 years¹³ has made creating opportunities for regional journalism all the more important. While social media platforms can share information to known and adjacent networks, they do not attract the same audience consistency as radio and television media. First Nations journalists are increasingly well placed to fill this market gap and provide information of relevance to local communities alongside national headlines.

The reduction of localized news services in regional and remote Australia has been identified as a concern to Government. The First Nations media sector has needed to fill the gap in news and weather services for many remote and regional communities, as the ABC has scaled back its local news and weather coverage for these less populous areas over the past five years. First Nations Media Australia seeks to increase the news and current affairs capacity of First Nations broadcasters both to address this geographic deficit at a national level and to increase the diversity of news reported.

To achieve these aims, our sector has established a program to:

- Build regional journalism capacity and increase employment opportunities where other media outlets are withdrawing from regional areas;
- Address a market gap for regional and remote participation in our national news paradigm;
- Increase efficiencies in existing news services through collaboration;
- Provide opportunity for organisations to tailor news content as relevant to the region;
- Provide opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reporters to access and share professionally produced content, including sovereign messages and issues at a national level;
- Provide accessible information for all audiences to engage with news, as told from a First Nations perspective; and

¹² McNair yellowSquares, *Indigenous Communications and Media Survey, 2016*, <https://www.firstnationsmedia.org.au/projects/indigenous-communications-and-media-survey-2016>

¹³ Birch, Laura, *Australian media closures spark fears important local stories will not be told*, ABC, 21 May 2020 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-21/australian-community-media-closures-esperance-express-newspaper/12259734>

- Develop partnerships for the delivery of multi-platform news content (radio, television, print and online) to provide real careers for community journalists remaining in regional areas, adding value to the Government's existing investment with NITV.

The program to strengthen news services aligns with many of the submissions made to the 2017 Senate Enquiry into Public Interest Journalism. It also aligns with similar policy considerations globally. For example, the Canadian House of Commons' Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage enquiry resulted in recommendations for the Canadian Government to establish an Indigenous journalism initiative with the purpose of training Indigenous journalists to cover Indigenous government institutions and other relevant issues across Canada as part of their Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls for action implementation.¹⁴ In northern Europe, Pietikäinen identified a "Sámi Way" of doing journalism. This, she argued, was deeply entrenched in local cultural values and worldviews, in particular as Indigenous news media made it "possible to practise culturally typical ways of communication, to recognize experiences, perspectives and topics often disregarded by other media."¹⁵ Her research prompted significant increases in Indigenous journalism in Norway and Sweden with funding provided through the Samediggi Parliament. Universities in Norway are currently advertising courses to meet the rising demand for Indigenous journalism among the Sami community in Scandanavia, recognising it as a 'growing field'.¹⁶ Our news sharing program aligns directly with international policy to support minority journalism and a diversity of voices in news reporting, however it requires further journalism development within the sector to truly meet its potential.

To achieve these aims, the sector requires an allocation of funding to:

- train and mentor emerging First Nations journalists (\$200,000)
- expand access to existing news sharing software for multiplatform content (\$50,000)
- operational funding to support a network of regional journalists and manage content distribution (\$170,000)
- resources and reference materials (\$25,000)
- employment support for First Nations journalists to provide regular news reports (\$555,000 potentially drawn from Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business funds)

Total request for strengthening news services	\$1m per annum
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¹⁴ Fry, H, *Disruption: Change and Churning in Canada's Media Landscape*, Report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, House of Commons, 42nd Parliament, First Session, June 2017

¹⁵ Pietikäinen, S, *Broadcasting Indigenous Voices: Sami Minorit Media Production*, European Journal of Communications, Sage Publications, 2008 <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.869.1919&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

¹⁶ <http://samas.no/en/studier/juo-master-sami-journalism-indigenous-perspective>

COVID-19 emergency relief

The importance of localism in journalism is notable in the First Nations media space, particularly from a cultural sensitivity perspective. Increasing extreme weather events require localised responses and as we've recently learned, so does a global pandemic. In emergency situations people need to receive key message information on a large scale, but they also need to know how to respond locally with relevant information at a State, municipal and community level. When is their clinic open? What is happening with schools in their area? What roads are closed? Where are the closest shelter points? This information needs to be immediate, distributed widely, free to access and updated regularly. First Nations communities receive information in a manner that resonates with audiences, using relevant local language and trusted spokespeople through First Nations media services.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a recent demonstration of First Nations media organisations' capacity to deliver timely and relevant information. Communities turned to First Nations media services as trusted sources of information, particularly amid conflicting reports shared through social media and other networks. First Nations media organisations worked to address misinformation within the community, such as perceived connections between 5G and COVID-19.

First Nations media organisations as businesses have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in both the short and medium-term. The primary impact of the pandemic has been increasing pressure on the capacity of small teams to deliver essential information services. First Nations media organisations are an essential service for getting information to First Nations communities deemed particularly vulnerable to COVID-19-related deaths. Media organisations immediately transitioned their operations to facilitate remote broadcasting and increasing hygiene processes for workspaces to protect their teams' health. At the same time, broadcasters faced a significant increase in workload to effectively respond to rolling announcements and relay information specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences. This included a significant increase in translation requirements and a fast turn-around on information such as the closure of remote communities which was undertaken with 12 hours notice.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has been the catalyst for increased collaboration between First Nations media organisations and some community stakeholders (such as Land Councils, Government departments and health organisations), it has also meant the cancellation of broadcast events such as local football broadcasts and NAIDOC week events. Stations have lost income opportunities drawn from fundraising events which they have had to cancel and many have experienced a downturn in sponsorship revenue. These factors place increased strain on untied income and already stretched resources at many First Nations media organisations.

First Nations Media Australia notes the Commonwealth has acknowledged economic pressures relating to commercial broadcasters and responded by providing funds through the delayed Budget 2020-21 process for commercial media operators (\$48.7 million for regional print publications). While First Nations community broadcasters may be less reliant on self-generated revenue than other broadcast services, many have faced significant dips in self-generated revenue sources (sponsorship, membership, fundraising) needed to supplement Government funding support. FNMA members reported reductions of up to \$20,000 per month as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and some estimate self-generated income losses of up to \$180,000 in 2020 as a result of COVID-19. These figures do not include the additional workload required to convey timely messaging to communities over an extended period of time, plus additional equipment purchased to facilitate COVID-safe work environments for broadcasters to disseminate vital information. The cost to the sector has been huge and while we are grateful for the \$230,000 allocated across the sector through the NIAA toward these expenses, that initial emergency support provided does nearly meet the costs our members have incurred in responding to this health crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic is far from over. First Nations media organisations continue to be impacted by border restrictions, public gathering limitations and unreliable sponsorship revenue. Conversely, Government will need First Nations media organisations to inform communities about vaccine rollouts and associated health messaging through 2021-22. We ask that the Commonwealth provide emergency funding relief to First Nations media organisations impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic of \$4.3 million, an average of \$100,000 per 43 organisations and less than 10% of the funding provided to the commercial media sector.

Total request for COVID-19 emergency financial relief	\$4.3m
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Contingency funding

Some national events, such as the Census are heavily planned. Others, like the COVID-19 pandemic are unforeseen in many ways. Extreme weather events are generally unpredictable in terms of forward-budgets, but we do know that they are increasing in regularity and we need to make provisions for their inevitability. Trends in extreme weather events (cyclones, hurricanes, floods and fires) have been increasingly both globally and in Australia since the 1980s.¹⁷ First Nations media organisations have an essential role in ensuring community safety during these extreme weather events, providing emergency information relevant to local regions.

Media services themselves are not immune to the effects of extreme weather events. Cyclones regularly knock down transmitter towers, earthing equipment is

¹⁷ Climate Council of Australia, Weather Gone Wild, <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Climate-council-extreme-weather-report.pdf>, 2019

required to protect against lightning damage, sites require fire-proofing – there are a broad range of costs involved with the protection of existing infrastructure, prevention maintenance and occasionally, emergency replacement of damaged specialist infrastructure not covered by insurance policies.

Due to pressure on operational funds, First Nations media organisations are often left with significant cash-flow issues while awaiting the provision of funds in a new financial year. With no contingency funding to address equipment failure and maintenance, these needs are also being met through redirected operational funds.

Until 2015-16, the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet has previously held a contingency fund available to the First Nations media industry to apply for support throughout the year if and when emergency requirements emerge. Currently there is no capacity for media organisations to seek this type of support. FNMA requests that this fund be reinstated and managed through the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

Total request for contingency funding	\$0.5m
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Expanding local media services

Although Indigenous licensed radio services reach approximately 48 per cent of First Nations the population, there is still approximately 52 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who do not have access to a dedicated First Nations radio service. This includes some capital cities (Adelaide, Canberra and Hobart) and many major regional centres.

Links between access to culturally relevant local information through media, increased cultural pride and improved social outcomes are well-established in academic literature. We seek to provide that opportunity to people living in on the Central Coast of NSW, Dubbo, Newcastle, Tamworth, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong, the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, Canberra, Adelaide and Hobart through establishing licensed First Nations radio services in some of these regions and others. FNMA recommends the hub and spoke model currently used by Remote Indigenous Media Organisations (RIMOs) as a cost-efficient way of establishing these services, requiring resourcing of a radio studio enabling local broadcasting and regional network contributions. This model works effectively in remote locations, allows for the possibility of co-location with other community organisations and provides opportunities for local employment through the First Nations radio network footprint.

The establishment of services in Canberra, Hobart and Adelaide will require an annual investment of \$1.2million. An investment of a further \$1.8million would allow for the establishment of a further 10 services in regional areas.

Total request for expanding local services	\$3m per annum
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2. Increase job & skills

The First Nations media sector produces an effective opportunity to:

- engage youth in meaningful careers;
- address high unemployment rates in First Nations communities;
- develop job-ready skills in a range of communication industry roles;
- respond to emerging roles in a rapidly changing convergent media;
- build on the culture and language skills already held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- increase efficiency for Government and non-Government funded projects through support for coordination roles to oversee project-based activities.

First Nations media organisations are proficient in engaging and recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, providing employment opportunities in local communities and support for achieving the goals of individual people. The First Nations media industry provides a range of mechanisms for media workers to receive training, mentoring and continued professional development throughout their career such as: pathways training with local First Nations trainers, accredited training delivered by First Nations RTOs and community media partners, upskilling at industry events like the Remote Indigenous Media Festival and professional mentoring.

Communications is a growth industry and FNMA identifies significant opportunity to expand employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our sector. Feedback from the sector shows frustration with training opportunities that are not matched with employment opportunities, leading to high turnover of staff and inefficiencies through continual overseeing of trainees and entry level staff. People can access entry level training to get involved in the sector, but then often can't build and maintain sustainable careers based on insecure contract work, low pay rates, working conditions that may not meet OH&S requirements and a lack of pathways into ongoing positions. Our budget request toward jobs and skills seeks to address some of these matters through expanding training programs, meeting award wage levels and growing employment opportunities.

Expanding Training Programs

Employees in the communications sector are highly skilled, with a higher proportion of the workforce with postgraduate and Bachelor level degrees, graduate diplomas and certificates, and advanced diplomas and diplomas compared with other industries.¹⁸ The First Nations media industry offers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a culturally safe environment in which to develop 'work ready' skills and to continually upgrade those skills to define their own career paths. For this reason, we see many media workers move into communication roles in other industries, such as the mining and resources industry, politics and the public service and information technology. We also see employees develop skills within our industry and then transition to other roles in media, including becoming freelance agents or starting small businesses themselves. While the impact of this role is largely positive for communities, the media organisations receive no recognition or compensation for acting as a work-ready training hub and lose efficiencies in the continual cycle of training and replacing new staff. This is expanded further under growing employment opportunities.

The First Nations media sector currently resources 43 organisations and over 120 licensed services with between 500-600 staff, including part-time and casual employees, working in organisations in urban, regional and remote locations.¹⁹ Approximately 28 per cent of those positions are full time, with 72 per cent are part-time or casual.²⁰ There is industry desire to increase activities to a scale that would require twice the number of staff that are currently employed across the sector, but budget constraints currently prevent the training of new staff or the capacity to provide career opportunities to people who do undertake training. The Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research has developed an *Employment and Skills Development Strategy* in consultation with the sector which outlines a career development action plan, policy recommendations and assistance for First Nations media organisations to meet the IAS Indigenous employment target. It recommends investment in training and targeted employment programs such as traineeships and pathways roles in areas such as management, training, project management, production, technical and IT services.²¹

The ratio of Indigenous staff employed at First Nations media organisations is currently approx. 79 per cent. There are currently about 46 FNMOs or other organisations which are funded by NIAA for delivery of broadcasting activities, of which 22 have a non-Indigenous manager. Due to the risk associated with changing the Manager role in a small organisation, this becomes an issue for small

¹⁸ Bureau of Communications research analysis and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011), Census of Population and Housing.

¹⁹ Clague, P, *Employment and Skills Development Strategy Report*, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, December 2018

²⁰ Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

²¹ Clague, P, *Employment and Skills Development Strategy Report*, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, December 2018

organisations where total staff are often below 9 employees.²² The Jumbunna Institute reports, “A holistic approach which facilitates the development of best practice models for overcoming unemployment in Indigenous communities. Good leadership and partnerships between media organisations, stakeholders and government are factors that will significantly contribute to job readiness and the skill capacity of Indigenous peoples in the media sector.”²³

The development of management mentorship and shadowing programs would build capacity and skills in specific areas such as management, production and coordination. Many of these roles are currently filled by non-Indigenous staff, particularly in remote and regional areas, as the experience needed to fulfil these roles takes a long period of time to build. These types of jobs cannot be easily taught through courses and would be more suited to shadowing, where specific skills can be learnt on the job.

There are two First Nations RTOs operated by First Nations media organisations, Goolarri Training and 4AAA Training (run by Brisbane Indigenous Media Association). They are supplemented by strong partnerships with the Community Media Training Organisation (CMTO), Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education, the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS), Media RING, the Jawun secondment program and multiple cross-industry training relationships. With resourcing, the sector can further develop these industry training partnerships to address the gaps in training support through shadowing and mentoring programs, cadetships and tailored pathway courses. Resourcing levels required include:

- \$500k per annum toward formalized training activities for sector-wide skills development;
- \$600k per annum toward mentorship, job shadowing and non-accredited training support; and
- \$200k per annum toward the implementation of the sector's Workforce Development Action Plan.

Total request for expanding training programs	\$1.3m per annum
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²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Grow Employment Opportunities

In its *Australia's Tech Future* report, the Australian Government identified, "while it is hard to predict the skills in demand in the future, we know employers are looking for workers who have a combination of transferrable digital skills and collaborative, creative, communication and entrepreneurial and problem-solving skills."²⁴ The First Nations media industry is well-placed to expand on existing activities to generate new employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in these roles, as well as prepare workers with the skills to meet these emerging business demands.

The majority of employees in the First Nations media sector are employed as broadcasters. However, the sector also provides opportunities for employment as technicians, IT specialists and a broad range of audio and screen production roles. The First Nations media industry has responded to an evolving media landscape by expanding operations beyond traditional radio and television broadcasting to include newer communication formats such as podcasting, online formats such as websites, streaming and social media publication. Audiences demand multimedia content delivery, which has resulted in the expansion of media worker skills to a broad range of screen, online and audio formats which in turn generates employment and economic development opportunities.

In a content-driven media environment, First Nations media organisations have had to prioritise broadcast personnel while making some tough decisions in relation to support personnel. The result is a hollowing of administrative resources across the industry, which leaves gaps in career pathways into management positions and lack of human resources for business development, fundraising, promotion, financial management and programming oversight. In many cases, a Station Manager is expected to carry out all of these roles. Similarly, individual broadcasters in the First Nations media sector are delivering the same amount of content that a team of 4 or 5 people would be working on at an equivalent mainstream service.

First Nations Media Australia identifies opportunities for future employment expansion in the following areas:

- a) Content production
- b) Public interest journalism
- c) Digital archiving
- d) Digital inclusion – provision of IT, technical and training expertise
- e) Communications growth industries – production and translation services
- f) Digital technologies

²⁴ Department of Industry, Science and Technology, *Australia's Tech Future*, Australian Government, Canberra, December 2018 <https://www.industry.gov.au/data-and-publications/australias-tech-future>

Digital technologies are integrated in a range of business settings from agriculture to virtual reality. These developments open opportunities for media workers to build capacity and training in areas of journalism, multimedia and online production, marketing, social media communications, drone cinematography, animation, digital graphics and desktop publishing, web development, photography, technical and IT roles and app development.

First Nations broadcasters are beginning to use their multimedia skills and knowledge of Country to provide cultural mapping services. For example, PAW Media and Communications in Yuendumu, Northern Territory has recently partnered with Uber Air to create the IndigiVR project, which shares stories recorded via drone footage through virtual reality headsets. PAW Media staff reflected on the benefits of having young people engaged in media a different way through this technology.

To meet emerging employment opportunities and address career pathway barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in the media industry, we request:

- \$1.5million per annum toward employment support for new mid-level positions to establish career pathways between broadcaster and executive levels (approx. 20 positions nationally);
- Funding to strengthen news services, digital archiving and content production described in other sections of this submission;
- \$1.4million for job shadowing and mentor programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personnel into management and leadership roles; and
- \$1.5million per annum toward production enterprise and business development roles within the industry (approx. 20 positions nationally).

Total request to grow employment opportunities	\$4.4m per annum
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Align award wages

A reliance on volunteers, trainees, part-time and casual staff who are at the lower end of the pay scale offers little incentive to remain within the sector. This in turn can be evidenced in difficulties attracting and retaining younger staff. Employment arrangements vary with some workers still supported by low-level wage rates established essentially as 'work for the dole' type arrangements under the CDEP and National Jobs Package schemes. The First Nations media industry produces professional media services, and yet our workers are often receiving wages that are inconsistent with modern Award rates. These low wages produce challenges for staff retention as skilled and experienced media practitioners seek higher paying jobs in other sectors and offer little incentive for career advancement within the sector.²⁵ Only 12 per cent of staff at Indigenous licensed radio stations are aged 26 years or

²⁵ Clague, P, *Employment and Skills Development Strategy Report*, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, December 2018

younger.²⁶ Additional funding support could redress these numbers as it would create opportunities to engage young employees in training options and create space to offer ongoing employment with career development. This in turn would enable First Nations media organisations to build capacity whilst ensuring that key roles are recompensed with an award-wage.

Associated with capacity limitations for small media organisations are challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled staff. While the First Nations media industry is well placed to create employment opportunities, the sector is largely reliant on government funding programs to support those roles. A review of employment funding levels is needed to bring salaries in line with industry award rates. A relevant award is needed for production roles. A tiered system is needed for wages and conditions that are relevant to job duties, skills/training, experience, use of language or cultural knowledge. Currently highly skilled and experienced media practitioners are working on sub-award salary levels or having to leave the sector.

The award wage for a radio broadcaster is \$916.60 per week.²⁷ The average salary for a Radio Announcers in Australia is \$52,803 annually (approx. \$1,015 weekly). However, radio announcers working in capital cities reported earnings significantly above this level; Sydney (47.9% more), Perth (42%) and Brisbane (32.6%).²⁸ The minimum award wage for a full-time employee working in the commercial radio industry (which includes support staff and trainees) is \$740.80 per week.²⁹ By comparison, CDP workers receive \$290 per week for working 25 hours (around \$11.60 per hour) and must work continuously in order to receive payments.³⁰ As CDP is the only available support for remote media organisations to employ reporters in communities, in effect this means broadcasters are working for below minimum wage rates. This creates a barrier to both the recruitment and retention of media workers.

We request a funding allocation of \$2.2million per annum be added to operational funding to the sector to bring wage levels in line with Award rates.

Total request to align with Award wage rates	\$2.2m per annum
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²⁶ Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

²⁷ FairWork Ombudsman, Pay Guide: Broadcasting, Recorded Entertainment and Cinemas Award 2010, Australian Government, effective 1st July 2019. <file:///Users/admin/Downloads/broadcasting-recorded-entertainment-and-cinemas-award-ma000091-pay-guide.pdf>

²⁸ Payscale, Average Radio Announcer Salary in Australia, 2019 https://www.payscale.com/research/AU/Job=Radio_Announcer/Salary

²⁹ Fuller, David, Commercial Radio Industrial Awards – Rates of Pay, Commercial Radio Australia, 2019 <http://www.commercialradio.com.au/hr-training/commercial-radio-awards-pay-rates>

³⁰ Burton-Bradley, Robert, Inside the CDP, NITV News, 2nd November 2017, <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2017/11/01/inside-cdp-allegations-fake-work-unsafe-conditions-and-payments-dead-people>

3. Improve capacity and sustainability in the media industry

Indigenous broadcast services receive approximately 75 per cent of their funding through the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet and an additional 8 per cent from other government sources.³¹ Government funding has been supplemented by sponsorship and social entrepreneurship income sources. Over the past 15 years, economic pressure has resulted in shrinking sponsorship income with Indigenous licensed radio stations reporting a reduction from an average 248 minutes of sponsorship per week in 2011-12 to 97 minutes per week in 2015-16, with an average revenue rate of \$10 per minute.³² These figures have likely dropped further during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unlike other community broadcasters, Indigenous licensed radio stations have not been able to turn to their audiences for financial support. Membership/subscriber revenue for Indigenous stations is just \$1 per member (on average) as compared to an average \$38 per member across the wider community broadcasting sector, with audiences for some license types (fine music/educational) paying up to \$66 per member to support their preferred station.³³ Societal and socio-economic pressures mean that First Nations broadcasters can't supplement other revenue streams in this way. Social Ventures Australia found that First Nations media organisations have demonstrated their capacity to self-generate revenue through other social entrepreneur activities (such as revenue from video production but are constrained by the current minimum resourcing levels allowing only for the maintenance of essential services with no provision for staffing to diversify activities.³⁴

Demand and competition for operational funding has also increased with significant increases in the number of broadcast services (stations and outlets) over the past 25 years. In the past decade, the lack of CPI increase has meant a loss of around \$4million to the sector in real terms as the cost of power, equipment, wages, copyright licence fees and other operational expenses has increased. For example, the operating costs of transmission sites (electricity and lease expenses) increased 49.6 per cent between 2011-12 and 2015-16 across the community broadcasting sector.³⁵ The stagnant funding pool has increased pressure on reserves, resources and personnel, limiting the capacity of First Nations media organisations to absorb income shocks, or address arising opportunities.

³¹ Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

³² Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

³⁵ Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

Compounding this, the Community Broadcasting Program, which provides some supplementary funding to First Nations radio stations, had indexation paused from 2014. Over the five years the indexation pause is in effect, the result is a \$4.024 million reduction in funds in real terms to community broadcasting which has ripple effects for First Nations broadcasters. In 2015-16 a sample group of 31 Indigenous licensed radio stations surveyed reported collective income of \$11,230,451, an average increase of 36 per cent over the five years since 2011-12. However collective expenditure levels for the same group of stations amounted to \$12,052,982, an increase of 69 per cent in the five years since 2011-12 and an income to expenditure percentage of 107 per cent. It is also worth noting income levels for rural and remote radio stations actually fell by 7 per cent between 2007-08 and 2015-16, while stations in metropolitan and regional areas experienced some income increase, but not enough to keep pace with rising operational expenses.³⁶ These statistics demonstrate an unsustainable trend in income to expenditure levels, but stagnant funding levels restrict opportunities for First Nations broadcasters to grow their self-generated funding capacity.

We request the Government provide an additional \$8million per annum, bringing the total amount of operational funding provided to support the approximately 43 organisations delivering radio, television and online services. This includes:

- \$4.4million to address CPI;
- \$2.6million to support activities that increase organisational sustainability and reduce reliance on Government funding; and
- \$1million to expand existing operations to increase the impact and social value of our services within communities through online business development.

Total request to grow sector sustainability	\$8m per annum
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Urgent infrastructure upgrades

A stagnant funding environment has resulted in continually having to shave budgets to meet rising operational expenses, significantly restricting the sector's capacity to upgrade equipment or even to maintain existing equipment effectively. The last coordinated program to upgrade broadcasting, transmission and digital networking equipment was the Indigenous Remote Radio Replacement Program in 2007-2009 which invested \$3.3 million in a two-phase replacement of obsolete radio equipment. A targeted infrastructure upgrade program is needed to bring First Nations media services up to industry standard. It's worth noting that IRCA did an audit of RIBS equipment in 2014, which identified that around 19 of the 103 sites audited had inadequate building conditions, including a lack of toilets. FNMA

³⁶ Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

encourages a sector-wide update to this audit and offers the 2014 data as a solid starting position to build on. FNMA could undertake this work if resourced.

Smart technologies provide for cost-effective network management, monitoring of remote broadcast facilities and staff training and support which offers efficiencies in repairs and maintenance activities and reduced travel costs. The use of modern IP network technologies and broadcast software systems has advantages for radio services with multiple broadcast sites, enabling targeted, location specific information and sponsorship messages. This has the potential to enhance audience engagement with relevant information campaigns. In this way, investment in network infrastructure upgrades increases the return-on-investment for Government campaign activities and previous equipment investment. Providing funding support for the introduction of smart technologies directly aligns with the first of five priority outcomes set by the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet for Indigenous broadcasting and media for the 2017-2020 financial years: “1. Use of new technology to improve content and audience reach and reduce costs.”³⁷

Associated with the equipment upgrade need is the failure of a number of remote radio studios to meet basic workplace health and safety standards. Inadequate building conditions, including lack of toilets and air-conditioning, were identified in around 19 of the 103 studios audited in 2014, a number that has likely grown since the audit was conducted. Poor working conditions affects employment retention. The condition of buildings also puts them at risk of vandalism and consequent disruption to broadcasting services.

There is some shared infrastructure between telecommunications and broadcasting that can be used to build on existing government investment in broadcast infrastructure and to generate maximum public value from new infrastructure rollouts. First Nations media organisations may be called upon for technical skills, capacity building activities and infrastructure requirements as part of the Government’s proposed Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan announced in March 2019.³⁸ If this results in a funded program, it would present a potential opportunity to grow communications jobs through the provision of IT, technical and training expertise.

While minimum standards for workplace conditions are enshrined in OH&S requirements, minimum industry standards for transmission hubs and IP implementation needs the establishment of an industry benchmark. We suggest minimum requirements to address this issues include:

- \$100k to update our 2014 audit and establish industry benchmarks for IP networking requirements;

³⁷ Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

³⁸ See Recommendation 8 of the Government’s [response](#) to the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review.

- \$600k toward the repair and maintenance of existing infrastructure;
- \$650k toward the upgrade of remote broadcasting studios to meet minimum OH&S requirements; and
- \$650k toward the rollout of smart technologies to increase industry efficiency.

Total request to address urgent infrastructure upgrades	\$2m
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4. Preserve Culture & Languages

First Nations media organisations contribute to the maintenance of cultural practice, renewal and revival of languages and education every day. In 2021-22, FNMA highlights two areas requiring additional budget support to ensure the work done in this space over the past four decades is not lost, and that it continues into the future.

Digital Archiving

Over approximately 40 years the First Nations media industry has amassed archives of nationally significant content which is largely stored on magnetic tape (eg. VCR formats). This tape is now degrading, meaning all collections not digitized by 2025 will be rendered unplayable – an issue requiring urgent action. Stretching from the early 1980s through to the present, the collections provide an unbroken record of language usage, cultural knowledge, traditional skills, community events, family histories and oral histories. Preservation and enhancement of the remote First Nations audiovisual collections is a vital activity for the cultural heritage and wellbeing of local communities and as a contribution to the Indigenous cultural heritage and truth-telling processes for the nation. The collections have a high value for education, cultural identity, language teaching, cultural and linguistic heritage, and for researchers into First Nations media history.

This presents an opportunity for the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in culturally meaningful roles to as Community Archive Workers, needed to coordinate the extensive and time-consuming work of digitising, cataloguing and managing community access and sharing protocols. A National Plan for Preserving First Nations Audiovisual Collections has been developed by First Nations Media Australia in partnership with the National Film & Sound Archive, AIATSIS and Traditional Custodians. The plan outlines agreed standardised methods and metadata cataloguing for a digitisation process. Over 30 organisations are identified as beneficiaries of the Audiovisual Collections Plan. A First Nations Media Digitisation Facility will be established in Alice Springs this year, with funding support from the Aboriginal Benefit Fund and also in partnership with AIATSIS. However, infrastructure and human resources are required to undertake this urgent work in the three-year timeframe remaining to preserve priority recordings.

The cultural sensitivities relating to these recordings makes sending them to centralised Government agency inappropriate. First Nations communities must retain control of community collections with oversight from Traditional Custodians. Social Ventures Australia noted the trust Indigenous Broadcasting Services have developed within communities makes they well placed to manage “a cultural archive of national significance.”³⁹ On-country archiving work is more cost-effective, enabling local decision-making about access and media handling, and identifying cultural metadata for cataloguing. Localised archiving work is cost-effective, enables local decision-making about access and media handling and identifying cultural metadata for cataloguing, and provides meaningful employment opportunities in remote and regional locations.

Government's worldwide are faced with this same issue. The New Zealand Government is resolving it by supporting Te Mangai Paho to fund a digital archiving projects for \$575,000 annually to travel to different regions and archive magnetic tape materials.⁴⁰ Our solution to digitisation requirements is similar to the activities currently being carried out to preserve Maori media archives, in that it has an overarching national strategy combined with mobile equipment that can move around communities and digitise content on location, provide training to individuals to maintain and grow collections moving forward and leave collections to be managed by custodians for appropriate community access using open source software management tools. We just need to cover a much larger geographic region than our New Zealand equivalents. We propose identifying 6 collection sites and 3 mobile digitisation suites to digitise sensitive materials on country, moving location on a weekly basis. Each of these locations/mobile suites would provide employment opportunities for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people, as would the ongoing management of community collections. Funding is also required for digital storage equipment.

Due to the finite deadline for digitising content currently stored on magnetic tape, this project requires budget support for three years only. However it is urgent in nature. To save the back-catalogue of recordings collected over the past 40+ years from permanent loss, we require an investment of \$2.5million per annum for 3 years, making a total investment of \$7.5million and preserving an archive of priceless history. This funding would be used toward digitisation equipment, the employment of Community Archive workers and the resourcing of outsourced digitisation services for high-risk material.

Total request for digital archiving	\$2.5m per annum for 3 years
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³⁹Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

⁴⁰ Te Mangai Paho, *Annual Report 2016-17 & Annual Report 2017-18*

Content Production

First Nations media organisations must serve their communities. In an era where media delivery is both fragmented and convergent, this means being in all the spaces that audiences expect to access content. Radio stations are now expected to be 'more than just radio' by audiences, funders, content-maker and marketing platforms. The era of media convergence has made it easier for First Nations radio stations to produce and deliver content across a range of platforms. Therefore, in addition to providing 24-hour radio services, First Nations radio stations are producing an average weekly total of 30 hours podcast content per week, 209 hours of video content and 51 hours of online only content sector-wide.⁴¹ The production of multi-platform content and social media publishing takes additional time and skills which are not accounted for in the operational funding provided to First Nations media organisations but must be done to meet audience expectations and maintain community relevance.

Content production is vital to the maintenance and preservation of First Nations languages and culture. First Nations produced content also serves to enhance social cohesion, truth-telling, education and understanding of First Nations culture across the wider Australian society. Eighty-one per cent of Indigenous licensed radio stations report regular engagement with marginalised or disadvantaged communities through their program content.⁴² Social Ventures Australia noted the core business of Indigenous Broadcast Services is to broadcast information, news, interviews, music, community events and stories to large audiences and that content funding allows our services to *"keep culture alive by creating culturally rich environments and by recording, preserving and broadcasting cultural in an appropriate way. IBs also play a crucial role in increasing community cohesion, building community resilience and supporting people into meaningful employment."*⁴³

Establishing ongoing opportunities for hands-on media production and broadcasting is the best way to address perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the wider community, and build skills and create jobs, while creating a repository of significant multi-media content. Increased funding for content production in the areas of radio documentaries/podcasts, news and current affairs, language and cultural content, dramas, music and so on will build capacity of First Nations media organisations to employ and training local media practitioners to produce, broadcast and archive locally significant stories for the community and where relevant to national and even international audiences.

⁴¹ Survey Matters, Community Broadcasting Sector Programming & Community Development Census, CBAA, June, 2017

⁴² Survey Matters, *Community Broadcasting Sector Programming and Community Development Census*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, June 2017

⁴³ Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

There are strong correlations between media portrayal, self-determination and wellbeing. For this reason, some of the key themes identified in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody identified that “action is needed to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the media, and to educate non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve community attitudes and address ignorance.”⁴⁴ The Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2020 shows that nearly half of Australian society thinks media usually portrays Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a negative way (44% of the general community and 46% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people), with only 12% of the general community and 19% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community believing that media portrays Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people positively.

The capacity for content production in the sector has been significantly constrained by:

- The loss of video content funding through changes to the Indigenous Broadcasting Program in 2007
- Inadequate funding under the IAS for content production, which is currently supposed to be drawn from already over-extended operational funds
- Limited, competitive content funding provided through the Community Broadcasting Foundation has remained static for five years at \$1.1 million which is also accessible to general licensed community radio stations.

Alternative sources of funding for First Nations media content, beyond NITV for video content, are limited. Local producers are unlikely to have the level of broadcast credits required for funding through screen agencies and need support to develop their own skills and provide on-the-job training and mentoring for others. Similarly, existing levels of funding rarely allow for producing the cross-platform content, podcasts and online content modern audiences seek. Increased funding support for content production exponentially increases the capacity of First Nations broadcasters to increase social value through engagement with stakeholders, musicians, artists and the Australian Government.⁴⁵

The production of radio and television content projects varies between about \$5,000-\$60,000 depending on the scope and production requirements of the series or documentary.⁴⁶ An investment of \$2million per annum would likely fund around 50-60 radio and video projects per annum to produce one-off documentaries, interviews, series and increase audience engagement through increased outside broadcast activity and multiplatform content delivery.

Total request for content production	\$2m per annum
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⁴⁴ Deloitte, *Review of the Implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody*, Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet, 2018

⁴⁵ Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

⁴⁶ Community Broadcasting Foundation, funded projects: <https://cbf.org.au/grants/successful/>