



Pre-Budget Submission 2022-2023

Submission by First Nations Media Australia to the Australian Treasury

"The Indigenous broadcasting and media sector provides a voice to engage, inform, educate and entertain Indigenous communities, facilitating active participation and cultural and language preservation in Indigenous communities."

– Hugh Watson Consulting – *Renewing a Vital Indigenous Voice and Community Asset*, 2021

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Introduction

About First Nations Media Australia

First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) is the peak body for Indigenous media and First Nations Media Australia is the peak body for Indigenous media and communications. Our purpose is empowering Australia's First Nations people through our culturally connected media industry. As at January 2022, our membership includes 67 organisations and 167 individuals working in or alongside the industry as broadcasters, freelance journalists, photographers, filmmakers and allies.

As part of its industry leadership role, FNMA seeks to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the skills and resources required to access information required to make informed decisions about their own lives, and to share our cultures, languages and perspectives with both First Nations communities and the broader Australian community. We pursue our objectives through active membership of the Coalition of Peaks and through working alongside Government to develop actions like the Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan. The crossover of infrastructure, digital literacy and access to information between telecommunications and media is significant. Therefore, First Nations Media Australia also works to support the digital inclusion and connectivity needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

About the First Nations broadcasting and media sector

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

¹ McNair yellowSquares, *Indigenous Communications and Media Survey*, 2016

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

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

The scope of the First Nations media sector includes:

- **Television:** National free-to-air (NITV); satellite delivered narrowcast (ICTV) TV services; local narrowcast TV services (Goolarri TV at Broome, ICTV in Alice Springs and Broome and Larrakia TV at Darwin). The ICTV satellite TV service reaches 371,846 smartcards nation-wide as at April 2021, not including terrestrial services in Alice Springs and Broome.
- **Video & film production:** Production of culture and language-based content for broadcast & online distribution.
- **Print and Online:** A national newspaper (Koori Mail) alongside a strong web presence of journalistic sites such as IndigenousX.
- First Nations media organisations have a strong **social media** following and publish content online daily.
- **Radio:** Over 230 radio broadcast sites coordinated by 35 licensed, community-owned, not-for-profit organisations. These radio services are able to reach around 320,000 First Nations people, including around 100,000 very hard to reach people in remote Indigenous communities, or approximately 48% of the First Nations population. Radio services are prevented from providing a primary radio service to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples due to a lack of funding and spectrum availability. Established stations broadcast live shows, plus interviews, radio documentaries, news, emergency information, community events, government and other messaging within community broadcasting guidelines through these platforms:
 - 157 stations broadcasting on FM
 - 4 stations broadcasting on AM
 - 13 broadcasting via VAST satellite, in addition to FM services.
 - 5 metropolitan services broadcasting via DAB+, in addition to FM services in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and Darwin.
 - Almost all offer online streaming via a dedicated station website.
 - Many offer on-demand content either through the station's own website, or Soundcloud or podcast sites.
 - 26 stations can be streamed via the indigiTUBE website and app. Some stations also have their own application or use the TuneIn or iHeartRadio apps to reach audiences.

These channels offer a wide range of programming, including news and current affairs reporting from a First Nations perspective, in over 25 Indigenous languages nationally, including the first language of many people in remote communities. In the remote context, First Nations media is the most reliable and ubiquitous radio and media service available to audiences. The sector reaches significant audience share with 91% of people in remote Indigenous communities being regular listeners to radio services and watching ICTV at least once per month.⁴

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

A strong First Nations owned media industry enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to **access to relevant news, information services and emergency warnings and to actively participate in the appropriate delivery of media and information services** for their communities. First Nations media provides a voice for their communities. It is uniquely placed to hear and share communities' strengths, priorities and concerns. In providing news and information to a community, they provide the community with the information they need.⁵

First Nations media outlets are primarily focused on the wellbeing of the community they serve.⁶ This has been particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic throughout which First Nations media organisations have supported communities with essential information and addressed pockets of misinformation and concern emerging within communities. The role First Nations media takes in the distribution of essential information has unfortunately been highlighted by increasing frequent extreme weather events. During such crises, First Nations communities turn to community-controlled media services as a trusted source of information, relaying relevant and relatable information in accessible languages.

"At a time when the mainstream media (and particularly the news) is undergoing major change in terms of diminishing reach, as well as reduced diversity, ownership and revenue, the Indigenous broadcasting and media sector is playing an important role in maintaining media and communication diversity, enhancing social capital and providing leadership in Indigenous communities."

- Hugh Watson Consulting, *Renewing a Vital Indigenous Voice and Community Asset*, 2021

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

⁶ Above & Beyond Broadcasting: a study of First Nations media and the COVID-19 pandemic, University of Melbourne, January 2022

Summary of Budget Request

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

FNMA views effective communication as essential to the ongoing viability of First Nations communities and central to the success of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This submission suggests actions the Australian Government can take toward implementing elements of the Agreement such as "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media, in particular community-controlled media, have a central role in communicating activities under this Agreement to allow culturally relevant messages to be developed and shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages used in media under Outcome 16 and the achievement of Outcome 17.⁷

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

1. Provide essential information services
2. Increase jobs and skills
3. Improve the community-controlled sector's sustainability

1	Provide essential information services	
	Infrastructure maintenance program	\$3.05m
	COVID-19 emergency support, including mental health	\$4.73m
	Strengthen news services	\$1m
	Expanding local media services	\$3.5m
2	Increase jobs & skills	
	Expand training and career development opportunities	\$4.3m
	Content production fund	\$2m
	Digital Archive workers	\$1.3m
	Address recruitment and retention barriers	\$2.2m
3	Improve community-controlled sector sustainability	
	Business development actions	\$5.1m
	Address indexation pressures	\$4.4m
	TOTAL BUDGET REQUEST:	\$31.58m

⁷ National Agreement on Closing the Gap, July 2020

Budget Item Details

1. Provide essential information services

The role that First Nations media organisations perform in the delivery of essential information cannot be overestimated. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasters translate and relay key information in languages that are accessible to communities around the country every day. First Nations media is the preferred channel for receiving news and government messaging as it transgresses language and cultural barriers to connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences in a way that resonates in their local setting. No other media outlet provides news services in Indigenous languages.

First Nations media organisations address a market gap through providing essential information to many remote communities not serviced by any other form of media. This includes the dissemination of vital emergency, health and government information. In 82 regions across the country, First Nations radio is the only radio service available. In a further 16 locations, First Nations radio is the only local service available, in addition to ABC services retransmitted from other regions. Indigenous Australians have relatively low digital inclusion and it has not improved in recent years. The digital inclusion gap between Indigenous Australians and other Australians is evident across access, affordability and digital ability considerations.

More than 2.5 million Australians remain offline.⁸ This includes 24.7% of Indigenous Australian households who do not access the internet from home, compared with the national average of 14.7%. Levels of home internet access for Indigenous Australian households diminish further with remoteness, with up to 45.2% of households in remote and very remote locations unable to access the internet⁹. In this context, First Nations media is the primary information source for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences in many remote communities.

In 2022-23, the First Nations media sector requests funding to enable adequate responses to:

- increasing requirements for public health messaging, in particular relating to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- localised responses to increasing extreme weather events and other localised crises (floods, cyclones, food shortages, road closures, fires);
- the retraction of public interest journalism; and
- maintain broadcast infrastructure vital to the delivery of emergency information.

⁸ Roy Morgan, Centre for Social Impact – Swinburne University & RMIT University, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide – The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2020*, Telstra, November 2020.

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2016*

Infrastructure maintenance program

Trends in extreme weather events (cyclones, hurricanes, floods and fires) have been increasing both globally and in Australia since the 1980s.¹⁰ First Nations media organisations have an essential role in ensuring community safety during these extreme weather events, providing emergency information relevant to local regions. Media services themselves are not immune to the effects of extreme weather events. Cyclones regularly knock down transmitter towers, earthing equipment is required to protect against lightning damage, sites require fire-proofing – there are a broad range of costs involved with the protection of existing infrastructure, prevention maintenance and occasionally, emergency replacement of damaged specialist infrastructure not covered by insurance policies. Just this week, we have seen 80,000 lightning strikes recorded in a 24-hour period in the Kimberley, a huge risk to broadcast infrastructure. Such extreme weather events are difficult to budget for in the context of extreme pressure on operational funds caused by a lack of indexation paired with increased operational expenses, but we do know that they are increasing in regularity and we need to make provisions for their inevitability.

With no contingency funding to address equipment failure and maintenance, services outages are being resolved inconsistently through redirected operational funds. Until 2015-16, the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet has previously held a contingency fund available to the First Nations media industry to apply for support throughout the year if and when emergency requirements emerge. Currently there is no capacity for media organisations to seek this type of support.

First Nations media organisations have taken steps to 'weather-proof' equipment as best they can, with repairs and improvements being made across the country currently. However, ongoing maintenance support is required to protect the Commonwealth's existing investment in broadcast infrastructure. Paired with an increasing reliance on IP technologies to maintain broadcast services, the availability of technical support can mean the difference between service outages lasting minutes instead of days. As primary providers of essential emergency information, it is vital that First Nations media are fully operational and reach all audiences within their licensed areas.

There is some shared infrastructure between telecommunications and broadcasting that can be used to build on existing government investment in broadcast infrastructure and to generate maximum public value from new infrastructure rollouts. First Nations media organisations may be called upon for technical skills, capacity building activities and infrastructure requirements as part of the Government's proposed Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan announced in March

¹⁰ Climate Council of Australia, Weather Gone Wild, <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Climate-council-extreme-weather-report.pdf>, 2019

2019.¹¹ If this results in a funded program, it would present a potential opportunity to grow communications jobs through the provision of IT, technical and training expertise.

Increasingly, technical personnel *must* be considered part of a media organisation's infrastructure requirements due to the dual reliance on equipment and IT/IP expertise to resolve emerging issues. This has been a common theme arising in FNMA's sector-wide infrastructure audit (due for completion in March 2022) and through industry consultation. The lack of technical expertise in regional and remote areas particularly is an industry-wide barrier, resulting in avoidable service outages for other media (such as the ABC) and telecommunications (such as Telstra). Opportunity exists for the First Nations community-controlled sector to provide technical support across multiple communications services with support for relevant training and expert coordination. The First Nations media sector is well placed to provide place-based employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a culturally safe environment for the benefit of multiple stakeholders requiring services in remote and regional locations. This network would be readily available to respond to technical issues during extreme weather events, but more importantly, would be taking steps to ensure a continuous robust broadcast network to avoid outages in times of crisis.

The First Nations media sector requests immediate funding of maintenance and technical support for broadcast and telecommunications infrastructure including:

- the reinstatement of contingency funding for emergency equipment to be managed through the National Indigenous Australians Agency (\$500,000)
- support for the employment of 12 x broadcast technician trainees to provide regional support across multiple First Nations media outlets (\$900,000)
- the employment of 6 x experienced technicians to supplement existing technical capacity in the First Nations media sector, providing networked advice and maintenance services (\$600,000)
- coordination of a scheduled maintenance program and associated training activities to ensure the longevity and consistency of broadcast infrastructure, including travel and training activities (\$400,000)
- the rollout of smart technologies to increase industry efficiency (\$650,000) as recommended to the NIAA by Hugh Watson Consulting.¹²

Total request for infrastructure maintenance program	\$3.05m
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¹¹ See Recommendation 8 of the Government's [response](#) to the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review.

¹² Hugh Watson Consulting, *Renewing a Vital Indigenous Voice and Community Asset*, commissioned by the NIAA, February 2021

COVID-19 emergency support, including mental health

In emergency situations people need to receive key message information on a large scale, but they also need to know how to respond locally with relevant information at a State, municipal and community level. When is their clinic open? What roads are closed? Where are the closest shelter points? This information needs to be immediate, distributed widely, free to access and updated regularly. First Nations communities receive information in a manner that resonates with audiences, using relevant local language and trusted spokespeople through First Nations media services.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a recent demonstration of First Nations media organisations' capacity to deliver timely and relevant information. Communities turn to First Nations media services as trusted sources of information, particularly amid conflicting reports shared through social media and other networks. First Nations media organisations worked to address misinformation within the community. PAW Media, for example, reported "We made a few segments, one we called PAW news, which was about trying to keep everyone up to date and have news in language, short little videos that are easy to understand. We did a few animations and posters about staying in community and not travelling into town when those travel restrictions happened and we also did a little section called 'Ask PAW', where you'd get questions from the community and then put the answers out in English and in language to try and help disperse misinformation and rumours about COVID."¹³

First Nations media organisations as businesses have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in both the short and medium-term. The primary impact of the pandemic has been increasing pressure on the capacity of small teams to deliver essential information services. Broadcasters have faced ongoing significant increases in workload to effectively respond to rolling announcements and relay information specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences. This included a significant increase in translation requirements and a fast turn-around on information as situations change. The ongoing nature of this pressure has impacted mental health and wellbeing for media workers across the sector, compounding existing issues of racism for workers responsible for monitoring social media feeds in particular.

Beyond the impacts on personnel, First Nations media organisations have felt the economic impact of the pandemic alongside its mainstream media counterparts. Sponsorship reductions due to event cancellations, reduced opportunity for fundraising, lack of opportunity to partner with community sports and other

¹³ Above & Beyond Broadcasting: a study of First Nations media and the COVID-19 pandemic, University of Melbourne, January 2022

organisations are just some of the lost income opportunities First Nations media organisations have suffered.

First Nations Media Australia notes the Commonwealth has provided \$50 million in funding through the Public Interest News Gathering fund, in addition to allocations of \$48.7 million made in the 2020-21 Budget supporting regional print newspapers (predominantly privately owned businesses) through the financial impacts of the pandemic. While First Nations community broadcasters are less reliant on self-generated revenue than other broadcast services, many have faced significant dips in self-generated revenue sources (sponsorship, membership, fundraising) needed to supplement Government funding support. FNMA members reported reductions of up to \$20,000 per month as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and some estimated self-generated income losses of up to \$180,000 in 2020-21 as a result of COVID-19. These figures do not include the additional workload required to convey timely messaging to communities over an extended period of time, plus additional equipment purchased to facilitate COVID-safe work environments for broadcasters to disseminate vital information. The cost to the sector has been huge.

The COVID-19 pandemic is far from over. First Nations media organisations continue to be impacted by border restrictions, public gathering limitations and unreliable sponsorship revenue. Conversely, the Government has relied heavily on First Nations media organisations to inform communities about vaccine rollouts and associated health messaging through 2021-22. We ask that the Commonwealth provide:

- emergency funding relief to First Nations media organisations impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic at an average \$100,000 per 43 organisations (less than 5% of the funding allocated to supporting the commercial media sector to date); and
- funding for tailored mental health actions appropriate to each media organisation at an average cost of \$10,000 per media outlet.

Total request for COVID-19 emergency support, including mental health	\$4.73m
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"First Nations broadcasting returns an average \$2.87 in social outcomes for every \$1 invested, with many organisations returning a rate much higher than this nearly 3:1 average ratio."
Social Ventures Australia, 2019

Strengthening News Services

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

This imbalance in participation in the media still permeates Australia's media landscape today. 32 per cent of the general community cites the media as their main source of information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹⁴ Yet all too often the information reported is unbalanced in a negative way, misinformed and/or excludes First Nations perspectives with very real outcomes of compounding issues of racism, bias and barriers to employment for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. First Nations broadcasting and media has a vital role in providing balanced and culturally appropriate reporting in order to promote awareness and understanding among non-Indigenous Australians, participate in the truth-telling process, encourage participation in democratic processes and promote reconciliation. In this way, all First Nations news reporting is public interest journalism in Australia.

First Nations media services counter the lack of balance in mainstream media outlets when reporting on matters relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While they do report challenges and negative stories, they also take pride in reporting successes and in doing so showcase examples of good news within First Nations communities. Seventy-seven per cent of surveyed listeners indicated their primary reason for listening to First Nations radio was to hear positive stories on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹⁵ The result is high levels of audience engagement.

The Public Interest Journalism Initiative notes a net reduction of 105 newsrooms in Australia since 2019.¹⁶ This contraction of news services has made creating opportunities for regional journalism all the more important and has been identified as a concern to the Government. While social media platforms can share information to known and adjacent networks, they do not attract the same audience consistency as radio and television media. First Nations journalists are increasingly well placed to fill this market gap and provide information of relevance to local communities alongside national headlines. Similarly, the First Nations media sector has needed to fill the gap in news and weather services for many remote and regional communities, as the ABC has scaled back its local news and weather

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ McNair yellowSquares, *Indigenous Communications and Media Survey*, 2016, <https://www.firstnationsmedia.org.au/projects/indigenous-communications-and-media-survey-2016>

¹⁶ Gary Dickson, The Australian Newsroom Mapping Project, Public Interest Journalism Initiative, <https://anmp.piji.com.au/>, cited 4 February 2022

coverage for these less populous areas in recent years. First Nations Media Australia seeks to support and increase the news and current affairs capacity of First Nations broadcasters both to address this geographic deficit at a national level and to increase the diversity of news reported.

To achieve these aims, FNMA has piloted a First Nations News Initiative through 2021 which:

- Builds regional journalism capacity and increases employment opportunities;
- Addresses a market gap for participation news reporting from regional and remote areas;
- Increases efficiencies in existing news services through collaboration;
- Provides opportunity for organisations to tailor news content as relevant to the region;
- Provides opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reporters to access and share professionally produced content, including sovereign messages and issues at a national level;
- Provides accessible information for all audiences to engage with news, as told from a First Nations perspective; and
- Develops partnerships for the delivery of multi-platform news content (radio, television, print and online) to provide real careers for community journalists remaining in regional areas.

The pilot program was successful with 12 emerging journalists from 10 regions undertaking a training program and contributing stories to a national 'wire service' for use by both First Nations and community licensed broadcasters. This cohort of trainees were supported by a Regional Editorial Coordinator and a set of partnerships coordinated by the FNMA as the peak body. There were several learnings made through the pilot phase and a set of training resources produced. Several of the journalists trained in 2021 have now moved on to roles in mainstream media or received promotion within their First Nations media employers. Building on the pilot phase, FNMA is now seeking support to help the sector move into a consolidation phase for the First Nations News Initiative and expand it to greater benefit.

This would require a funding support to:

- train and mentor emerging First Nations journalists (\$200,000)
- expand access to existing news sharing software for multiplatform content (\$50,000)
- operational funding to support a network of regional journalists and manage content distribution (\$170,000)
- resources and reference materials (\$20,000)
- employment support for First Nations journalists to provide regular news reports (\$560,000)

Total request for strengthening news services	\$1m per annum
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Expanding local media services

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

Links between access to culturally relevant local information through media, increased cultural pride and improved social outcomes are well-established in academic literature. We seek to provide that opportunity to people living in on the Central Coast of NSW, Dubbo, Newcastle, Tamworth, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong, the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, Canberra, Adelaide and Hobart through establishing licensed First Nations radio services in some of these regions and others.

FNMA recommends the hub and spoke model currently used by Remote Indigenous Media Organisations (RIMOs) as a cost-efficient way of establishing these services, requiring resourcing of a radio studio enabling local broadcasting and regional network contributions. This model works effectively in remote locations, allows for the possibility of co-location with other community organisations and provides opportunities for local employment through the First Nations radio network footprint. Media organisations in Sydney and Melbourne are already taking steps to network with regional areas in NSW and Victoria with a view to establishing a hub-and-spoke model to support the communication needs of First Nations communities in regions with no voice currently.

The First Nations media sector seeks funding to support:

- the establishment of services in Canberra, Hobart and Adelaide (\$1.2 million annually)
- the establishment of 10 new community-controlled media services in regional areas (\$1.8 million annually)
- a rollout seeding program to expand existing services to support 10 x regions in NSW and Victoria (\$500,000)

Total request for expanding local services	\$3.5m per annum
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"First Nations media is an essential service for the communities it serves, and especially so in times of crisis."

Above & Beyond Broadcasting: a study of First Nations media and the COVID-19 pandemic, 2022

2. Increase job & skills

The First Nations media sector produces an effective opportunity to:

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

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

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

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

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

- a) Content production – including translation services and corporate communication services
- b) Public interest journalism
- c) Digital archiving
- d) Digital inclusion & digital technologies – provision of IT, technical and training expertise

This submission outlines requirements for Commonwealth investment to achieve sustainable employment growth across each of the areas above. Growth in public interest journalism activities has already been addressed under Strengthen News Services and opportunities to grow technical expertise with associated employment opportunities has been covered under the Infrastructure Maintenance Program. This section considers training and career opportunities for emerging media workers and barriers to attracting employees into the industry, mid-career support into leadership roles and new opportunities in business development, content development and digital archiving.

Training & Career Development opportunities

Employees in the communications sector are highly skilled, with a higher proportion of the workforce with postgraduate and Bachelor level degrees, graduate diplomas and certificates, and advanced diplomas and diplomas compared with other industries.¹⁷ The First Nations media industry offers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a culturally safe environment in which to develop 'work ready' skills and to continually upgrade those skills to define their own career paths. For this reason, we see many media workers move into communication roles in other industries, such as the mining and resources industry, politics and the public service and information technology. We also see employees develop skills within our industry and then transition to other roles in media, including becoming freelance agents or starting small businesses themselves. While the impact of this role is largely positive for communities, the media organisations receive no recognition or compensation for acting as a work-ready training hub and lose efficiencies in the continual cycle of training and replacing new staff.

The First Nations media sector currently resources 43 organisations and over 120 licensed services with between 500-600 staff, including part-time and casual employees, working in organisations in urban, regional and remote locations.¹⁸ Approximately 28 per cent of those positions are full time, with 72% are part-time or

¹⁷ Bureau of Communications research analysis and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011), Census of Population and Housing.

¹⁸ Clague, P, *Employment and Skills Development Strategy Report*, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, December 2018

casual.¹⁹ There is industry desire to increase activities to a scale that would require twice the number of staff that are currently employed across the sector, but budget constraints currently prevent the training of new staff or the capacity to provide career opportunities to people who do undertake training. The Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research has developed an *Employment and Skills Development Strategy* in consultation with the sector which outlines a career development action plan, policy recommendations and assistance for First Nations media organisations to meet the IAS Indigenous employment target. It recommends investment in training and targeted employment programs such as traineeships and pathways roles in areas such as management, training, project management, production, technical and IT services.²⁰

The First Nations media and communications industry is a community-controlled sector with significant potential to increase its contribution to Closing the Gap. First Nations media organisations across the country act as training and skills development hubs, empowering people to move into a range of roles within other sectors, such as tourism and resources. The communications sector provides enabling services to support opportunities and outcomes in service sectors, such as health and education, and promotes inclusiveness and participation.²¹

First Nations media organisations provide a fertile training ground for career development such as:

- participation in school programming contributing to job-ready skills development;
- support for career development with the sector drawing on industry-led pathways and accredited training;
- supporting the early careers of media workers who transition to roles in mainstream media across all platforms including the ABC, SBS, newspaper and online reporters and television reporters; and
- screen industry career development.

The ratio of Indigenous staff employed at First Nations media organisations is currently approx. 79 per cent. There are currently about 46 FNMOs or other organisations which are funded by NIAA for delivery of broadcasting activities, of which 22 have a non-Indigenous manager. Due to the risk associated with changing the Manager role in a small organisation, this becomes an issue for small organisations where total staff are often below 9 employees.²² The Jumbunna Institute reports, “A holistic approach which facilitates the development of best practice models for overcoming unemployment in Indigenous communities. Good

¹⁹ Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

²⁰ Clague, P, *Employment and Skills Development Strategy Report*, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, December 2018

²¹ Department of Communications and the Arts, *The Communications Sector: recent trends and developments*, Bureau of Communications Research, Commonwealth Government, Canberra, October 2016

²² Ibid.

*leadership and partnerships between media organisations, stakeholders and government are factors that will significantly contribute to job readiness and the skill capacity of Indigenous peoples in the media sector."*²³

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

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

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

In 2021, FNMA has developed multiple successful mentoring programs in partnership with the CMTO, the ABC and other industry partners to develop skills particularly relevant to media and support cross-sector networking. This has included a leadership skills mentoring program tailored specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, with mentoring support provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with established media careers. Feedback on this program has been especially positive, demonstrating the benefit of providing mentoring opportunities to supplement skills-based training units.

FNMA is aware of the opportunities available to some industries through the JobTrainer program, but notes Screen and Media qualifications are not eligible for

²³ Ibid.

JobTrainer support. Similarly, the program relies on individuals having the information and means to apply for program support online, a situation that is rarely feasible for people living in remote communities. A Support Officer is required to help navigate the opportunities of these programs adjacent to the media sector, and to provide advice to government agencies to ensure such programs are accessible to trainee workers coming into the communications sector.

Resourcing levels required include:

- \$500k per annum toward formalised training activities for sector-wide skills development;
- \$600k per annum toward mentorship, job shadowing and non-accredited training support;
- \$1.5million per annum toward employment support for new mid-level positions to establish career pathways between broadcaster and executive levels (approx. 20 positions nationally);
- \$1.4million for job shadowing and mentor programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personnel into management and leadership roles;
- \$100k per annum toward the employment of a sector-wide Training Support Officer resource; and
- \$200k per annum toward the implementation of the sector's Workforce Development Action Plan.

Total request for training and career development programs	\$4.3m per annum
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Content production

There are strong correlations between media portrayal, self-determination and wellbeing. For this reason, some of the key themes identified in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody identified that “action is needed to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the media, and to educate non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve community attitudes and address ignorance.”²⁴ First Nations Media Australia submits this budget request in the context of decades of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people striving to combat racial stereotyping, inaccurate and imbalanced reporting through media; positively impacting the way First Nations communities perceive themselves and the way they are perceived, and the actions the First Nations media sector contributes to combatting these serious concerns.

The Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2020 shows that nearly half of the Australian population thinks media usually portrays Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a negative way (44% of the general community and 46% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people), with only 12% of the general community and 19% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community believing that media portrays Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people positively. This has a significant impact on racism and unconscious bias faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the context of 32% of the general community citing media as their main source of information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.²⁵

First Nations media organisations must serve their communities. In an era where media delivery is both fragmented and convergent, this means being in all the spaces that audiences expect to access content. Radio stations are now expected to be ‘more than just radio’ by audiences, funders, content-maker and marketing platforms. The era of media convergence has made it easier for First Nations radio stations to produce and deliver content across a range of platforms. Therefore, in addition to providing 24-hour radio services, First Nations radio stations are producing an average weekly total of 30 hours podcast content per week, 209 hours of video content and 51 hours of online only content sector-wide.²⁶ The production of multi-platform content and social media publishing takes additional time and skills which are not accounted for in the operational funding provided to First Nations media organisations but must be done to meet audience expectations and maintain community relevance.

Content production is vital to the maintenance and preservation of First Nations languages and culture. First Nations produced content also serves to enhance social

²⁴ Deloitte, *Review of the Implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody*, Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet, 2018

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Survey Matters, *Community Broadcasting Sector Programming & Community Development Census*, CBAA, June, 2017

cohesion, truth-telling, education and understanding of First Nations culture across the wider Australian society. Eighty-one percent of Indigenous licensed radio stations report regular engagement with marginalised or disadvantaged communities through their program content.²⁷ Social Ventures Australia noted the core business of Indigenous Broadcast Services is to broadcast information, news, interviews, music, community events and stories to large audiences and that content funding allows our services to *“keep culture alive by creating culturally rich environments and by recording, preserving and broadcasting culture in an appropriate way. IBs also play a crucial role in increasing community cohesion, building community resilience and supporting people into meaningful employment.”*²⁸

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

First Nations media organisations in all locations apply for project-based support to produce documentaries, animations, special series, outside broadcasts, language revitalisation initiatives, podcasts and multimedia productions across radio and screen content, predominantly through the Community Broadcasting Program. This is a highly competitive grant process which provides around \$1.1m annually in content production support nationally. In effect, this fund supports around 40 projects in varying lengths across the country, providing intermittent casual employment for skilled media personnel. It is highly over-subscribed with demand significantly overwhelming the available funds. Alternative sources of funding for First Nations media content, beyond NITV for video content, are limited. Local producers are unlikely to have the level of broadcast credits required for funding through screen agencies and need support to develop their own skills and provide on-the-job training and mentoring for others. Similarly, existing levels of funding rarely allow for producing the cross-platform content, podcasts and online content modern audiences seek. Increased funding support for content production exponentially increases the capacity of First Nations broadcasters to increase social value through engagement with stakeholders, musicians, artists and the Australian Government.²⁹

²⁷Survey Matters, *Community Broadcasting Sector Programming and Community Development Census*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, June 2017

²⁸ Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

²⁹ Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

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

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

The production of radio and television content projects varies between about \$5,000-\$60,000 depending on the scope and production requirements of the series or documentary.³⁰ A co-investment of \$2million per annum through the IAS would likely fund around 50-60 radio and video projects per annum to produce one-off documentaries, interviews, series and increase audience engagement through increased outside broadcast activity and multiplatform content delivery. This would support the development of freelance careers in media and filmmaking. There is significant scope to increase the training and employment opportunities created by project-based production work. FNMA suggests the IAS could co-fund content projects or provide matched funding to the Department of Communications investment.

Total request for content production	\$2m per annum
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Digital Archiving

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

This presents an opportunity for the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in culturally meaningful roles as Community Archive Workers, needed to coordinate the extensive and time-consuming work of digitising,

³⁰ Community Broadcasting Foundation, funded projects: <https://cbf.org.au/grants/successful/>

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

The cultural sensitivities relating to these recordings makes sending them to centralised Government agencies inappropriate. First Nations communities must retain control of community collections with oversight from Traditional Custodians. Social Ventures Australia noted the trust Indigenous Broadcasting Services have developed within communities makes them well placed to manage “*a cultural archive of national significance*.”³¹ On-country archiving work is more cost-effective, enabling local decision-making about access and media handling, and identifying cultural metadata for cataloguing. Localised archiving work is cost-effective, enables local decision-making about access and media handling and identifying cultural metadata for cataloguing, and provides meaningful employment opportunities in remote and regional locations.

FNMA will establish a First Nations Media Digitisation Facility in Alice Springs this year, in partnership with AIATSIS. Work to preserve priority collections from the Central Desert regions is already underway, responding to the urgency of saving the back-catalogue of recordings collected over the past 40+ years from permanent loss. In addition, localised Digitisation Officers are required to work within First Nations media organisations at 10 locations across Australia to help archive precious histories from their regions. These include the Kimberley, Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Torres Strait, Port Augusta, Townsville, East Arnhem Land and other priority collections. Community access to archive materials, together with oversight from Traditional Custodians will significantly contribute to the maintenance of culture and languages as well as providing digital skills training and employment opportunities in regional and remote areas. These workers will be supported by the FNMA Archiving Team in Alice Springs.

Investment required:

- 10 x Digital Access Workers (\$700,000)
- Infrastructure for archiving hubs in 8 locations (\$600,000)

Total request for digital archiving	\$1.3m
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³¹Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

Address recruitment and retention barriers

A reliance on volunteers, trainees, part-time and casual staff who are at the lower end of the pay scale offers little incentive to remain within the sector. This is evidenced by difficulties attracting and retaining younger staff. Employment arrangements vary with some workers still supported by low-level wage rates established essentially as 'work for the dole' type arrangements under the CDP.

The First Nations media industry produces professional media services, and yet our workers are often receiving wages that are inconsistent with modern Award rates. These low wages produce challenges for staff retention as skilled and experienced media practitioners seek higher paying jobs in other sectors and offer little incentive for career advancement within the sector.³² Only 12% of staff at Indigenous licensed radio stations are aged 26 years or younger.³³ Additional funding support could redress these numbers as it would create opportunities to engage young employees in training options and create space to offer ongoing employment with career development. This in turn would enable First Nations media organisations to build capacity whilst ensuring that key roles are recompensed with an award-wage.

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

The award wage for a radio broadcaster is \$956 per week.³⁴ The average salary for a Radio Announcer in Australia is \$55,625 annually (approx. \$1,070 weekly). The minimum award wage for a full-time employee working in the commercial radio industry (which includes support staff and trainees) is \$772.60 per week.³⁵ By comparison, CDP workers receive \$290 per week for working 25 hours (around \$11.60 per hour) and must work continuously in order to receive payments.³⁶ As CDP is the only available support for remote media organisations to employ reporters in

³² Clague, P, *Employment and Skills Development Strategy Report*, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, December 2018

³³ Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

³⁴ FairWork Ombudsman, Pay Guide: Broadcasting, Recorded Entertainment and Cinemas Award 2010, Australian Government, published 16 December 2021. file:///Users/admin/Downloads/broadcasting-recorded-entertainment-and-cinemas-award-ma000091-pay-guide%20(1).pdf

³⁵ Fuller, David, Commercial Radio Industrial Awards – Rates of Pay, Commercial Radio Australia, 1 July 2021 <http://www.commercialradio.com.au/hr-training/commercial-radio-awards-pay-rates>

³⁶ Burton-Bradley, Robert, Inside the CDP, NITV News, 2nd November 2017, <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2017/11/01/inside-cdp-allegations-fake-work-unsafe-conditions-and-payments-dead-people>

communities, in effect this means broadcasters are working for below minimum wage rates. This creates a barrier to both the recruitment and retention of media workers.

We request a funding allocation of \$2.2million per annum be added to operational funding to the sector to bring wage levels in line with Award rates and enable effective recruitment and retention of personnel within the industry.

Total request to align with Award wage rates	\$2.2m per annum
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Screen image from ICTV vaccine campaign, November 2021

3. Improve community-controlled sector sustainability

Grow business development

A lack of operational funding has constrained the sector's capacity for business development and increased dependence on government funding, rather than increased financial sustainability. Indigenous Broadcasting Services receive approximately 75% of their funding through NIAA and an additional 8% from other government sources at the state and federal level.³⁷ Social Ventures Australia found that, "Indigenous Broadcasting Services have demonstrated their capacity to generate their own revenue but there is a minimum resourcing threshold that must be maintained to enable Indigenous Broadcasting Services and their staff to diversify their activities and funding." Further, the report found there is a minimum resourcing threshold required for First Nations media organisations to explore new projects that may attract more funding, employ more community members and better suit the needs of their community, if they have capacity to hire and train staff to do so.³⁸

In its *Australia's Tech Future* report, the Australian Government identified, "while it is hard to predict the skills in demand in the future, we know employers are looking for workers who have a combination of transferrable digital skills and collaborative, creative, communication and entrepreneurial and problem-solving skills."³⁹ The First Nations media industry is well-placed to expand on existing activities to generate new employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in these roles, as well as prepare workers with the skills to meet these emerging business demands.

Investment in business development roles within First Nations media organisations would support media organisations to:

- Support media organisations to diversify their income streams through developing production partnerships with business;
- Support corporations to implement their Reconciliation Action Plans through communication partnerships with First Nations media organisations;
- build their capacity to integrate digital technologies – creating opportunities for media workers to build capacity and training in multimedia and online production, marketing, social media communications, drone cinematography, animation, digital graphics and desktop publishing, web development, photography, technical and IT roles and app development;
- build capacity for industry sustainability.

³⁷ Social Ventures Australia, 2017

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Department of Industry, Science and Technology, *Australia's Tech Future*, Australian Government, Canberra, December 2018 <https://www.industry.gov.au/data-and-publications/australias-tech-future>

Not all media organisations will be well placed to grow sustainability opportunities in the short-term, but we estimate at least 20 will be in a good position to benefit from medium-term support for these positions with ongoing benefit beyond the initial three-year period. We request a sector-wide investment of

- \$1.5million per annum for three-years toward production enterprise and business development roles within the industry (approx. 20 positions nationally).
- \$2.6million to support activities that increase organisational sustainability and reduce reliance on Government funding; and
- \$1million to expand existing operations to increase the impact and social value of our services within communities through online business development.

Total request to grow community-controlled sector sustainability	\$5.1m
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Address indexation pressures

The sustainability of the First Nations media sector is constrained by a lack of funding indexation to meet increased unavoidable costs to services, a lack of funding to undertake business development opportunities and a high-pressure environment requiring significant prioritisation of resources, often at the expense of professional development within the sector.

Demand and competition for operational funding has also increased with significant increases in the number of broadcast services (stations and outlets) over the past 25 years. In the past decade, the lack of CPI increase has meant a loss of around \$4million to the sector in real terms as the cost of power, equipment, wages, copyright licence fees and other operational expenses has increased. For example, the operating costs of transmission sites (electricity and lease expenses) increased 49.6% between 2011-12 and 2015-16 across the community broadcasting sector.⁴⁰ The stagnant funding pool has increased pressure on reserves, resources and personnel, limiting the capacity of First Nations media organisations to absorb income shocks, respond to crises, or address arising opportunities.

Government funding has been supplemented by sponsorship and social entrepreneurship income sources. Over the past 15 years, economic pressure has resulted in shrinking sponsorship income with Indigenous licensed radio stations reporting a reduction from an average 248 minutes of sponsorship per week in 2011-12 to 97 minutes per week in 2015-16, with an average revenue rate of \$10 per minute.⁴¹ In many instances, these figures have dropped further still during the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁴⁰ Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

⁴¹ Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

We request the Government provide an additional \$4.4million per annum, bringing the total amount of operational funding provided to support the approximately 43 organisations delivering radio, television and online services to reasonably address CPI.

Total request to address indexation pressures	\$4.4m per annum
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