



**Reconciliation Australia's**  
**Submission into the Reform of Australian Government**  
**Administration**  
**Building the world's best public service**

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## Introduction

Reconciliation Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to a discussion on the Reform of the Australian Government Administration.

Reconciliation Australia is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that was established in 2000 by the former Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. It seeks to build and promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians for the well-being of the nation. Our vision is for an Australia that provides equal life chances for all, recognising and respecting the special place, culture and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians. Equal life chances for all Australians means eliminating the glaring gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

The Australian Government has stated it is determined to close the fundamental divide in health outcomes and life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>1</sup> The demographics of Indigenous disadvantage are stark. Based on the findings of the Productivity Commission's 2009 report on *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*, there is a reasonable prospect that the national outcomes for Indigenous health, employment, housing and income could get worse.<sup>2</sup> The consequence of this occurring would be disastrous on both the social and economic front.

Reconciliation Australia believes that reform of the machinery and culture of government is needed to achieve effective whole-of-government policy development and service delivery that is attuned to the diverse needs and priorities of Indigenous Australians. This submission addresses two areas identified in the Advisory Group's discussion paper which we believe to be critical to closing the gap and creating equal life chances for all Australians. These are:

- High quality, forward thinking and creative policy advice; and
- High quality, effective programs and services focused on the needs of citizens

We would urge the Advisory Group to recognise that sustained improvement in public sector outcomes for Indigenous Australians will have significant benefits for all Australians.

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<sup>1</sup> Close the Gap, Indigenous Health Equality Summit Statement of Intent.

<sup>2</sup> Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2009. *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*. Commonwealth of Australia.

## High quality forward thinking and creative policy advice

Reconciliation Australia believes that creating high quality, forward thinking and creative policy advice requires:

- structural change to embed the genuine participation of citizens in policy and program development. This means significant strengthening of, and support for, community development approaches that are responsive to local needs.
- Prime Ministerial backing for a new national framework for Indigenous policy development and implementation, placing a high priority on harnessing the knowledge and leadership of local communities.
- enhanced capacity of the Australian Public Service (APS) to effectively develop and implement policy in collaboration with citizens. Increasing levels of Indigenous employment across the APS, specialist training, targeted recruitment and an emphasis on on-the-ground experience will improve the ability of the APS to respond to critical policy challenges.

### Policy formulation

There is an existing body of evidence to support the three recommendations mentioned above. The key messages from this material are summarised in a brief appendix to this submission – ‘Things that work’ (Appendix A).

It is clear from this body of work and from the international development literature of the last 40 years that the genuine engagement of Indigenous communities in the early stage development of policy and in the design of implementation plans is pivotal to success. Policies that are developed with little input or ownership from target communities, especially where those communities believe that they have not been consulted in a bona fide way, are generally unsuccessful. A ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach across very diverse communities typically achieves poor outcomes over time.

Reconciliation Australia and the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Research (CAEPR)’s Indigenous Community Governance Research Project was a detailed two year study of what works in Indigenous community governance. The research found that cooperative approaches and community involvement in program design and delivery were necessary to best match the diversity of Indigenous communities around Australia.

The Australian National Audit Office’s evaluation of government service delivery in remote Indigenous communities also found that meeting community needs was often linked to the level of community involvement in the program’s planning and delivery. Those programs that engaged the community in the development and implementation of the program best meet community needs.

While the findings of this report pertain directly to remote Indigenous communities, the findings are supported by similar evidence across urban and regional contexts. The Advisory Group would find of special interest the successful examples highlighted by the Indigenous Community Governance Research Project.<sup>3</sup> This project involved researching the governance of Indigenous organisations across urban, regional and remote Australia. It features policy arrangements with a community development approach that allowed communities to participate as partners with governments in designing frameworks to meet their needs.

The Indigenous Community Governance Research Project highlighted the need for program design to match diverse community circumstances. It indicated that federal and State government agencies need to apply a more sophisticated understanding of the different types of Indigenous communities to maximise the likelihood of positive program outcomes in very diverse types of Indigenous communities.

These findings are also supported by the board established to review the Australian Government's Northern Territory Emergency Response. The board stated that:

'...there needs to be adjustments in the machinery of government enabling better coordination of services, greater responsiveness to the unique characteristics of each community and higher levels of community participation in the design and delivery of services.'<sup>4</sup>

Local approaches, developed in partnership with communities are, not surprisingly, less likely to produce unintended consequences, confusion and poor on-the-ground involvement in the long-term. In their study of the efficacy of alcohol restrictions across a range of different contexts, the National Drug Research Institute found that there was no one measure or suite of measures that could be assessed as universally effective.<sup>5</sup> Instead, they found that those that were developed with the support and involvement of particular communities, based on the needs and circumstances of those communities, were most likely to achieve success.

Reconciliation Australia believes that a sustained improvement in public sector outcomes in this area will not be attainable if based solely on individual agency improvement efforts. We believe that structural change is required across the APS to provide the necessary coherence and effective focus of federal effort over the coming decade. Given the

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<sup>3</sup> Hunt, J. and D. Smith, 2006. Building Indigenous community governance in Australia: Preliminary research findings. Report to Reconciliation Australia and the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research.

Hunt, J. and D. Smith, 2007. Indigenous community governance project: Year two research findings. Report to Reconciliation Australia and the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research. See <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/projects/indigenous-governance-research-project>

<sup>4</sup> NTER Review Board, 2008. Northern Territory Emergency Response: Report of the NTER Review Board. Report to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. See [http://www.nterreview.gov.au/docs/report\\_nter\\_review/docs/Report\\_NTER\\_Review\\_October08.pdf](http://www.nterreview.gov.au/docs/report_nter_review/docs/Report_NTER_Review_October08.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> National Drug Research Institute, 2007. *Restrictions on the sale and supply of alcohol; evidence and outcomes*. Curtin University of Technology.

seriousness of the findings about ineffective program outcomes in the 2009 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report, Reconciliation Australia believes that a better coordinated federal framework is needed – one that is based on a community development approach. A guiding principle of such this framework must be that communities have a genuine voice in policy and program development, implementation and financial decisions on matters which affect them. This may require the devolution of authority and service delivery structures from a centralised bureaucracy to regions. Reconciliation Australia Director Fred Chaney states:

‘There is really no contest either about the fundamental importance of Indigenous engagement as a prerequisite for success – this is what reconciliation is all about these days – building the respectful partnerships that underpin every example of success we have at our disposal, locally and around the world.

Let’s be upfront and learn from our mistakes - centralised, imposed programs delivered from Canberra or state/territory capitals have not delivered the success we must now expect.’<sup>6</sup>

There is a large volume of evidence highlighting the need for structural change across the APS to embed the genuine participation of citizens in policy and to ensure responsiveness to local needs. Given the complex changes required, Reconciliation Australia suggests that the Advisory Group draw together experts in community development approaches to explore options for this type of reform.

### **Policy integration**

A continuing challenge for policy development is to maintain a cross-departmental and multi-tiered approach. The Indigenous Community Governance Research Project found that Indigenous organisations faced, as one of their major challenges, very poor coordination across departments. Unnecessary duplication and failure to properly coordinate often left Indigenous organisations with burdensome reporting requirements and complex service delivery arrangements. The recommendation of the 2007 Indigenous Community Governance Research Project report was for regional developments and partnerships with integrated funding mechanisms and highly skilled government officers to facilitate and monitor arrangements, supported by effective departmental back-up within government.

Reconciliation Australia believes that the 2009 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report was correct in identifying the following pre-requisites for program success:

- cooperative approaches between Indigenous people and government — often in partnership with the non-profit and private sectors
- community involvement in program design and decision-making — a ‘bottom-up’ rather than ‘top-down’ approach
- good governance — at organisation, community and government levels; and

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<sup>6</sup> Fred Chaney, address to the National Press Club 4 July 2007

- ongoing government support — including human, financial and physical resources.

In addition to working across department silos, the APS will also need to consider innovative approaches to working across policy silos. For many communities policy areas are difficult if not impossible to separate. As the board established by the Australian Government to review the Northern Territory Emergency Response states:

‘Just as housing issues underpin community health, so policing issues intermesh with family support which, in turn, is intimately connected with child and family health.’<sup>7</sup>

We believe that the APS needs to provide a variety of incentives and support mechanisms for agencies to be innovative and flexible. At a minimum, there is a need to find ways to reduce the Canberra silo syndrome which has sometimes led to Indigenous communities receiving numerous visiting delegations from different agencies over a short time. Given that the delivery of the majority of basic services is the responsibility of the States and Territories, finding efficiencies and ways to improve the pattern of partnership with this level of government is critical to success.

Reconciliation Australia believes that the Australian and State and Territory governments have made significant progress in coordinating their actions. Governments are increasingly coordinating priorities and resources through mechanisms like the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and bilateral agreements. Tailoring these existing mechanisms to local or regional areas will build on this momentum and increase the impact of government actions.

## Human capital

For effective policy and program development, as well as service delivery, the APS requires people with the necessary expertise to tailor policy solutions to match different Indigenous communities.

Both the Desert Knowledge remoteFOCUS<sup>8</sup> initiative and Reconciliation Australia’s Indigenous Community Governance Research Project have recommended strengthening the provision of public sector training in relation to Indigenous policy and program implementation in order to enhance the capacity of the public service to effectively deliver the outcomes required. The Indigenous Community Governance Research Project recommended that ‘bureaucratic skills need to be enhanced to meet the challenges of shaping and implementing policy to develop stronger Indigenous governance’.

<sup>7</sup> NTER Review Board, 2008. Northern Territory Emergency Response: Report of the NTER Review Board. Report to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. See [http://www.nterreview.gov.au/docs/report\\_nter\\_review/docs/Report\\_NTER\\_Review\\_October08.pdf](http://www.nterreview.gov.au/docs/report_nter_review/docs/Report_NTER_Review_October08.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Desert Knowledge Australia 2008. *PROSPECTUS remoteFOCUS: Revitalizing Remote Australia*. See <http://www.desertknowledge.com.au/dka/index.cfm?fuseaction=remoteFocus>

Additionally, the Australian National Audit Office's *Evaluation of Service Delivery in Remote Indigenous Communities 2009* report found that capacity of government is critical, emphasising the importance of ensuring departmental staff have strong interpersonal skills and a thorough understanding of remote communities.<sup>9</sup>

For decades the Australian School of Pacific Administration provided specialist training for public servants to deliver certain services to New Guinea and Indigenous people in Northern Australia. While the Australian and New Zealand School of Government has developed a program in conjunction with AusAID for public sector officials in the executive ranks to build capacity and strengthen reform in the Pacific region, currently there are no APS-wide training programs focusing on building the capacity of the APS to effectively develop policy and deliver services to Indigenous Australians.

Increasing Indigenous employment levels across the APS will also assist to build its the capacity to provide more effective policies and service delivery to Indigenous people as well as contribute to increased social equity by improving Indigenous peoples' income levels and employment opportunities.

While the APS has programs and policies in place to increase the recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff, the APS reform Discussion Paper indicates that Indigenous employment in the APS has been falling, from 2.7% in 1999 to 2.1% in 2008. This is particularly concerning when the Indigenous population of Australia is in fact growing.<sup>10</sup>

Reconciliation Australia's Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP) provide some valuable insights with regard to strategies to recruit and retain Indigenous staff in the APS.<sup>11</sup> The RAP program, launched in 2006, turns 'good intentions into action' by supporting organisations to engage within their sphere of influence in the national effort to close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and other Australians. Organisations set targets within three areas, 'respect', 'relationships' and 'opportunities', and produce a yearly progress report indicating whether or not these targets have been achieved. Forty Australian Government Departments have completed RAPs and six agencies have submitted progress reports. These six progress reports provide valuable evidence on the current situation regarding Indigenous employment in the APS and indicate ways in which the situation could be improved.

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<sup>9</sup> Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous programs) *Evaluation of Service Delivery in Remote Indigenous Communities* see <http://www.finance.gov.au/oea/docs/ESDRIC.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> The Australian Bureau of Statistics states that the Indigenous population of Australia is projected to grow by 2.2% per year between 2006 and 2021, compared with an annual growth rate of between 1.2% and 1.7% per year for the total Australian population see <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/5D8264F4B083F282CA25762A002726E3?OpenDocument>

<sup>11</sup> Reconciliation Australia's RAP program turns "good intentions into action" by encouraging and supporting organisations, large and small, to engage within their sphere of influence in the national effort to close the 17-year gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and other Australians. For further information see <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/reconciliation-action-plans/what-is-a-rap>

Reconciliation Australia recognises that the use of RAP progress reports to make recommendations about Indigenous employment in the APS is problematic on several counts. In addition to the RAP program being voluntary, resources and capacity to implement Indigenous employment strategies varies across the public services. However, we do believe that the RAP progress reports provide an important insight into the level of commitment to Indigenous employment in the APS at the departmental level. Reconciliation Australia has noted that the time and effort invested in the corporate RAP progress reports is significantly greater than those of the Australian Government Departments. We also believe that the RAP progress reports provide important information on which strategies are working and which are not in individual government departments.

Six Australian Government Departments have completed RAP progress reports. These reports highlight poor data collection in the APS relating to Indigenous employment, as well as the substantial gaps in data. One department's RAP progress report noted that they did not know the number of their existing Indigenous employees. Another department aimed to have a 5% increase in Indigenous applicants. The subsequent progress report received by Reconciliation Australia stated that the department did not have data in relation to the number of Indigenous applicants to department jobs.

The RAP progress reports also indicate that initiatives to increase Indigenous employment are not being followed through due to time pressures, high workloads and cost restrictions in combination with a lack of ownership and responsibility and very few of the retention and recruitment strategies executed in the APS are being carefully monitored. For example, one agency implemented a policy regarding Indigenous representation on interview panels yet no evidence was provided in their RAP progress report as to whether or not this initiative had been successful. Additionally, an Indigenous Employee Officer was appointed at a different agency, but neglected to note in the progress report whether or not this had been a positive change for the human resources branch.

Successful Indigenous recruitment strategies have been initiated in some Australian Government Departments. An Australian Government Department's RAP progress report indicated that three Indigenous graduates, five Indigenous trainees and two Indigenous cadets were engaged at the department in early 2009. This is likely to be due in part to their strategy of promoting the department as an employer of choice to universities and high schools with a high population of Indigenous students. Another department noted the Australian Public Service Commission's Indigenous Traineeship Program is very successful in the department's regional operating locations.

In general, however, recruitment processes across the APS often appear inflexible and remain a major barrier to recruiting and retaining more Indigenous staff. The RAP progress reports indicate several Australian Government Departments had difficulty implementing non-traditional recruitment strategies. One Department was unable to implement the school-based traineeships they had aimed to execute in their RAP, while another decided

not to implement an agency-specific Indigenous cadetship program following a feasibility study. Yet corporate groups are becoming increasingly aware of the need to adapt their recruitment strategies to successfully attract Indigenous staff. Qantas, for example, noted that to deliver on their RAP goals, they had to broaden their traditional approach to recruitment to include a range of initiatives aimed at building the pipeline of Indigenous talent such as school-based traineeships, university cadetships, engineering apprenticeships and partnerships with other corporate groups.

The six RAP progress reports from Australian Government Departments indicate that the provision of training opportunities for Indigenous staff is the main focus of retention strategies. Training opportunities have included the Australian Public Service Commission's Indigenous development programs and training offered by the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre.

Reconciliation Australia emphasises the importance of flexible working arrangements and cultural training for staff as a crucial element in retaining Indigenous employees. This point was noted in *An Evaluation of the Australian Public Service Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees* produced by Dominic Downie and Associates for the Australian Public Service Commission.<sup>12</sup> The evaluation noted the poor promotion and retention outcomes for Indigenous staff in the APS and stated that 'a key driver of retention is whether or not APS workplaces provide an environment that is sensitive to and supportive of Indigenous culture.' It is also important to note that Indigenous staff consulted as part of the evaluation identified a lack of workplace support as a factor in Indigenous staff retention.

An analysis of the six RAP progress reports from Australian Government Departments indicate that the APS would benefit from:

- accurate data collect on Indigenous employment levels, retention and turn over by agency;
- an effective governance structure to achieve outcomes in Indigenous employment; and
- sharing information about best practice among each other and also private sector employers, including creative employment and retention strategies.

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<sup>12</sup> Dominic Downie and Associates, 2008. *An Evaluation of the Australian Public Service Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees*. Unpublished report to the Australian Public Service Commission.

## High quality, effective programs and services focused on the needs of citizens

Reconciliation Australia believes that for the APS to provide high quality, effective programs and services focused on the needs of citizens, it requires:

- the ability to devolve authority and service delivery structures from a centralised bureaucracy to a more tailored approach that responds to cultural needs and the needs of regions or local areas; and
- good accountability systems that provide for ongoing independent evaluation and one that focuses on clear outcomes developed in consultation with citizens.

### Citizen centered

Currently, program and service delivery across Australia is generally based on the ‘one size fits all’ approach. Research from the Desert Knowledge remoteFOCUS initiative indicates that:

‘Government programs operate in a manner that marginalises Indigenous peoples’ access to mainstream services (and confines them to a labyrinth of individual or one-off programs and related funding sources) that are poorly delivered and take little account of the individual circumstances...’<sup>13</sup>

As previously stated, Reconciliation Australia supports architectural change to the APS which embraces the genuine participation of citizens in policy and program development, implementation and financial decisions on matters that affect them. However, too often consultation with Indigenous communities is conducted as an uneven exercise with the interests of individual agencies dominating the exchange of information unduly within communities. Government consultation schedules tend to be driven by program or electoral timeframes that inhibit, rather than encourage, effective engagement by communities. There is often insufficient understanding and appreciation of the uneven power relationships underpinning these consultations and an unwillingness to genuinely share power.

As the Australian National Audit Office noted in its lessons from the COAG Indigenous trials:

‘...governments must be willing to understand and work respectfully with Indigenous communities, and Indigenous communities must be willing to understand and work with governments. Both may need to review the ways in which they interact with

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<sup>13</sup> Desert Knowledge Australia 2008. *PROSPECTUS remoteFOCUS: Revitalizing Remote Australia* see <http://www.desertknowledge.com.au/dka/index.cfm?fuseaction=remoteFocus>

one another to ensure that interactions are appropriate and foster the development of productive and lasting relationships.’<sup>14</sup>

Meredith Edwards’ research on participatory governance indicates that the key ingredients for successful creation of participatory policy mechanisms include strong leadership, trusting relationships and the willingness of those with power to share it.<sup>15</sup> This indicates the need for ministerial level support for the devolution of authority and for many aspects of service delivery decision-making to regional and local areas.

This would necessitate a more tailored approach to program and service delivery by the APS, one that is linked up with State and Territory service provision. To ensure the effective delivery of services, the APS must increase partnerships with organisations outside of government. Using local or specialised organisations to deliver programs and services would increase flexibility and innovation and help to ensure services are delivered in a way that meets the needs of citizens.

While recognising the general benefits of a mobile workforce that can readily move into and across the APS, a high turnover of staff within the APS, especially in areas of service delivery, undermines the creation of viable relationships at community level. Governments need to realign their thinking around the economic value of investing in relationships, human resources and longer timeframes required to deliver effective and sustainable partnerships. Investment in relationships should sit alongside investments in service delivery or physical infrastructure as essential ingredients in community development and achieving lasting results.

### **Well designed**

Perhaps the most important point for governments that has emerged out of the Indigenous Community Governance Research Project is that the complexity of government arrangements in Indigenous communities is a barrier to successful Indigenous governance. The research recommends that, while there has been some movement towards more regionalised, decentralised approaches, departmental funding silos remain predominant. Combined with the relative lack of field experience among many central policy makers, this constrains the development of optimal regional governance strategies and priorities.

Reconciliation Australia believes that its recommendations in this submission are supported by the Australian National Audit Office’s 2007 survey of Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC) managers, which found that ‘departmental culture and systems’ along with ‘red tape or bureaucracy’, ‘rigid funding arrangements’ and ‘centralised delegations and funding

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<sup>14</sup> M. Edwards, 2008. *Participatory Governance and the Indigenous Agenda: From Rhetoric to Reality*. Centre for Policy Development.

<sup>15</sup> M. Edwards, 2008. *Participatory Governance and the Indigenous Agenda: From Rhetoric to Reality*. Centre for Policy Development.

allocation methods' were among the main weaknesses of the Government's Indigenous Affairs arrangements.

Chief among issues highlighted in the Office of Evaluation and Audit's evaluation of *Service Delivery in Remote Indigenous Communities* is the need to have decision-making power invested in local entities with better on-the-ground knowledge and relationships.<sup>16</sup> The report found that there was a 'block' between those on the ground and centralised decision-makers and that this block was harmful to effective and efficient policy development and implementation. It is also essential for the APS and governments to stop the 'start again' syndrome and build on areas of success.

While Reconciliation Australia believes that well designed programs and services are those designed to respond to local issues, programs must also be designed with a clearly defined purpose. Productivity Commission Chair, Gary Banks notes:

'...a consistent failure to acknowledge Indigenous cultural perspectives in policy design and implementation, despite acknowledgement of its importance in achieving successful outcomes.'<sup>17</sup>

Past experience tells us:

- The natural tendency of mainstream agencies is to cater to the mainstream. Without strong and consistent political and administrative leadership, agencies generally fail Indigenous communities.
- Mainstream service delivery not delivered in culturally appropriate ways is unlikely to succeed.
- Indigenous organisations that are appropriate to particular community setting and have authority in the community are essential to obtaining the engagement of those communities.

### **Delivered by capable people**

This submission has already discussed the importance of enhancing the capacity of the APS to effectively develop policy and deliver services in collaboration with citizens. In addition to the points already raised, it is also important to recognise the need for specialised positions within the APS and that a recruitment approach based on generic capabilities may not produce a workforce able to deliver outcomes for Indigenous people. The Australian Public Service Commission's Integrated Leadership System<sup>18</sup> identifies five core capability clusters for APS employees:

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<sup>16</sup> Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous programs) *Evaluation of Service Delivery in Remote Indigenous Communities* see <http://www.finance.gov.au/oea/docs/ESDRIC.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Gary Banks, Chairman, Productivity Commission, Australia address to the Second OECD World Forum on "Statistics, Knowledge and Policy", *Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies*, Istanbul, Turkey, 27-30 June 2007.

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.apsc.gov.au/ils/index.html>

- shapes/supports strategic thinking;
- achieves results;
- cultivates/supports productive working relationships;
- exemplifies/displays personal drive and integrity; and
- communicates with influence.

However, the evaluations of the COAG trials identified the necessary skills to work in Indigenous Affairs as being: ‘good listening; acting in good faith; high levels of good will; willingness to share power; recognising and acknowledging intra-community and familial relationships and how these impact on leaders; understanding the pressures on communities; being honest and open; and being human’.<sup>19</sup>

### Well managed

Reconciliation Australia has seen through RAPs that well managed programs and services are ones that have measureable targets, realistic timeframes and clear accountabilities. That is there is clear responsibility for actions. They are also programs and services that incorporate a continuous improvement process or incremental gains through lesson learnt. This requires a focus on ongoing evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of the action, the program and service delivery in achieving the desired outcomes and to identify where modifications need to be made. Meredith Edwards’ research suggests that the ‘essential ingredients’ for good accountability systems include that expectations of all parties are agreed and explicit; expectations balance respective capacities; reporting arrangements are credible; and there are carefully designed and appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.<sup>20</sup>

Regular and transparent evaluation of outcomes over the long-term is crucial for forming an evidence base for measuring the success of programs and services. In addition, Reconciliation Australia believes that baseline data collection is an essential aspect of accountability. The importance of baseline data to measure successes and guide future direction was highlighted by the board established to review the Australian Government’s Northern Territory Emergency Response. In its evaluation the board stated:

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<sup>19</sup> Morgan Disney and Associates Pty Ltd 2007. *Synopsis Review of the COAG Trial Evaluations*. Report to the Office of Indigenous Policy Co-ordination. See [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/evaluation/coag\\_trial\\_site\\_reports/overview/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/evaluation/coag_trial_site_reports/overview/Pages/default.aspx)

<sup>20</sup> M. Edwards, 2008. *Participatory Governance and the Indigenous Agenda: From Rhetoric to Reality*. Centre for Policy Development.

‘Apart from some initial scoping data, there was little evidence of baseline data being gathered in any formal or organised format which would permit an assessment of the impact and progress...’<sup>21</sup>

The importance of ongoing independent evaluation that focuses on clear outcomes has also been highlighted by John Altman from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research who states:

‘In the absence of independent assessment of policy performance, together with a growing trend to report policy success in the popular media in an orchestrated manner, it is becoming harder and harder to gauge whether results are positive, negative or neutral. Such heightened contestation partly reflects the absence of consensus about the approach taken. It also reflects that the approach is owned and championed by the state, not by the people or Indigenous communities. It is not unusual to read a number of contradictory and highly contested views about a policy outcome, if not on the same day then strung out over just a few, with trial by media, rather than concrete evidence of success, appearing to influence the government’s approach.’<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> NTER Review Board, 2008. *Northern Territory Emergency Response: Report of the NTER Review Board*. Report to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. See [http://www.nterreview.gov.au/docs/report\\_nter\\_review/docs/Report\\_NTER\\_Review\\_October08.pdf](http://www.nterreview.gov.au/docs/report_nter_review/docs/Report_NTER_Review_October08.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Altman, J. 2009, *Developing a national Indigenous policy framework that recognises needs, rights and legacies and delivers results*. Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research. See <http://online.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/topical/2009T12.php>