

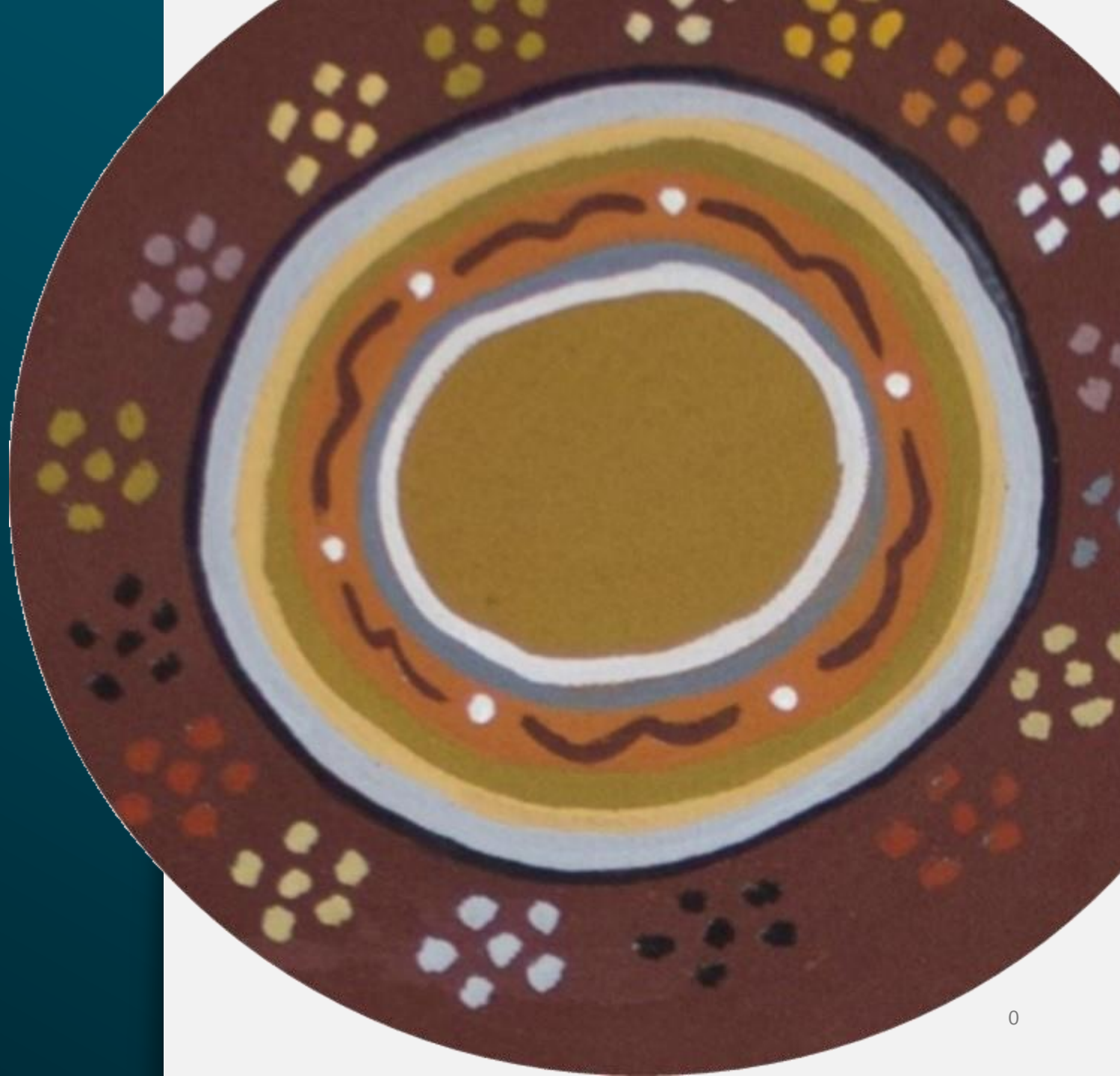
Language and Culture

Working Together Session

In May 2019 Empowered Communities brought together Aboriginal organisations and leaders from across the East Kimberley to talk about Language and Culture. Together we;

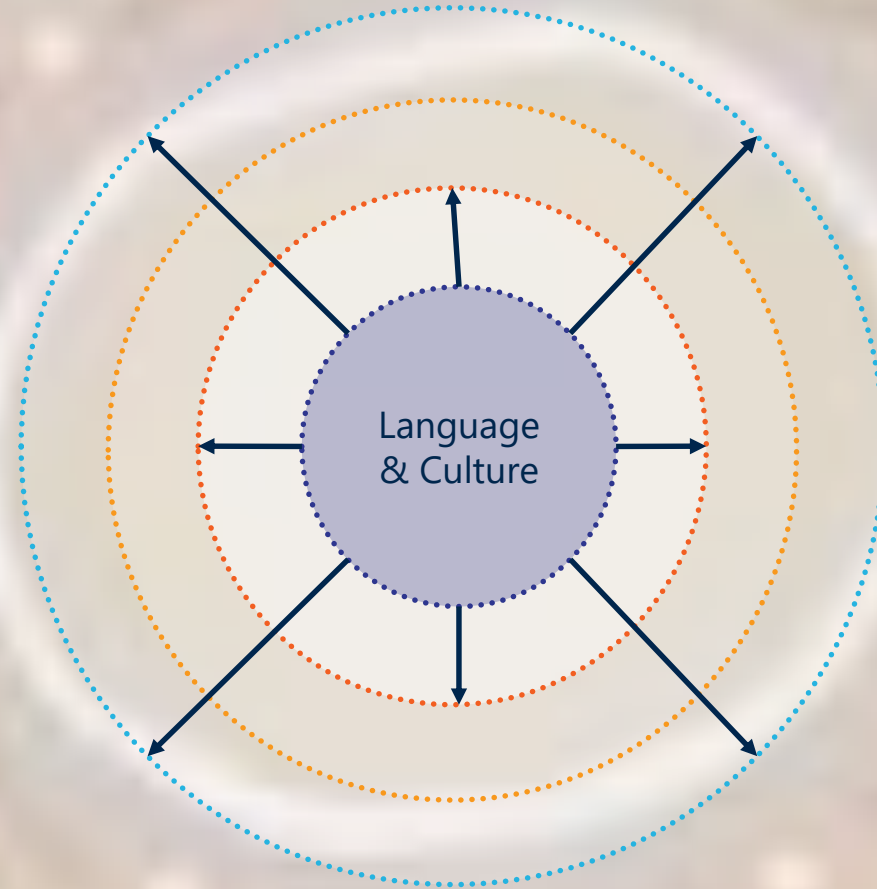
- Shared stories and experiences to build a shared understanding of what Language and Culture means.
- Explored our hopes and aspirations for Language and Culture.
- Named what success would look like when Language and Culture are strong.
- Began to plan how we can track and measure progress.

Please note: The indicator framework as co-designed at this session is a work in progress. We welcome you to try and test it and provide feedback.



Why Language and Culture?

Language and Culture is central to everything both now and into the future.



Language and Culture works from the inside to strengthen our relationships with self, each other and Country. It connects us to our cultural heritage and identity. It promotes social and economic inclusion. It increases wellbeing and economic participation, opportunity and independence and is a central priority to regional development

What has been said before?

There has been a number of consultations in the East Kimberley on Language and Culture. People have a clear vision of what success will look like when things are going well. In 2018 Empowered Communities recorded these visions at the annual Members Summit and through a series of community meetings.

Empowered Communities Members Summit

When things are going well people will be collaborating and understand what each other do. People will have a strong sense of identity. They will be strong in spirit and not shamed. Language will be alive and stories, songs and dance will be passed on to our kids. Services will be designed and working better. People will be motivated and engaged.

Kununurra and Halls Creek Community Forums

People will be strong in their understanding of the roles and responsibilities connected to their skin groups and these skin groups will be formally recognised. People are returning and connecting to Country. There is less offending, less violence, abuse, bullying and suicide. Tribal discipline is being practiced. People are speaking language and children are learning about culture at home and in school.

Past Consultations

Aboriginal people will have access to Country. We will live peacefully with family and kin and our Elders will feel safe to share and record their knowledge. Skin groups will play a part in maintaining order. Kids will be learning Aboriginal way alongside kartiya way. People will show honesty, ownership and accountability. They will have respect for each other and Country.

It is now time to take the next step. Together we need to work out how we can track the strength of Language and Culture in the East Kimberley. How will we know when things are working? How do we know when services are getting things right? How can we measure change at an individual, family and population level?

What does Language mean to people in the East Kimberley?

Language is more than just an agreed way of communicating. It is a platform from which cultural knowledge and heritage is passed on. It is central to identity and carries meaning beyond the words themselves. It is important to also describe what it means to speak a language. This includes attitudes towards language and transfer of language. It can be measured through levels of fluency and the domains in which it is spoken.

(Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre)

Language isn't important just to speak it. It is important because of the things it enables – songs, customs, identity.

There has to be an inspiration, a reason for being. It's going to be people in the community.

Government see Language and Culture different to us so it is important we have clarity about what we mean by Language and Culture – we need to tell Government what it means to us.

Connectedness is critical to strong Language and Culture. Language and Culture can't be split.

It's not about showing that language isn't strong it's about showing where it can go.

We need to understand the different levels of language when deciding on measures. Public is the highest domain where language is spoken.

Attitudes to Language are important. We need our young people to feel proud to speak language.

It is important to plan. A linguist can't save a language but they can help put strategies and plans in place to help save it.

We can't do all of the other things without language first. We want as many people as possible to be able to have simple understanding.



What does Culture mean to people in the East Kimberley?

Culture is the ceremony, ritual and knowledge practice that underpin the sovereignty of First Nation people who have existed in their specific location on this continent for millennia.

(Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre)

We know people have the cultural knowledge when a person can practice culture independently.

It is the organisations' role to provide the opportunity but it is the individual's responsibility to carry it forward.

Culture reflects the traditional law and customs that can be mapped back thousands of years. Events and ceremonies are the expression of culture.

The issue is bigger than personal gain. Can you drive your culture safely into the future?

The Tjurabalan Red Shirts is a cultural knowledge handover process – it is not traditional/normal way of doing this but time is critical and we need to pass on this knowledge to preserve it.

We know people have the cultural knowledge when a person can practice culture independently.

The cultural network is being broken down, the relationships between each other are changing.

There is a real anxiety amongst old people about losing culture. We are losing our cultural knowledge holders too quickly.

We need to ask ourselves - who wants to know the knowledge? Who knows the knowledge? Who needs to know the knowledge?



How does it feel when Language and Culture are strong?



"The sound of corroboree brings people together and draws them in. The didge and the clapsticks make you feel at home. You forget family feuds and arguments. You feel the spirits are there with you and are communicating with you. This is how it feels when Language and Culture are strong."



When Language and Culture are strong we have **strong raring ngoondenging** (good bingy – good feeling).

People are **practicing culture** as part of life – not because they get paid for it. We are **talking language** everyday, everywhere and we practice **traditional marriages and kinship**.

We feel **whole**. We feel at **home**. Like when we are **on our own Country**. There is **connection and togetherness** with each other and with Country. **Self-identity** is strong and our family and home **life is happy**.

We are **positive, inspired, motivated**. There is good **interaction, communication and sharing**. There are **strong leaders and good guidance**.

We are **proud** because **kids are participating in culture** and they feel **pride in their identity**. We are proud because **we help each other to do cultural activities**, we are **inclusive and accepting**.

We are proud to belong.

Does Culture feel the same way now as it did in the past?

Things feel different and not as strong because of Western interference. Rules and laws made by Gardiya stop us from doing things with our families in the same way. Removal off Country has led to loss of culture. The landscape and the country have changed.

Our old people have passed and the young generation are frustrated or scared about Language and Culture not being there. Kids feel shame to speak language now. There is less respect for Elders. There is division amongst other traditional groups.

There is no more writing in the sand and elders telling stories.

We used to do cultural work not for payment – we did the work for our families. But now we need to share culture outside our families it is right to have remuneration. We had to start building organisations because Language and Culture were slipping away. Native title made a difference but different Dawangs have created issues.

If culture doesn't feel strong now what do we want it to feel like in the future?

Culture has to exist in modern life. Young people need to be involved as learners.

Language and Culture will be in the media and showcased to the rest of the world and everyone will be proudly speaking language.

There will be more gatherings in community where the whole community will join in – not just the same group.

Bad behaviour will not be rewarded – kids who behave right way will be included in opportunities. There will be more focus on the positive: good news stories and celebrations

No jealousy. Respect for Elders. Healing camps. Togetherness. Back to Country trips. Communicating with the ancestors.

Organisations will be working together to support cultural practice, including funerals. Staff won't 'just be doing their job'.

How can we keep track of our journey and measure our progress in meaningful ways?

- An **indicator** *indicates* performance but does not measure it. A performance indicator define a set of values against which to measure. Indicators are about *whole* populations.
- A **measure** *measures* performance. Measures are usually about the people who receive services.



Binarri-binyja yarrawoo with help from Jawun undertook a literature review of how other projects locally, nationally and internationally measure Language and Culture.¹

As a group we worked through potential indicator domains and drafted a set of indicators that were meaningful for the East Kimberley.

1. Sources included; Vanuatu Pilot Study Report 2012: Alternative Indicators of Well-being for Melanesia, Community Wellbeing from the Ground Up - A Yawuru Example, Outcomes Map – Mental Health Suicide Prevention Yiriman Project, Integrating art production and economic development in the Kimberley - National Survey of Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists, The link between Indigenous culture and wellbeing: Qualitative evidence for Australian Aboriginal peoples, Mayi Kuwayu Study survey, 2014-2015 NATSISS

Indicators of LANGUAGE AND CULTURE in the East Kimberley

COUNTRY

IDENTITY

ART

LANGUAGE

Country is the land and all living things within the land. It includes the seasons, stories and creation spirits. It is both a place of belonging and a way of being.

Identity is how we see ourselves. It is individual, cultural and social and created through our family, community and the society in which we live. It involves relationships and interactions and provides a sense of belonging.

Art is a way of recording our stories, knowledge and our unique cultural identity. It involves our traditional and contemporary skills and knowledge and how we share our culture with others. It is a record of the adaptive nature of our cultural heritage.

Language is more than just an agreed way of communicating. It is a platform from which cultural knowledge and heritage is passed on. It is central to identity and carries meaning beyond the words themselves.

- Access to Country
- Lands being used to support traditions and cultural economy
- Caring for Country (singing Country, traditional management)
- Seasonal hunting and food gathering
- Recognition, knowledge and respect for Country
- Governance and decision making to support Aboriginal control

- Identification with clan, tribal group or language group
- Knowledge of skin group
- Connection to Country (including totem)
- Transmission of traditional knowledge (e.g. Art, history, healing)
- Strong knowledge of family history, kinship and family tree
- People have a proud Aboriginal identity
- Participation in cultural activities, ritual and ceremony

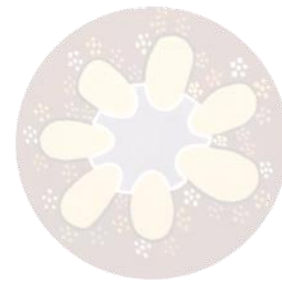
- Understanding of history, knowledge and stories behind the art
- Interest in art from tourists/outside people
- People practicing art for reasons other than money
- People participating in the economy through art
- People participating in 'art maintenance' activities

- People learning an Aboriginal language
- Language resources
- People who confidently and regularly use Aboriginal language words
- Language use in public
- Proficiency of language speakers
- Language attitudes

INDICATOR GROUPING

WHAT MIGHT WE MEASURE?

What's Next for Language and Culture in the East Kimberley?



- Circulate this Language and Culture work across the wider East Kimberley and build in feedback
- Develop an evidence brief to help advocate for investment in Language and Culture.
- Build capacity in measuring and evaluation across the ACCO sector.
- Test the indicator framework in the Wirnan project Monitoring and Evaluation plan

Thankyou to everyone who took part and generously shared their stories and experiences around Language and Culture.



**Binarri-binyja Yarrowoo -
backbone for Empowered Communities in the East Kimberley**

Advocating Change | Facilitating Choice

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