Future delivery of foundation skills training in remote Australia

Discussion Paper - Response Summary and Analysis

July 2023

Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the department) acknowledges the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia on which we gather, live, work and stand. We acknowledge all traditional custodians, their elders past and present, and we pay our respects to their continuing connection to their culture, community, land, sea, and water.

Contents

1.0 Context

At the Jobs and Skills Summit, held in September 2022, the Australian Government committed to reinvigorating the delivery of foundation skills programs, in partnership with states, territories and foundation skills sector stakeholders.

Over the period from September 2022 to March 2023, a series of consultations and engagements were conducted to better understand what is needed from a future foundation skills program.

Drawing on this consultation and engagement, the Australian Government announced a redesigned foundation skills program in the 2023-24 Budget to improve access to training for all Australians seeking to develop their language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Commencing on 1 July 2024, the redesigned Skills for Education and Employment program will include two distinct but complementary programs. They are:

- **Stream 1** – foundation skills training delivery to individuals by contracted service providers including through place-based project delivery for example to workers and their employers who may want tailored training for their workforce. The government is investing $366 million in this stream.
- **Stream 2** – foundation skills training delivery to First Nations Australians by First Nations organisations in partnership with Registered Training Organisations or Adult and Community Education sector providers to deliver whole of community language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills training through place-based grants. The government is investing $46 million in this stream.

2.0 Purpose of this paper

As part of the consultations that informed the redesigned program, on 8 December 2022 the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the department) released a discussion paper titled the Future delivery of foundation skills training in remote Australia, how foundation skills delivery in remote Australia could be strengthened.

Responses to the discussion paper closed on 13 February 2023.

The discussion paper included the following questions:

1. How can foundation skills training be designed to draw on the strengths, and meet the needs, of learners in remote Australia?
2. How should a foundation skills remote program be designed to respond to local needs?
3. How could Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations be better supported to deliver appropriate training?
4. How should results of the foundation skills remote program be measured, monitored, and evaluated?
5. How could the foundation skills sector, including the workforce, be better supported to deliver in remote Australia?
6. What opportunities are there for the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments to work together to better support foundation skills delivery?

This paper provides a summary and synthesis of feedback received through consultations. This feedback has been instrumental in shaping government policy however does not necessarily reflect government policy.

3.0 Executive Summary

Thirty-seven organisations and stakeholder groups either responded to the discussion paper or participated in virtual workshops.

Stakeholders included peak body organisations, industry bodies, Skills for Education and Employment providers, Remote Community Pilot providers, and key First Nations representatives.

Several themes emerged from responses, with the resounding message to Government to support language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (LLND) skills programs that are designed in partnership with, and led by, remote communities. There was a strong call to commit to the principles of the Closing the Gap Agreement, including the four priority reform areas.

While responses were requesting a suite of 'off the shelf' models to be developed, or the use of tested literacy campaigns such as 'Yes I Can' and 26TEN, the responses emphasised the need for each project to be designed at the community level. This community led component is critical for remote and First Nations communities, where success of the program can depend largely on word of mouth, and the support of key community members.

Feedback was clear that longer funding periods and a commitment to embed resources in the community are critical. Responses pointed out that in remote communities, in particular First Nations remote communities, projects take time to develop and gain traction. Additionally, shorter programs that were based on achieving outcomes against a full assessment of a learner's LLND skills against both the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) and the Digital Literacy Skills Framework (DLSF) indicators did not necessarily reflect the desired or actual outcomes for communities or individuals. These shorter programs should also include other key life goals and social and economic objectives of the communities and individuals.

Feedback indicated that data collection, management and transparency were important to respondents. Data collected in terms of LLND needs for First Nations people should be available to community for the development of program design and decision-making.

In addition to these common themes, submissions from industry bodies concentrated on future employment needs for industry that are often prevalent in remote areas and the need for LLND support to better meet these employment opportunities.

Separately, a peak body representing women in Vocational Education and Training (VET), outlined the key barriers facing women in remote areas, and the prevalence of women needing assistance or providing support services for people who experience LLND barriers.

Focused virtual workshops were conducted with several stakeholders. These workshops echoed the sentiments expressed in the Discussion Paper responses with a number of findings to be considered in the new program development.

4.0 Analysis of Responses

4.1 Strengths and Needs of Remote Learners

Stakeholders were clear that each remote community is unique, with different social and economic priorities, varying levels of engagement with support services, and cultural sensitivities. Programs need to recognise and meet the individual needs of communities.

> *Key Feedback:*
>
> Government should:
>
> 1. Prioritise programs that combine instruction with applied learning approaches in work, community development and social enterprise activities.
> 2. Open programs to all in the community who need foundation skills development.
> 3. Incorporate First Nations language and culture into individual project design.

4.1.1 Practical learning approach

Respondents stressed the importance LLND skills play in equipping individuals and communities with the tools needed for agency and self-advocacy.

Traditional style classrooms may be appropriate in some settings, but not all. Many respondents suggested that programs aimed at community should not be 'one size fits all'. Generic competency-based training which is not aligned to individual, or community goals, is rarely successful.

Ownership and participation are enhanced when training is aligned to life goals of participants (for example, obtaining a driver's licence, budgeting etc), and the current and future needs of communities.

Respondents indicated programs are often designed without consideration of the existing skills and knowledge of First Nations people. Instead, traditional knowledge (including First Nations languages) may be aligned to various careers and programs could capitalise on this. Projects built around local and traditional knowledge should be prioritised where appropriate.

Similarly, respondents called for greater recognition of the role elders and community-based mentors can play in the delivery of foundation skills training.

In remote areas where there are established industries, such as the resource and/or agricultural sectors, workplace programs or programs targeting LLND development for prospective employees may be beneficial.

Industry in some remote areas is also experiencing changing workforce needs. The resource and agricultural industries are experiencing rapid and significant change due to decarbonisation initiatives and digitisation/automation. Foundation skills, including digital literacy skills, will be vital for individuals to gain the required skills to undertake further training or education, to gain employment, or upskill, in these industries.

We heard that programs that combine instruction with applied learning approaches in work, community development and social enterprise activities should be prioritised.

4.1.2 Broaden eligibility criteria

One response highlighted that foundation skills are part of a lifelong learning framework. Many people have multiple jobs over their lifetime and may need to upskill in areas – particularly with digital literacy skills. Additionally, as new technologies emerge, participating fully in society requires some level of proficiency in literacy skills. As many workers are still employed in some capacity after retirement age (contributing to the economy and community in remote areas), it is vital to ensure access to foundation skills training for all ages and employment status. Learning hubs within communities that people can access, even after training is completed, can embed the program within the community and ensure sustainability for the longer term.

A clear theme in the feedback was that training should be available to all in the community who need, or express a desire to improve their foundation skills, and eligibility not restricted to jobseekers. Instead, eligibility should include anyone in the community who expresses a desire to improve their foundation skills, and access to the program should be simple and not involve a cumbersome registration process.

While many responses concentrated on First Nations participants, other feedback suggested the need to include migrants in LLND programs targeting remote areas.

The issue of varying gendered experiences in remote areas was also highlighted in the feedback. Ensuring access to training for women was seen as important, with suggestions that training be more family centric.

4.1.3 Overcome barriers to participation

Commentary in the responses indicated that often foundation skills training is based on a deficit model with participants' current skills and knowledge not being considered. This was mentioned particularly in the context of operation within First Nations communities. Together with potential prior negative experiences or trauma with education (or other factors), a deficit model reduces the likelihood of learners fully engaging and succeeding in training.

Additionally, responses stressed that it should be remembered that often in remote and First Nations communities, learning is not always a first priority, with family and cultural obligations taking precedence over training. This should not be interpreted in the first instance as lack of interest. Importantly, disengagement should not be looked at in isolation as a measure of underperformance for a project and highlights the need for projects to be delivered in a way that understands community context and supports participant re-engagement.

Incorporating First Nations language and culture into individual project design in order to engage and motivate community was suggested through a number of responses. This would also ensure that training is not approached from a deficit perspective, and instead builds on traditional language and knowledge to ensure that acknowledgement and respect are afforded the learner, aiding in confidence and value of the program.

Additionally, teachers in the program should be aware of the different written and spoken language conventions of First Nations' languages in order to better understand the context in which to design and deliver English LLND training.

The lack of suitable and affordable digital infrastructure in remote areas was a key theme throughout the responses. Digital capacity in remote areas is often limited. Affordability of digital devices, high cost of data and the ability to maintain these digital devices (repairs etc), restricts capacity for digital literacy skills development. Internet access and capacity in remote areas requires that device and connectivity costs are built into program costs. Technological advances, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and chatbots, should be integrated into programs where possible and appropriate.

We heard that transport to and from training continues to be an issue in remote and outer regional areas and this is a significant barrier to training. Transport and other barriers should be considered when designing community-based projects and partnerships with organisations offering wrap-around support need to be considered.

Programs should contain elements of wrap-around support to assist addressing barriers to participation in training. For example, linking participants to childcare centres through assisting learners to access suitable digital devices.

Program design should be able to change as industry and technologies change, and skills required for work and society change.

4.2 Program Design

> ***Key Feedback:***
>
> 4. Programs should be designed around individual and community priorities (current and future).
> 5. Community controlled organisations should lead program design.
> 6. Adequate time should be allowed for partnership development and program design.
> 7. Traditional knowledge and its application should guide foundation skills design and be recognised as valid skills set in the national skills taxonomy.

As per the issues raised in response to Question 1, the overarching theme of submissions was that the program should be designed to cater for needs at the community level and should be community-led. Programs should not be developed in isolation from community and individual goals and should incorporate LLND into other training or community-based activities where necessary.

4.2.1 Prioritise Needs of Community and Individual

The need for LLND training models to be designed around the needs of the community and individuals was the overarching theme of the responses to this question.

Responses resoundingly did not support 'fly-in and fly-out' models nor wholly online programs. Programs should be place-based with teachers and trainers living within the community wherever possible.

The training model needs to be flexible to accommodate responsibilities of the communities and individuals. In recognition of this, programs should allow for repeat engagement or re-entry by individuals after periods of withdrawal from the program. This approach would build trust and assist to maintain buy in from participants and the community.

Consultation and clear communication with community members, including elders and community leaders, needs to continue throughout the project life cycle to ensure the project aligns to community and individual goals, and helps maintain community 'buy-in' and participation.

4.2.2 Approach to Program Design

The Program needs to be aligned with the National Agreement for Closing the Gap 4 priority reform areas.

It was strongly suggested that programs should be co-designed and led by the communities – particularly in First Nations communities.

One submission suggested that a population model for service provision should be developed and not a model built on individual access.

There was a call for the department to develop a suite of potential learning models which can be tailored locally and include tools for the delivery of LLND (and other – including mentoring) skills to those community people who may be identified to function as project staff.

Adequate time should be afforded to develop partnerships and design program concepts. True partnerships in remote communities take some time to build. Co-design approaches required to get the community on board and recruit participants also take considerable time to implement. This needs to be built into program design, including performance measures, to allow sufficient time to:

- develop partnerships required to design a project at the community level
- allow lead in time before commencing projects
- allow enough time to achieve project milestones and outcomes.

Government will need to develop a tolerance for allowing projects adequate time to investigate ways to truly achieve outcomes.

Traditional knowledge could assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners to recognise the skills and associated career paths associated with this knowledge which include some in science and innovation.

4.2.3 Program Elements

Both accredited and non-accredited training should be acceptable, to allow for the type of training that is most appropriate for achievement of community and participant goals.

4.3 Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations

> **Key Feedback:**
>
> Program design should include:
>
> 8. Establishment of programs that can accommodate a broader range of community controlled organisations.
> 9. Capacity building opportunities in program design.
> 10. Funding assistance to support organisations with identifying suitable registered training organisations.

The key theme of the responses to this question centre on capacity of community controlled organisations to deliver training, and to successfully identify and/or partner with quality training providers.

4.3.1 Partnerships

Community controlled organisations are best placed to design programs from a culturally safe and often trauma informed perspective.

However, some community controlled organisations are either inexperienced with LLND delivery or may not have the capacity to deliver a program in isolation. These organisations may benefit from forming partnerships with Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and other educational organisations, which can deliver the LLND components, community services offering wrap-around support, and other key stakeholders.

Projects need to be designed and led by community in partnership with RTOs and other support services to ensure they are wholistic and community and person centric.

Responses called for the consideration of partnership approaches that have demonstrated outcomes such as 26TEN (supported by 1,131 organisations across Tasmania) and 'Yes I Can' (Literacy for Life Foundation) initiatives. This should include the consideration of funding for partnership or campaign type models such as 26TEN and 'Yes I Can', where local people are at the centre of program design.

The program should be opened for a broader range of community controlled organisations to apply for funding, including Land Councils and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS). These organisations can partner with suitable RTOs for the training design and delivery components.

4.3.2 Capacity Building

LLND education is not the same as other training, such as VET, and part of the overall objective of increasing LLND skills involves the capacity building of community controlled organisations.

We heard that the capacity of community controlled organisations needs to be addressed across a number of fronts. Community controlled organisations may:

- not know where to source an appropriate RTO with which to partner to deliver LLND training

- not have suitably trained staff to deliver the program

- have staff that may be experiencing LLND issues themselves

- not have the capacity to provide effective program governance as it may be outside the normal business of the organisation.

The broader program should contain an element of capacity building for community controlled organisations which are applying for project funds. This will be vital to embed the program in the community and will have flow on effects to broader community capacity.

Funds could be provided for (but not necessarily restricted to) the following:

a. LLND development for existing and potential staff

b. assistance with LLND and/or training to assist with administration of the program

c. mentoring training for community members.

Projects tied to key personnel often lose momentum if these people leave the program, therefore capacity building within communities should occur to ensure that projects become less reliant on key individuals.

The overarching program should also assist communities and organisations seeking to apply for funding to source appropriate quality RTOs.

4.3.3 Funding

The following section summarises what we heard in relation to how LLND programs in remote Australia should be funded.

Attendance-based training models such as the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) are often not viable in remote communities. One respondent outlined a case study where a project was developed to meet community demand and resulted in a financial loss for the RTO due to attendance-based funding.

Community controlled organisations in most remote communities are dealing with significant socio-economic issues such as health, employment and are not resourced to expand into other areas.

Funding needs to reflect the real costs of delivering in remote areas with mainstream 'value for money' principles being inappropriate for remote delivery. Assistance with funding for IT capability for the projects should be provided, if necessary.

Costs to deliver training in remote communities restricts viability. While it is recommended project staff and partners should be local to the community, this is not always possible, particularly when specific expertise and experience needs to be (at least initially) sourced from outside the community. Accommodation for these personnel is difficult to find and costly. Wage costs are also high with incentives needed to be inbuilt into the program to keep personnel on board.

Current funding for programs restricts the contributions that some community controlled organisations can make towards LLND improvement. For example, there are ACCHS in community

which are one of the larger employers, and while they may be succeeding in the delivery of their services, are often not resourced to focus on preparing for future workforce needs.

Commonwealth investment in LLND programs for remote communities should be longer term.

Responses have suggested to direct funding towards campaign and partnership models such as 'Yes I Can' (Literacy for Life Foundation) which aim to build LLND capacity of community members to help others with LLND issues.

4.4 Measuring, monitoring, and evaluating results

Key Feedback:

11. The Productivity Commission's *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy* should inform the performance framework and subsequent program evaluation.
12. Measurements should be in line with Priority Reform 4 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: 'Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level'.
13. A set of tools for measurement of the ACSF/DLSF could be developed and tailored at the community level to meet community and individual needs.

4.4.1 Program Evaluation – LLND Outcomes

Measurements should be in line with Priority Reform 4 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: 'Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level'. This priority reform requires that the Government collect, manage and report data that is transparent and accessible by First Nations people, in order for informed shared decision-making on initiatives aimed towards Closing the Gap.

Performance frameworks and program evaluation should be aligned to the Productivity Commission's *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*. The Strategy recognises the knowledge and diversity among First Nations communities and is a framework for Australian Government agencies to work with First Nations people in the planning and implementation of any evaluation.

4.4.1.1 Approach to Assessments

Stakeholders were clear that it was essential that the development of measures and conduct of assessments was approached sensitively, given the prior experience that many First Nations people may have had with Western education. Culturally safe and trauma informed learning should be considered when developing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or program requirements attached to the number of assessments individuals need to undertake. The examples of 'shame' in not having sufficient LLND skills, or the reluctance to engage with assessment if family members do not have skills at the level they do (if the learner can read and others in the family cannot) are powerful barriers to engagement. Additionally, lower levels of LLND may be intergenerational, and it may take years for significant change to occur within a community even if there are more immediate benefits to individuals. Assessment frameworks need to be in line with both funding body objectives, community and individual objectives.

Assessments should not solely rely on the ACSF as a measure of proficiency. Changes to participant practices and the level of engagement with LLND should be considered.

Success at the project level should also be assessed through measures such as achievement against personal and community goals, participant reflection and satisfaction, increased participation in the community and other measures such as employment, or less reliance on government support services (refer to 4.4.2).

While some responses suggested attendance and retention are a good indicator of a program's success, others indicated that having targets associated with these could have a negative impact in that there are many barriers to attendance, particularly in remote areas. It had also been suggested that payment models based on attendance are largely unviable in remote areas.

Longer term measurement of the social and economic impact of programs should inform future funding models. Longer term evaluations of projects should be implemented, including longitudinal studies on current Remote Community Pilot participants to evaluate longer term impacts on individuals and communities.

There was a suggestion to use 'practice based' measures such as those used in Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) possibly in conjunction with the ACSF.

4.4.1.2 Core Skills Assessments

Measuring LLND success needs to be both quantitative (ACSF) and qualitative (based on participant life or employment goals). Responses highlight that while LLND is a priority for government, improving LLND skills are not usually the primary focus of individuals, whose immediate priorities may be to gain skills to participate more fully in the workplace, to assist other family members or to engage more in everyday life, such as bill paying or obtaining a driver's licence. Improving LLND skills are generally a means to achieving a person's primary goals.

The current assessment frameworks for Commonwealth funded LLND programs have been raised as an issue. Responses highlight the difficulties of assessing against the ACSF and the conflict between having to achieve progression against full ACSF indicators versus the participant's goals, which could be something such as being able to fill out online forms or obtaining a general construction induction (White Card) which may or may not include a full indicator progression. Or the participant may leave the program early, once this goal is reached.

An increase in assessment results against the ACSF was considered by many to not always be an effective tool for measuring the effectiveness of training outcomes in assisting people with low LLND skills to get into the labour market and in particular the shorter, sharper programs – e.g. those offering industry specific skills in order to transition to particular employment.

One response indicated that the ACSF promotes 'teaching to the test' and does not measure whether LLND levels are embedded in participant practice and does not measure the level of engagement with LLND more broadly. Comments indicated that the ACSF is viewed as too linear when in reality learning is not a linear process. There were several adverse comments regarding baseline or pre-training assessment as being a disincentive and a barrier to participation in the program.

Other respondents supported the use of the ACSF and DLSF but did highlight frequent assessments had (in their experience) proven to be counter-productive and had been a disincentive for participants and contributed to drop out rate. Respondents who were also SEE providers saw the requirement for progress assessments after 200 hours of training did not align with training schedules.

A set of tools for measurement of the ACSF/DLSF could be developed and tailored at the community level to meet community and individual needs.

There was a suggestion to use case studies of participants at identified intervals (such as 1, 3 and 5 year intervals). These case studies could also (where possible) measure the impact on families and connections of participants to gain a greater understanding of the wider impact of LLND programs on participants and the community.

4.4.1.3 Assessment Alternatives

An alternative to measuring a leaner's LLND progress with a competency based testing methodology that requires achievement of full ACSF or DLSF indicators, is to measure using the individual descriptions of performance (performance features) within each indicator. This would allow providers to report on what leaners 'can do' after a period study. It also better aligns with how learners progress in LLND focused courses, and with best practice in LLND training and assessment. Assessment should be progressive and incremental.

The use of performance features within the ACSF as evidence for progress (as opposed to the full indicator) was supported by several respondents to better show incremental progress. Another response indicated that funding should be allocated for the development of ACSF/DLSF toolkits which could be customised for each discrete community/project. This follows on from responses earlier in this report where the development of 'off the shelf' models was suggested. A central set of resources or 'tools' could be developed, or 'off the shelf' models, so that communities have a starting point on which to develop their projects.

LLND skills training needs to be linked to practical outcomes and may involve skill sets rather than units of competency or full qualifications. If the use of the ACSF as a measurement of progression continues, then the assessment framework (including baseline assessments) needs to be designed and executed in a way that does not cause stress or anxiety for the learner and is culturally safe. A call for careful consideration has been voiced through the responses. It was suggested that "a greater use of skill sets could enable improved outcomes for learners" as it allows learners to evaluate whether the training is suitable for them and gain recognition for the skillset they have achieved.

Suggested measures include:

Direct/Individual	Project Level Indicators	Community Level Measures
- Successful attendance and retention. - Individual attainment and improvements on life outcomes. - Qualitative feedback from participants and other key stakeholders involved in the program. - Impact on participant reliance on other forms of government support such as income support. - Other post completion outcomes	- Employment of First Nations project staff. - Evidence of positive partnerships with other key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled and other appropriate community organisations.	- Creation of a local sustainable industry or sector with the employment of local people, and utilisation of other local resources. - Reduction in the incidence of anti-social behaviour in the community.

4.4.2 Program Evaluation – Value for Money

'Value for money' for literacy education should be considered in line with the impacts of literacy for the economy and society in the wider context. For example, if someone's literacy is improved, then their employment prospects are improved, as well as their overall health and wellbeing.

Value for money should not be determined for remote and First Nations LLND programs in the same way as it is determined in urban areas, in recognition of the high cost of delivery in remote areas, and the fact that programs take a significant time to embed.

4.4.3 Program Evaluation – KPIs

Stakeholders noted that impacts of KPIs on program providers should be considered, particularly those which measure things that are outside of provider's control or are largely dependent on third parties. Responses indicate that there is duplication of reporting on current VET programs, i.e. the same data is collected several times for varying programs and government departments. Responses indicated that additional reporting should be avoided.

Development of KPIs at the individual project level should be community-led. It was recommended that departmental personnel that have responsibility for program design, including KPIs, should visit the delivery sites to gain a greater understanding of the cultural context in which programs are delivered.

Measures could be designed in partnership with community at the design stage of the individual programs/projects. This will ensure that KPIs are aligned with community values.

4.4.4 Data Resources

Lack of available, reliable and transparent data on LLND levels in remote and First Nations communities has been cited as an issue in some responses. The responses refer to the issue of Indigenous Data Sovereignty, being the right to govern how and what data is collected and its use; and Indigenous Data Governance which relates to policy development and the rights of First Nations people are considered and reflected in this policy.

Responses indicated that there is no central repository for data relating to the current levels of foundation skills in remote Australia. A point was made about Priority 4 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap reforms: 'Shared access to data and information at a regional level'. Data should be accessible and transparent taking into account the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Data Governance.

The Commonwealth should resource a data collection standard to determine LLND levels in remote communities and ensure equitable access and transparency around this data so that it can be used to adequately inform the design of LLND and other programs at the community level.

It was suggested that the government invest in establishing data collection standards with the principles of Priority 4 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Data Governance.

Data measured and collected should be reliable and transparent and be of benefit to the community, and specifically for First Nations people.

4.5 Support for foundation skills sector and workforce

> **Key Feedback:**
>
> 14. The Department should work with state training authorities to develop a sector and workforce strategy and initiatives to increase the size of the remote specialist foundation skills teaching workforce.
> 15. Funding should incentivise local delivery and development of local resources to deliver the training.
> 16. A model for a pathways approach to achieving a TAE40116 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment should be developed and where possible, should articulate into a diploma and/or degree.
> 17. Commonwealth scholarships for the completion of the TAE40116 should also be implemented.
> 18. Government should support the establishment a peak or association to grow collaboration, standard setting and innovation.
> 19. The possibility of engaging a peak organisation to organise remote LLND delivery on a national scale should be explored.

4.5.1 Capacity Building

Responses also highlighted the roles that community members play in assisting people due to lower levels of LLND, with many being volunteers (such as those working in community libraries or centres helping people fill out forms) or people in an informal mentoring or advisory capacity. These include elders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who often provide support, including bridging the gap between traditional knowledge and more mainstream learning environments. There were a number of calls in responses for these people to be recognised and compensated appropriately.

Community members should be compensated for work they do to facilitate/deliver training/programs. The role of mentors should be an important element of program design.

The recognition of the importance of mentoring in remote and First Nations LLND projects is highlighted throughout the responses. Local mentors add significant value to projects and are often the lynchpin for engagement and retention. Funding should be allocated to the training and payment of mentors. In the context of remote and in particular, First Nations communities, mentors provide culturally safe support and have a role that extends beyond the training environment and into everyday community life.

Again, the issue of funding the projects longer term was raised in the context of providing stability for the local project workforce, attracting quality candidates for positions, and allowing sufficient time in which to train those who required it.

From an industry perspective, where jobs are becoming more technical and digitised (particularly in the resources industry which has a significant presence in outer regional and remote Australia), mathematics is a skill in demand and is often lacking. It was suggested in one response that there should be incentives to encourage more mathematics teachers in remote areas. Additionally, the respondent indicated that there should be more mathematics-based programs, including those in language where appropriate. This would assist those from remote communities who have aspirations for higher education to be better equipped. Addressing the other barriers such as financial, transport and lack of support networks should be a priority of government to encourage community people to attend higher education institutions.

4.5.2 Building Community Level Workforce

Responses recommended that, where possible, local people are employed at the project level and that funding should be structured to incentivise the employment of local people.

Projects should consider an element of training community people to become trainers and teachers, and for other key project roles.

There is no current larger scale pathways approach to obtaining the TAE40122 Certificate IV – Training and Assessment, and beyond. One provider has suggested the development of a program to step First Nations people towards the Certificate IV using a tiered pathways approach. This has been trialled in New South Wales. This training should be able to articulate towards a diploma and to degree level courses should participants want to take their training further. This will allow them to potentially continue working while gaining their qualifications.

Any teacher or 'trainer training' strategies embedded within the program at the local level would require a commitment of several years' funding. Alternatively, a national teacher training initiative could be supported, or funding provisioned that project proponents could access.

Comments included that the wages were relatively low for the foundation skills workforce, reflecting the status of foundation skills within the education and training industry more broadly. There was a call to government to review this to attract and retain people into the foundation skills workforce. It was also noted that women form the majority of the foundation skills workforce, contributing to the gender pay gap.

Several responses indicate that incorporating the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages into training where possible creates a more accessible program for First Nations participants.

4.5.3 Workforce Strategies

It was suggested that a high level strategic approach to building the foundation skills workforce be developed. Remote foundation skills could be a component of an overarching strategy.

Incentives such as scholarships and awards should be available to encourage the completion of trainer qualifications.

A mechanism for innovation, collaboration and to set standards in remote and First Nations LLND design and delivery (such as a peak or association) should be established.

A reference to the Woort Koorliny: Australian Indigenous Employment Index 2022 was cited in the context of what works in terms of practices within large organisations which have had success in increasing and improving Indigenous employment. Learnings from this study could be used to model strategies for the foundation skills workforce.

A response from a peak organisation recommends funding an organisation such as the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) to coordinate the delivery of foundation skills in remote areas through its network of ACCHOs. ACCHOs are a significant employer of First Nations people in regional and remote Australia. An alternative separate procurement process for this sector was also suggested.

4.6   Commonwealth, state, and territory government collaboration

> ***Key Feedback:***
>
> 20. Governments need to collaborate across all tiers and portfolios to better target funds and avoid duplication of services. This includes a more cohesive interaction between various programs targeting the same cohorts.
> 21. Government should ensure programs are not competing for the same thin market.
> 22. Government should align programs against the 17 targets and 4 priority reforms under the Closing the Gap agreement.

There were strong sentiments about government making a serious commitment to the role of foundation skills training in remote and First Nations communities, including adherence to and reporting against, the 17 targets and 4 priority reform areas of the Closing the Gap agreement. One response indicated that government need to 'actually listen', instead of paying lip service, to self-determination and self-empowerment. This included getting serious about providing foundation skills and stop only funding pilot programs.'

4.6.1 Duplication

Some stakeholders raised concerns about duplication of effort with various programs and funding sources potentially operating in one community at any given time. This creates an environment of competing demands for community members, which makes it difficult for any one program to succeed or remain viable in a thin market.

One response highlighted that in the case of jobseekers, participants may be referred to in-house or other training programs in favour of Commonwealth funded programs such as the SEE program.

The respective levels of government should be clear about each other's roles in the delivery of foundation skills in remote areas and to First Nations communities to ensure that investment is responsive and forward thinking in terms of community and industry needs. Foundation skills development should be a shared responsibility.

Respondents called on governments to agree on a foundation skills policy between the tiers of government, to support better targeting and cohesion of initiatives. Programs developed under this policy should have clear and defined purposes with outcomes aligned to economic or societal outcomes. These should be designed and led by community in true commitment to closing the gap to achieve equality of life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and for all Australians.

4.6.2 Accessibility

Some states and territories are more reliant on federal funding than others, and in these cases, unless you are able to access federal funds, then there is less likelihood that you are able to design a program to deliver foundation skills training (or other adult education).

Some responses suggested funding of positions such as Community Engagement Advisors to engage with communities on LLND training needs, and a full-time Adult Educator in communities to be the 'go to' person for facilitation of foundation skills training and other training communities might need. This would assist in providing stability and long-term investment into closing the gap in First Nations communities.

Comments also reflected that there have been two House of Representatives inquiries that included comments on First Nations and remote LLND needs: *Don't take it as read: Inquiry into adult literacy and its importance*[1] and *Education in remote and complex environments*[2]. Some respondents to this

---

[1] House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Don't take it as read*, 2022.
[2] House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Education in remote and complex environments*, 2020.

Discussion Paper also made submissions to these inquiries. One submission suggested using the *'Don't take it as read'* report as a base from which to develop a model.

In addition to these specific points, suggestions for Government action were contained throughout the responses.

5.0 General comments

There were a number of responses submitted which contained general comments and feedback, not necessarily aligned with the specific questions outlined in the Discussion Paper. These comments were incorporated as feedback against the questions where the information was provided.

5.1 Submission Formats

Responses to the Discussion Paper were received via:

1. Written submissions
2. Virtual workshops
3. Online survey (Qualtrics)

5.1.1 Written Submissions

Written responses were received from 10 organisations/people representing a range of stakeholder groups.

5.1.2 Online Workshops

Online workshops were held throughout January and February 2023 with the following groups (see Table 2):

- Remote Community Pilot providers
- SEE providers
- LLND teachers
- Peak bodies
- General stakeholders
- State and Territory representatives

Each workshop was between 60 and 90 minutes long.

A number of 1:1 sessions with adult LLND specialists were also conducted in addition to these workshops. The purpose of these were to further explore points and themes raised at the workshop.

5.1.3 Online Survey

An online survey was released on 8 December 2022 via Qualtrics. Responses were received from 15 people/groups representing a range of demographics including:

- Community members/individuals

- Peak body members
- RTOs
- Government Departments
- Community Organisations
- Remote Community Pilots provider or subcontractors
- SEE provider or subcontractors

6.0 Next Steps

Feedback from this Discussion Paper has been used to inform the Australian Government's 2023-24 Budget measure *Foundation Skills programs - redesign and Pilot extension*.

The feedback will be further used to inform the detailed design and implementation of this measure, in particular Stream 2 – First Nation Delivery of the SEE program.

Consultations on Stream 2 guidelines will occur in the latter half of 2023.

7.0 Appendix A - Discussion Paper on *Future delivery of foundation skills training in remote Australia*

Future delivery of foundation skills training in remote Australia discussion paper – December 2022 - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government (dewr.gov.au)