

The Aboriginal media ecology in NSW: developing strategies for change

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1 Introduction

This report aims to inform government strategies for engaging with Aboriginal media and Aboriginal media professionals, and to provide practical and grounded advice for efforts to improve government communication with Aboriginal audiences. It reports on how government can learn from and support Aboriginal community-controlled media organisations to promote Closing the Gap and Aboriginal self-determination in NSW.

The impetus for this research is the 2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement) and the Joint Communications Strategy, which commit all levels of government to working with Aboriginal media as the 'central' communications bodies communicating Closing the Gap activities (*National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, 2020, p. 4, Clause 24). The National Agreement commits governments to work in partnership, challenge unconscious bias, and listen to Aboriginal voices to combat systemic racism (Clauses 19 and 61).

This is part of the overall commitment to working with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations as part of the Closing the Gap strategy, recognising the substantial role they play in providing services, creating opportunities, and advocating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Markham & Williamson, 2020). The National Agreement is being implemented by governments at a federal, state and territory level, and this report focuses on NSW.

Aboriginal media and government communications with Aboriginal audiences are relevant to several Closing the Gap Outcomes. This report outlines how media can contribute to a range of crucial Outcomes:

- Communicating health messages (Outcomes 1, 2)
- Promoting early childhood education initiatives (Outcomes 3, 4)
- Increasing engagement in further education (Outcome 6)
- Increasing engagement in employment (Outcomes 7, 8)
- Promoting housing services (Outcome 9)
- Promoting justice system reform (Outcome 10, 11)
- Campaigning against family violence (Outcome 13)
- Promoting mental health and wellbeing (Outcome 14)
- Promoting cultural activities and support initiatives on Country (Outcome 15)
- Supporting Aboriginal cultures and languages to thrive (Outcome 16)
- Promoting access to information for informed decision-making and digital inclusion (Outcome 17)

Specifically, this research can assist in developing the data requirements outlined as part of measuring Outcome 17 – digital inclusion. This Outcome is focused on equitable access to media, information and communications services for Aboriginal people by 2026. It aims to bolster Aboriginal control of information and communications. Survey, interview and secondary data explored in this paper helps to illustrate how Aboriginal organisations, people and communities engage with media across NSW, including patterns of usage, trust in media, and opinions on media representation. While the survey sample size is too small to make claims about the Aboriginal population in NSW as a whole, and in particular is not representative of those who are digitally excluded, this report still provides some useful insights into successful communication strategies in government partnerships with Aboriginal organisations and provides suggestions for better resourced and more respectful models of communication based on qualitative data and some quantitative data.

This research was commissioned by Aboriginal Affairs NSW and was undertaken by Researcher-in-Residence Dr Archie Thomas, with supervision by Professor Heidi Norman and in consultation with a variety of Aboriginal organisations, as outlined below.

Terminology

Following the convention of Aboriginal Affairs NSW, this report uses Aboriginal peoples when referring to Aboriginal peoples in NSW or refers to the specific Country/ies of participants. When discussing national issues, it uses the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. When discussing Indigenous people internationally, it uses the term Indigenous peoples. A variety of labels are used by other organisations, and in quotations.

Literature review

This paper should be read as a follow up to a major literature review and scoping paper, 'Closing the Gap and the Aboriginal media ecology in NSW' (Thomas, 2023). That literature review explored the policy space surrounding Aboriginal media and communications over four decades, the implications of Closing the Gap, and provided a thorough review of existing research including a long history of reviews and policy papers. That paper concluded:

- The new National Agreement provides significant potential for the growth and support of Aboriginal community-controlled media
- Aboriginal community-controlled media operates in a policy vacuum and with significant resource constraints that must be addressed for its potential to be fully realised, especially in NSW, where the sector is notably small
- After a period of initial expansion, Aboriginal community-controlled media has faced a complex and inexact architecture of legislation, regulation, funding and governance
- Research broadly demonstrates that Aboriginal community-controlled media provides trusted, culturally appropriate, locally grounded news and information, and sensitive and valued representation of Aboriginal peoples and their stories
- Aboriginal community-controlled media has significant potential to facilitate Aboriginal cultural and language survival and renewal, Aboriginal employment, and to promote messages that facilitate health, wellbeing, trust, engaged citizenship and self-determination, and to combat racism and discrimination in ways that broadly contribute to all identified outcomes of Closing the Gap
- Aboriginal community-controlled media policy and funding has not kept up with shifts towards multi-platform content creation and sharing in the digital era
- Further research is needed to understand the Aboriginal media ecology in NSW, including engagement and trust patterns of Aboriginal audiences in NSW and potential capacity-building for Aboriginal community-controlled media in NSW

The sections below outline existing literature that is directly relevant to the research undertaken for this paper.

Quantitative research

At the time of writing, there is limited available quantitative data on Aboriginal peoples' engagement with specific media types, particularly in NSW. There is some data on the audience for, and engagement with, Aboriginal community-controlled media across Australia.

2016 Census data on digital inclusion

The 2016 Census provides some basic data on digital inclusion. In 2016 the Census measured the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households across Australia with access to the internet. Across NSW, it found that 64 per cent of Indigenous households had an internet connection and 36 per cent did not. Digital exclusion was more pronounced in remote areas, for example, in the Northwest NSW region, only 49.9 per cent of households had internet access (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Unfortunately, the 2021 Census did not ask this question.

Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) on remote digital inclusion

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (2021) has so far only undertaken small case studies in remote areas, and none in NSW; their findings so far indicate that digital exclusion is worse in remote areas and that there is a heavy reliance on mobile internet. In these areas, the cost of internet access is higher, particularly relative to income. The findings, however, do indicate high levels of digital ability, suggesting that Aboriginal engagement in consuming, sharing and generating information could be facilitated by greater access and affordability.

Forthcoming Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan (IDIP) and Mapping the Digital Gap

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) is developing the Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan (IDIP), in response to recommendations from the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review. It will focus primarily on access, affordability and ability issues in regional and remote areas. Consultations commenced in 2021 after the release of a Discussion paper (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2021), and the Plan is forthcoming at the time of writing. The Discussion paper noted the lack of qualitative data, and therefore the lack of deeper insights about digital engagement and trust beyond some basic statistical measurements of access. A major research project funded by Telstra, Mapping the Digital Gap, is currently engaging with 12 remote Aboriginal communities to map patterns of digital inclusion and exclusion and develop strategies to influence policy making in this space (Australian Digital Inclusion Index, 2021).

2016 Remote Indigenous Communications and Media Survey

A face-to-face survey of around 500 Indigenous people in northern and central Australia was conducted in by McNair Ingenuity and First Nations Media Australia (2016), the peak body representing Aboriginal community-controlled media organisations. The researchers surveyed door-to-door in regions covered by Regional Indigenous Media Organisations (RIMOs), which act as regional hubs for Aboriginal media. The survey findings suggest broad engagement with the unique services of Aboriginal community-controlled media in the northern and central Australian context. For example, the survey found that 91 per cent of respondents listened to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander radio at least once a month, for reasons including:

- 'to hear about my own people' (65 per cent)
- 'for positive stories on Indigenous people' (79 per cent)
- 'for the Indigenous focus in programs and news' (54 per cent)
- 'to hear my own language' (56 per cent)
- 'for health information' (48 per cent)

2020 Reconciliation Barometer survey on media coverage

The Reconciliation Barometer, another large survey, had around 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents (Reconciliation Australia, 2020). It found that 46 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believe media coverage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is 'usually negative'; notably, this has fallen from 57 per cent in 2016 (Reconciliation Australia, 2020).

NSW specific data on Aboriginal media engagement is limited

Beyond these national measurements of access, more specific data on digital inclusion and media engagement for Aboriginal people in NSW is limited. There is little data available showing Aboriginal opinions on media representation and Aboriginal trust in different forms of media in NSW specifically. There is also little available data on how the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations generally engage with media and/or use media to communicate with Aboriginal peoples and communities (McCallum & Waller, 2017). This indicates the importance of building new data around Aboriginal digital inclusion, media usage, engagement and trust in NSW that both boosts quantitative understanding of digital inclusion and media engagement and uses qualitative data to understand broader issues.

Reviews and qualitative research

A series of government-commissioned reports have investigated the capabilities and purpose of Aboriginal community-controlled media, and tracked the policy settings, legal arrangements, and resources of the sector since 1984 and the roll out of remote broadcasting (Featherstone, 2015). Echoing many reports before it, the Stevens review (2010) notes Aboriginal media's continued relevance to and success with Aboriginal audiences and concludes that Aboriginal media provides significant benefits to Aboriginal people and communities. A recent review by Hugh Watson Consulting (2021) for NIAA made similar recommendations. Nevertheless, the sector has dealt with a complex and inexact architecture of legislation, regulation, funding and governance since the 1980s and most recommendations for further support to community-controlled media have been ignored by national, state and territory governments (Thomas, 2023).

A small field of qualitative research shows that positive media representation is crucial to cultural pride, community cohesion and connectedness, all of which are essential to improving access to services and overall wellbeing amongst Aboriginal people (Meadows, 2016).

Other research demonstrates other positive benefits, including how Aboriginal media:

- provides a positive 'social return on investment' in terms of the less-tangible impacts of media on wellbeing and cultural safety (Social Ventures Australia Consulting, 2017)
- supports cultural resurgence and language renewal (van Vuuren & Meadows, 1998)
- builds engaged communities and information literacy (First Nations Media Australia, 2019)
- communicates emergency messages and health information (such as recent responses to fires, the pandemic and floods) (Stuchbery et al., 2022) and
- challenges racism and unconscious bias (Dreher & de Souza, 2022)

Enthusiastic take-up and creative engagement in social media by Aboriginal audiences has also been a feature of research in this field (Carlson and Dreher, 2018).

Notably for this research, the Closing the Gap approach has been subject to a wide array of criticism since its original inception in 2008, the most consistent of which has been its ineffectiveness in changing the socioeconomic outcomes it has been focused on (Bond & Singh, 2020), and its basis in 'deficit discourse' which statistically positions Aboriginal people as deficient compared to a non-Aboriginal subject (Fforde et al., 2013). It has been critiqued for its lack of focus on underlying issues of and the legacies of colonisation, including intergenerational trauma, poverty and under-resourcing (Dillon, 2021). The 2020 National Agreement is the first time that Aboriginal organisations have been involved as signatories and partners in the Agreement. The Coalition of Peaks argue that if government wants to persist with the Closing the Gap framework, the best outcomes will be realised by bringing Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to the table (Coalition of Peaks, 2021). The Coalition of Peaks and other Aboriginal signatories have succeeded in creating a new emphasis on Aboriginal-controlled organisations. However, the organisations have also noted the strain placed on their existing resources and the need for much increased support to reach targets and for community-controlled research to measure new targets (Dreise et al., 2021). Aboriginal organisations not always linked to peaks, including some that participate in Local Decision

Making in NSW, also stress that it is important for national approaches such as Closing the Gap to recognise and work alongside existing regional governance structures in order to achieve better outcomes (Dreise et al., 2021).

Opportunities for data collection

Closing the Gap Outcome 17 focused on digital inclusion requires data collection that does not currently exist for the outcome to be measured.

A recent survey of existing and required Aboriginal media data by the Lowitja Institute and First Nations Media Australia proposed measures for government to take around digital inclusion, media representation and funding for Aboriginal community-controlled media as follows (Dent, 2022):

- liaise with the Australian Bureau of Statistics to include relevant questions on digital inclusion and media representation in the next Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey due in 2023-24
- increase, simplify and stabilise funding for Aboriginal community-controlled media
- include a measure relating to First Nations representation in media in Closing the Gap reports, with indicators to be developed in a roundtable
- specify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content as part of the legislative requirements mandating Australian content
- identify what constitutes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content through a consultative process led by Aboriginal media organisations
- encourage reporting from mainstream media organisations on their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content
- point-in-time content analysis of programming and media content to measure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation

Such approaches would involve a whole-of-government effort and, in some cases, legislative change.

Methodology

This report is based on qualitative and quantitative data including semi-structured interviews, survey data and secondary research literature. As noted, it follows a comprehensive literature review.

The research was designed in consultation with First Nations Media Australia (FNMA), the peak body of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media organisations in Australia. Consistent with principles of data sovereignty, survey data has been shared with FNMA for their use. In addition, Dr Daniel Featherstone and Emeritus Professor Andrew Jakubowicz were consulted in survey design given their respective expertise in Aboriginal community-controlled media and multicultural media. The project received ethics approval via the University of Technology Sydney, which includes blind peer review by an Indigenous Research Committee and the broader Ethics Committee. The ethics approval number is ETH21-6498.

A survey was conducted via Qualtrics and was exclusively aimed at Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in NSW aged over 18 years. Respondents were anonymous and no contact information was collected. Questions focused on access to technology, engagement with news media (including Aboriginal media), and trust in news media. Qualtrics estimated a 10-minute completion time for the survey, and the survey was designed for plain language readability. Feedback from Aboriginal Affairs NSW regional offices suggested that older respondents were taking up to double this time to complete the survey. The survey was

distributed through Aboriginal Affairs NSW's regional offices, emailed to Aboriginal community organisations across NSW, and via the networks of First Nations Media Australia. It was conducted mostly online. A small number of surveys were conducted face-to-face in a Central Coast-based Aboriginal service where staff read questions to respondents who may have difficulty taking the quiz online. Staff were instructed not to prompt responses from those they were assisting. There were 113 responses to the survey, after responses from international IP addresses and bots were excluded from the sample of 211. See Figure 1 for the distribution of survey respondents. This process was undertaken using the Qualtrics bot-detector and a review of all IP addresses, and geotracking of participants to exclude respondents not from NSW. The survey also asked participants to confirm their age at the beginning and end of the survey, and results that did not match were also excluded. Notably, this may have excluded legitimate respondents using VPN (virtual private networks) which provide IP address from different locations to allow anonymous browsing.

The small sample size limits the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings, and suggestions discussed below are considered as cues for further quantitative data collection and qualitative exploration. As evident in the literature review, the largest surveys undertaken focused on media use and engagement and targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nationally have achieved sample sizes between 250-500 people using face-to-face methods with large teams of researchers. This survey reach was limited as an online only survey with a research team of one part-time researcher. The research project was undertaken during the Sydney and later NSW lockdowns of 2021 and later changing COVID-19 protocols across the state. COVID-safety, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, was of paramount importance, and was part of the basis upon which the project received Ethics approval. This is an inherent limitation of the findings, especially in identifying digitally excluded populations. Nevertheless, this is the largest survey conducted focused on media use and engagement by Aboriginal people in NSW and could be used as a model for more in-depth, face-to-face data collection that can inform the data collection needs identified as part of Outcome 17 of Closing the Gap. Along with Census and other data, this data is being used by Aboriginal Affairs NSW to develop an initial map of Aboriginal media usage and engagement around NSW.

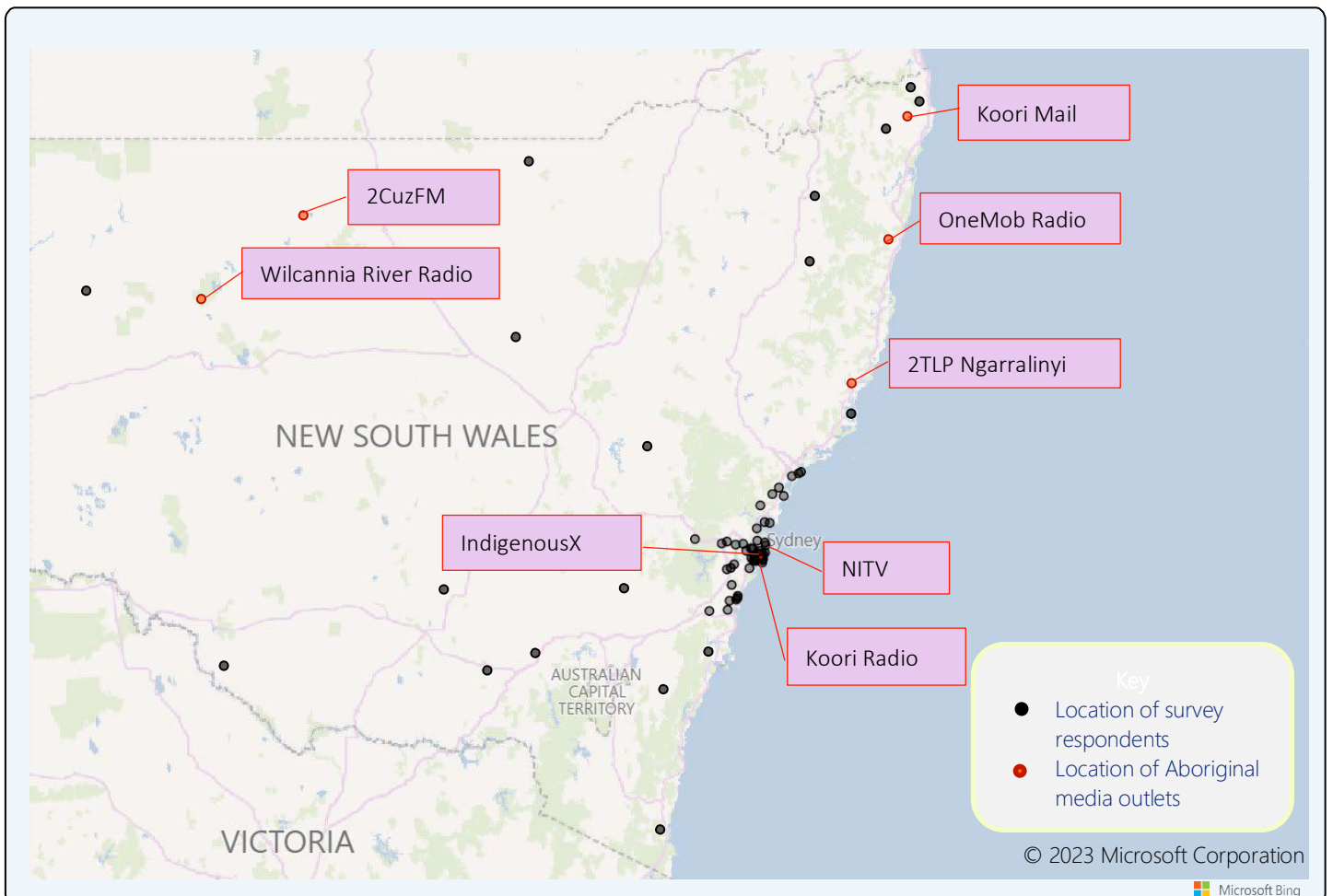
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Aboriginal professionals working in community-controlled organisations and in Aboriginal media organisations, as well as with Aboriginal journalists, editors and managers working in public and mainstream media. This was informed by the clear need for data beyond quantitative measurement, illustrated by findings of the literature review and consultation with First Nations Media Australia. A regional case study focused on the Central Coast region is drawn from semi-structured interviews with Aboriginal Affairs regional staff, the Barang Regional Alliance, and the data sovereignty organisation Ngiyang Wayama. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom, again for COVID-19 safety reasons. Audio, but not video, was recorded. Interview participants were given control over interview circumstances and time, a full and clear description of risk, a full and clear description of what data would be used for and were informed of their ability to withdraw from the interview and/or the research process at any time. The interviews were transcribed, and information and quotations included in this report were checked with participants. Edits suggested by Aboriginal Affairs NSW to draft versions of this report were reviewed by participants to ensure consistency with their input.

2 NSW Aboriginal media ecology mapping

This section explains what Aboriginal media ecology in NSW looks like, including what is known about their funding, resources and needs. Aboriginal community-controlled media refers to media services run by Aboriginal people. Traditionally these included broadcasting services and print media. Broadcasting services refers to services that broadcast on television or radio. Since the 1990s, media services run by Aboriginal people have expanded to include content creation across digital media and the more complex architectures of information and communication technology (ICT) (Featherstone, 2015). The film, animation and screen industry is largely excluded from the study.

The National Agreement recognises Aboriginal media as essential to building an appropriate and relevant communications sector. Despite NSW having the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population out of all states and territories, the Aboriginal media and communications sector is very small in NSW, it is largest in NT and WA where remote broadcasting was initially well-supported. The National Agreement represents an opportunity to recognise and even expand the Aboriginal media sector in NSW.

Figure 1: Location of survey respondents and location of Aboriginal media outlets in NSW



Aboriginal community-controlled radio stations

In NSW, a handful of community radio stations were established during a period of expansion under the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities scheme (BRACS) in the 1980s (Batty & Glynn, 1998). These services are not-for-profit radio stations which are now governed by the same legislative arrangements as community radio, funded via the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Culture and Capability Programme (First Nations Media Australia, 2022). Some additional funding is available via the Community Broadcasting Association Australia (CBAA). These radio stations are 2CUZ, based in Bourke, Wilcannia River Radio, based in Wilcannia, Koori Radio, based in Redfern, and Ngarralinyi, based in Taree.

Table 1: Aboriginal community-controlled broadcasting radio stations in NSW

Radio station	Callsign and locations	Governance	Activities	Biggest social media presence
2Cuz	Bourke 106.5 Lightning Ridge 96.1 Walgett 102.7 Brewarrina 106.5 Goodooga 97.7 Wellmoringle 100.5	Established by Muda Aboriginal Corporation in 1999, full license in 2004. Approximately 2 staff.	Talk shows and music. Live listening, no digital.	Facebook, 750+ followers
2LND Koori Radio	93.7 FM Sydney, Blue Mountains, Wollongong	Run by Gadigal Information Services, and governed by a board, since 1993.	Talkback, chat, news, music, current affairs and community information. Runs Young Black and Deadly workshops, Yabun and Klub Koori.	Facebook - 10,500+ followers
2TLP Ngarralinyi	103.3 Taree	Ngarralinyi (The Listening Place) was established by Mid North Coast Indigenous Broadcasting Association Corporation (MIBAAC) in 2000.	Ngarralinyi focuses on chat and music.	Facebook, 1,500+ followers
WRR Wilcannia River Radio	103.1 Wilcannia	Auspiced by the Regional Enterprise Development Institute, an Indigenous organisation based in	WRR 'broadcasts community news, events and meeting information, Central Darling Shire Council's daily road condition report (which is especially important in	Facebook, 1,700+ followers

		Dubbo. 5-7 staff.	winter months), job vacancies in the Wilcannia community, requests and cheerios'. Established in 2009 - slogan is 'Keeping it alive.	
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There is a new online radio station, OneMob Radio, formed by Gumbangyirr organisations in Coffs Harbour, discussed further below. This radio station is community-controlled, but does not have broadcast capacity. It is accessible online and via an app, and provides 24-hour web casting of news, events, music and culture. OneMob Radio run training on podcasting for groups and schools. The station was launched in November 2020. It is operated by Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Aboriginal Corporation and has 5000+ likes on Facebook.

Although not based in NSW, the Brisbane-based National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) shares news national news bulletins with Aboriginal radio stations in NSW.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled print media

NSW is home to the *Koori Mail*, the only national Aboriginal-run newspaper in the country (see below). The *Koori Mail* has a digital subscription service and recently began podcasting. Circulation is around 10,000 and the paper has 70,000 followers on Facebook and 13,500 followers on Instagram. The *Koori Mail* is a proprietary limited company based in Lismore, northern NSW, wholly owned by five Bundjalung Aboriginal community organisations: Bundjalung Tribal Society at Lismore, Bunjum Co-operative at Cabbage Tree Island, Buyinbin Co-operative at Casino, Kurrachee Cooperative at Coraki, and Nungera Co-operative at Maclean. The *Koori Mail* facilitated flood recovery efforts in the Northern Rivers region in early 2022, when they also lost their offices and archives.

Between 2011-2014, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council ran a magazine, *Tracker*. The magazine was explicitly pitched as an alternative to an increasingly hostile climate of news reporting, with a launch video explaining that mainstream media 'dehumanises' Aboriginal people whose perspectives are 'commonly misrepresented' and 'more often than not, sidelined'. It aimed to keep mainstream media accountable and provide reliable information on Aboriginal politics. *Tracker* was printing 35,000 copies in 2012 and was distributed nationally, making it at that point Australia's largest Aboriginal-run newspaper. The magazine was closed following a controversial cover criticising then Prime Minister Tony Abbott in 2014.

Beyond NSW, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander print media includes *The National Indigenous Times* is based in Western Australia and owned by two Indigenous businesspeople. The two employees are non-Indigenous. The paper is released monthly; the subscription base in NSW is unknown.

Two major national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander print media publications that used to be available in NSW have closed in the last decade. The Deadly Vibe Group published two magazines—a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, sport, music and lifestyle magazine (*Deadly Vibe*) and a newsletter (*InVibe*) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in secure rehabilitation care or at risk. *Deadly Vibe* previously received funding from government health programs and had a monthly distribution of 47,000 in 2014.

The Deadly Vibe Group also ran a weekly radio program syndicated across Aboriginal and community radio which conducted over 600 interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public figures. They also organised multiple festivals, the Deadly awards, and a dance-based health program, Move it Mob Style. In 2014, the Australian Government redirected funds from these Aboriginal media initiatives to frontline health services, and the Deadly Vibe group was closed.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander television

NSW plays host to National Indigenous Television (NITV). NITV was launched in 2007 and became part of Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) in 2012 (Rennie & Featherstone, 2008). It is managed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who themselves operate under the management of SBS. SBS receives around \$300 million in government support each year.

NITV has a national reach on television; it is free-to-air on Channel 24, as well as on Foxtel, Austar and Optus and the VAST satellite. It has a significant presence online, via the SBS website as well as via social media sites including Facebook, where it has a particularly significant presence with 300,000 followers. It also has a significant presence across Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. NITV also has a radio program on SBS national radio which runs three times a week. NITV is focused on Indigenous journalists reporting Indigenous news (predominantly national and local, with some international coverage). There is no other Indigenous-focused television news program on commercial or public television at the time of writing. NITV also focuses on commissioning new programming by Indigenous creators and sharing Indigenous content; NITV spent over \$10m on commissioning Indigenous content in 2019-20.

Emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media businesses

In addition to these not-for-profit services, there are numerous private businesses that are Aboriginal-run. Supply Nation lists 86 businesses in NSW focused on advertising and media, information technology, telecommunications and digital. Some examples include:

- IndigenousX, a news media organisation which publishes podcasts and content from Indigenous creators. It is a proprietary company, run by Gamilaroi man Luke Pearson. IndigenousX provides fee-based training in media, digital strategies, and professional communications. They also provide consultancy services on content development and reaching Indigenous audiences.
- 33 Creative, a digital creative agency, was founded by two Wiradjuri women, Maryah Sonter and Georgia Cordukes, who had worked as part of the Deadly Vibe Group. They provide content for television and audio, web sites and digital assets, social media assets and strategy, communications strategy, advertising and public relations campaigns, stakeholder and media engagement, and more. They are regularly contracted by governments as well as Indigenous community organisations and educational institutions.
- Awesome Black media facilitates connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creators and opportunities, as highlighted below.

There is some support for Indigenous media creation across the world through major social media platforms, including in Australia. Since 2018, Spotify Australia has run a Sound Up program which trains Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creators in podcasting. Ten applications are accepted each year and three cash grants are awarded per program to develop a podcast. TikTok Australia runs a program called Every Voice which provides grants of up to \$75,000 to creators to cover development and production costs. It is aimed at 'diverse and distinct voices' and has recently funded trans and gender diverse creators.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander journalists, creators and programs in mainstream media

Aboriginal journalism in NSW includes Aboriginal journalists working in various capacities in mainstream media organisations. While mainstream media is not Aboriginal community-controlled, it is a significant part of the small NSW Aboriginal media ecology.

There are approximately 100 active Aboriginal journalists in NSW, around a third of which are employed by NITV. ABC follows NITV as the second largest employer, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across management, content creation, production, editorial, television, radio, and online news. Fairfax/Nine, which owns *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, employs an Indigenous Affairs editor and has employed two Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander journalists and a photographer supported by the Judith Neilson Institute of Journalism and Ideas since 2019. This has included longform, investigative journalism and podcasting, focused on key Indigenous Affairs issues. *The Guardian*, which is now one of the most popular online news sources in Australia, employs an Indigenous Affairs editor and at least two Aboriginal journalists in reporting and podcasting. This is in part supported by the Balnaves Foundation. According to our research, the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander journalists start their careers in Aboriginal media organisations, or with the ABC or NITV. Perhaps problematically, the small amount of support for Aboriginal journalism in corporate media is partly reliant on philanthropy.

As well as providing a key source of employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander journalists, the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dedicated content is also created across the ABC, NITV and *The Guardian*, including radio and podcast programs. Network Seven, Network Nine, Network Ten and Sky News have no regular dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led news media or commentary, although they do employ small numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander journalists around the country. This is also true of national broadsheets *The Australian* and the *Australian Financial Review*, as well as *news.com.au*, and smaller outlets the *The New Daily*, and *The Saturday Paper*. Pay-per-view services including Foxtel, Fetch, Netflix, Stan, Binge, Amazon Prime, Disney Plus, Paramount Plus, YouTube Premium, Hayu, AppleTV and others are focused on creative content and largely do not focus on news, current affairs and information sharing, and have not been included in the research.

3 NSW media consumption – survey results

This section explores the results of our survey, including patterns of respondent engagement with both mainstream and Aboriginal media in NSW, and their levels of trust in each media type. As noted above, results should be considered in light of the sample size.

Characteristics of respondents

In NSW, the Aboriginal population was 278,000 in 2021, making up 3.4 per cent of the state's population, and giving NSW the largest Aboriginal population in the country. The median age of the Aboriginal population is 22 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

The median age of survey respondents was 29. The sample also skewed towards women, with 52.2 per cent women respondents, 45.1 per cent men, and 1.8 per cent non-binary or genderfluid.

Language speakers

The 2016 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016) found that 2.8 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people spoke an Aboriginal language at home. This question has been used to measure use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages since 1991, and it has generally shown a slow decline in the number of Aboriginal language speakers. Our survey asked the question differently, informed by the knowledge that very few Aboriginal people in NSW speak an Aboriginal language at home, but may be engaging with language in other ways. We found that 46.9 per cent – nearly half of all respondents – answered that they 'know or are learning some words in Aboriginal language'. Some respondents followed the prompt to self-report the language. In order of commonality and retaining the spelling used. Those languages are explored in Table 2.

Table 2: Aboriginal languages spoken by survey respondents

Language	Number of reported speakers
Wiradjuri	11
Gamilaraay/ Gomeroi/ Kamilaroi/ Gamilaroi	7
Yugambah	5
Bundjalung	5
Dharug	2
Dunghutti/ Dunghatti	2
Dhurga / Durga	2
Yuin	1
Ngarrindjeri	1
Barkintji	1
Githabul	1
Nyulnyulan	1
Guugu Yimidhirr/ Guugu Yimithirr/ Pama	2
Kriol	1
Arrente	1
Wakka Wakka	1
Dharawal	1
Ngemba	1
Gadigal	1
Yolngu Matha	1

Weilwan	1
Yaegl/ Gumbaingirr	1
Gathang	1

This may suggest interest in language learning among respondents in the context of what is called renewing or reviving languages—bringing back languages with a small group of fluent speakers—and reclaiming and/or reawakening languages—bringing back languages with no fluent speakers. However, the small sample size means that further research here is necessary. The results can be considered alongside the National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) data. The NILS showed that 31 languages that previously had no speakers recorded are now being spoken around the country, a number that has slowly increased over the three NILS surveys (2020). For NSW, the 2020 NILS estimated:

Table 3: Aboriginal languages spoken in NSW by NILS (2020) survey respondents

Language	Number of reported speakers
Wiradjuri	436
Bundjalung	105
Gamilaraay/Gomeri	94
Gumbaynggir	78
Yorta Yorta (also in Victoria)	51
Paakantji/Barkindji (also in South Australia)	40

Source: National Indigenous Languages Survey (2020)

Our Aboriginal language data and the NILS (2020) data may not be directly comparable since the data gathering and analysis methodologies may differ. For example, the way that ‘speaker’ is measured in the NILS survey may underestimate the number of people that are connected with, but may not fluently speak, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language in NSW. Further, for both surveys the survey sample sizes are too small to be definitive. Overall, surveys on Aboriginal language users draw on very small sample sizes and self-reported data, with NILS data drawn from a representative of each language group. However, a survey with a large sample size could potentially yield interesting results by delineating types of language proficiency. In terms of Aboriginal media in NSW, the unique role of Aboriginal media in promoting language activity could be particularly valuable in assisting language renewal and learning.

Internet use

As noted earlier, the 2016 Census measured household internet access. Internet access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait households in NSW is consistently lower than for other households (see Table 4 below). In far western NSW, about 31 to 49 percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households have no access to the internet at home compared to other households in those areas. Looking at NSW as a whole, in almost 40 percent of NSW Local Government Areas, at least 10 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households have no access to the internet at home compared to other households in the same area. In the 2016 Census ‘internet accessed from dwelling’ included internet accessed through a desktop/laptop computer, mobile or smart phone, tablet, music or video player, gaming console, smart TV or any other device. This differs from the 2006 Census and 2011 Census which distinguished between the type of internet connection accessed at home. In this way, the 2016 Census figures may inadvertently mask the digital divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal households, since a big barrier to digital inclusion for Aboriginal people is the cost of internet access, particularly via mobile phones, and particularly in more remote areas (Featherstone 2015, 2022).

The 2021 Census data did not include any question about whether the internet was being accessed at home. Unfortunately, this will make digital inclusion more difficult to measure.

Table 4: Percentage of households with internet accessed from dwelling, by Local Government Area, in ascending order

Local Government Area in NSW	% Household with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person(s)	% Other households	Percentage difference
Central Darling (A)	34.2	83.0	48.8
Walgett (A)	41.6	77.4	35.9
Bourke (A)	48.7	81.7	33.0
Brewarrina (A)	49.5	84.6	35.1
Wentworth (A)	51.0	85.6	34.6
Moree Plains (A)	51.8	83.1	31.3
Coonamble (A)	52.4	78.1	25.8
Warren (A)	55.6	79.7	24.1
Walcha (A)	57.2	79.5	22.3
Unincorporated NSW	57.7	90.8	33.1
Lachlan (A)	58.1	78.6	20.5
Gilgandra (A)	58.9	78.5	19.6
Glen Innes Severn (A)	61.6	79.1	17.5
Tenterfield (A)	63.4	77.8	14.4
Richmond Valley (A)	63.6	81.5	17.9
Inverell (A)	64.2	80.4	16.1
Kempsey (A)	64.7	81.9	17.3
Kyogle (A)	64.7	80.2	15.6
Armidale Regional (A)	65.5	88.3	22.8
Cobar (A)	65.7	83.2	17.4
Narrabri (A)	66.3	81.7	15.4
Griffith (C)	66.9	84.2	17.3
Edward River (A)	67.0	83.5	16.6
Nambucca (A)	67.6	83.1	15.5
Warrumbungle Shire (A)	68.4	78.1	9.8
Carrathool (A)	68.6	82.6	14.0
Eurobodalla (A)	68.7	85.9	17.1
Gwydir (A)	69.3	74.6	5.3
Liverpool Plains (A)	69.6	80.4	10.8
Murrumbidgee (A)	70.5	82.4	11.9
Broken Hill (C)	70.5	80.5	10.0
Gunnedah (A)	71.7	82.6	10.9
Leeton (A)	72.1	84.0	11.9
Oberon (A)	72.2	82.6	10.4
Balranald (A)	72.2	79.1	6.9
Narrandera (A)	72.4	80.6	8.2
Western Plains Regional (A)	72.4	86.6	14.2
Orange (C)	73.0	87.0	14.0
Narromine (A)	73.1	81.5	8.4
Cowra (A)	73.5	81.8	8.3
Snowy Valleys (A)	73.7	80.4	6.7
Mid-Coast (A)	73.8	83.4	9.6
Ballina (A)	73.9	89.1	15.2
Hay (A)	74.2	76.1	2.0
Clarence Valley (A)	74.2	83.5	9.2

Sydney (C)	74.3	93.1	18.9
Wagga Wagga (C)	74.3	88.7	14.4
Gundagai (A)	74.6	80.2	5.6
Forbes (A)	74.7	81.8	7.0
Tamworth Regional (A)	74.9	85.4	10.5
Muswellbrook (A)	75.0	86.0	11.1
Bega Valley (A)	75.0	86.9	11.9
Bogan (A)	75.1	78.7	3.6
Parkes (A)	75.2	82.5	7.4
Albury (C)	75.6	88.3	12.7
Mid-Western Regional (A)	75.9	84.3	8.4
Weddin (A)	76.3	81.4	5.2
Hilltops (A)	76.3	81.9	5.5
Murray River (A)	76.7	83.3	6.5
Bathurst Regional (A)	77.1	88.3	11.2
Fairfield (C)	77.3	88.2	10.9
Uralla (A)	77.5	84.7	7.2
Berrigan (A)	77.7	84.2	6.5
Coffs Harbour (C)	77.8	89.4	11.5
Lithgow (C)	78.0	82.3	4.3
Coolamon (A)	78.3	83.9	5.6
Federation (A)	78.4	82.7	4.3
Lismore (C)	78.6	88.0	9.5
Lockhart (A)	79.2	85.4	6.2
Singleton (A)	79.3	89.6	10.4
Randwick (C)	79.4	93.0	13.6
Blacktown (C)	79.5	92.4	12.9
Goulburn Mulwaree (A)	79.6	84.0	4.4
Cabonne (A)	79.7	85.9	6.2
Upper Hunter Shire (A)	80.0	84.0	4.1
Upper Lachlan Shire (A)	80.1	82.4	2.3
Liverpool (C)	80.3	91.0	10.6
Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional (A)	80.6	91.7	11.1
Snowy Monaro Regional (A)	80.7	86.0	5.3
Botany Bay (C)	80.8	90.5	9.7
Campbelltown (C) (NSW)	80.8	89.9	9.1
Cumberland (A)	81.0	90.3	9.3
Bland (A)	81.1	81.0	0.2
Shoalhaven (C)	81.3	86.4	5.1
Junee (A)	81.3	84.1	2.8
Dungog (A)	81.9	85.9	4.0
Cessnock (C)	82.1	84.9	2.7
Port Macquarie-Hastings (A)	82.6	87.0	4.4
Tweed (A)	82.7	87.2	4.5
Canterbury-Bankstown (A)	82.7	89.4	6.7
Strathfield (A)	82.9	94.0	11.0
Inner West (A)	83.0	93.2	10.1
Greater Hume Shire (A)	83.0	86.4	3.3
Port Stephens (A)	83.7	88.7	5.0
Maitland (C)	83.7	89.8	6.1
Blayney (A)	83.8	85.8	2.0
Newcastle (C)	83.8	89.3	5.5
Bellingen (A)	83.8	87.4	3.5
Wollongong (C)	83.9	89.0	5.1

Shellharbour (C)	84.3	89.2	4.9
Lake Macquarie (C)	84.5	89.5	5.0
Temora (A)	85.4	81.7	3.7
Byron (A)	85.6	92.0	6.4
Rockdale (C)	85.8	90.7	4.9
Central Coast (C) (NSW)	85.9	89.4	3.4
Wingecarribee (A)	86.2	91.1	4.9
Parramatta (C)	86.4	94.1	7.7
Yass Valley (A)	86.6	91.6	5.0
Georges River (A)	87.0	92.7	5.7
Hawkesbury (C)	87.1	91.6	4.5
North Sydney (A)	87.2	95.7	8.5
Penrith (C)	87.2	91.6	4.4
Burwood (A)	87.7	92.0	4.3
Hornsby (A)	89.3	96.1	6.8
Canada Bay (A)	89.7	93.5	3.8
Lane Cove (A)	89.8	96.1	6.3
Wollondilly (A)	90.0	92.8	2.8
Ryde (C)	90.0	93.8	3.8
Willoughby (C)	90.0	95.8	5.7
Woollahra (A)	90.9	96.2	5.2
Camden (A)	91.3	94.3	3.0
Sutherland Shire (A)	91.4	94.3	2.9
The Hills Shire (A)	91.9	97.1	5.2
Northern Beaches (A)	91.9	95.2	3.3
Blue Mountains (C)	92.1	93.7	1.6
Kiama (A)	92.6	92.8	0.2
Hunters Hill (A)	94.3	95.0	0.7
Waverley (A)	95.3	94.6	0.7
Ku-ring-gai (A)	95.7	97.2	1.5
Mosman (A)	96.9	96.0	1.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016

Note: ABS Local Government Area status types in NSW include Cities (C) and Areas (A)

Our survey asked more complex questions about internet and technology use, informed by existing research which indicated the need for more in-depth data. The literature suggests higher use of mobile internet by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, including problems with access and speeds in some rural and remote areas. We also wanted to understand access to different forms of technology and patterns of media use, including sharing of technology.

Table 5: Aboriginal internet and media use by survey respondents, by technology and media type

Technology and media by type (results show number of respondents and (%))	Technology and media by use
110 (97.3%) use a laptop or a computer	91 (80.5%) owned a computer or laptop
	58 (51.3%) used a computer or laptop at work
	29 (25.7%) used a computer or laptop at a library, community centre or local service
	29 (25.7%) shared with others
106 (93.8%) use a smartphone	103 (91.2%) owned a smartphone
	42 (37.2%) used a smartphone in a work context

	3 (2.7%) shared with others
(86.7%) access the internet at home	98 (86.7%) have an internet connection at home
	94 (83.2%) use a smartphone
	63 (55.8%) use a work computer
	32 (28.3%) have a mobile broadband dongle
	20 (17.7%) use a community centre or library
	1 (0.9%) rarely or never had internet access
90 (79.6%) watch television	75 (66.4%) own a TV they watch at home
	22 (19.5%) share a TV at home with others
	16 (14.2%) watch a TV at a library, community centre or local service
	14 (12.4%) watch TV at work
74 (65.5%) listen to the radio	53 (46.9%) listened to the radio at home
	40 (35.4%) listened to the radio in their car
	32 (28.3%) listened to the radio at work or in a work car
	24 (21.2%) listened to a radio at a library, community centre or local service
	10 (8.8%) shared a radio at home
	5 (4.4%) listened to the radio in a shared car

The results overall show expected high levels of engagement across multiple forms of media by survey respondents. They show some reliance on community services to access technology amongst a minority, as well as some access at work.

Television usage would appear to be declining, which suggests this question was interpreted to mean televisions used for traditional free-to-air broadcasting. The question, however, does not draw distinction between free-to-air services and access to streaming platforms (whether on a smart television or other device). Future research may want to determine access to streaming services.

Similarly, radio listening appears to be declining, with listening at work and in the car a reminder of sometimes passive engagement with radio.

For the 13.27% of respondents not accessing the internet at home, reasons included:

- Too expensive 6.2%
- Concerned about the information and content available online 4.4%
- I move around a lot 3.5%
- I don't feel like I need it 3.5%
- No internet in my area 1.8%
- Don't know how to get an internet connection 0.9%
- I prefer mobile broadband 0.9%
- Other reason 0.9%

This shows cost to be an important factor, as well as more deliberate decisions not to engage. It is important to remember that these results largely exclude the most digitally disconnected, as the survey was conducted online.

Engagement with news and information

Another set of questions focused in more depth on engagement with media. Firstly, respondents rated their overall confidence accessing news and information, which overall demonstrated strong confidence:

- 43.7% feel very confident accessing news and information online
- 29.2% feel quite confident accessing news and information online
- 21.2% felt moderately confident accessing news and information online
- 6.2% were not very confident accessing news and information online
- 0% were not at all confident accessing news and information online

Notably, the most popular daily source of news and information was social media, far outweighing all other options.

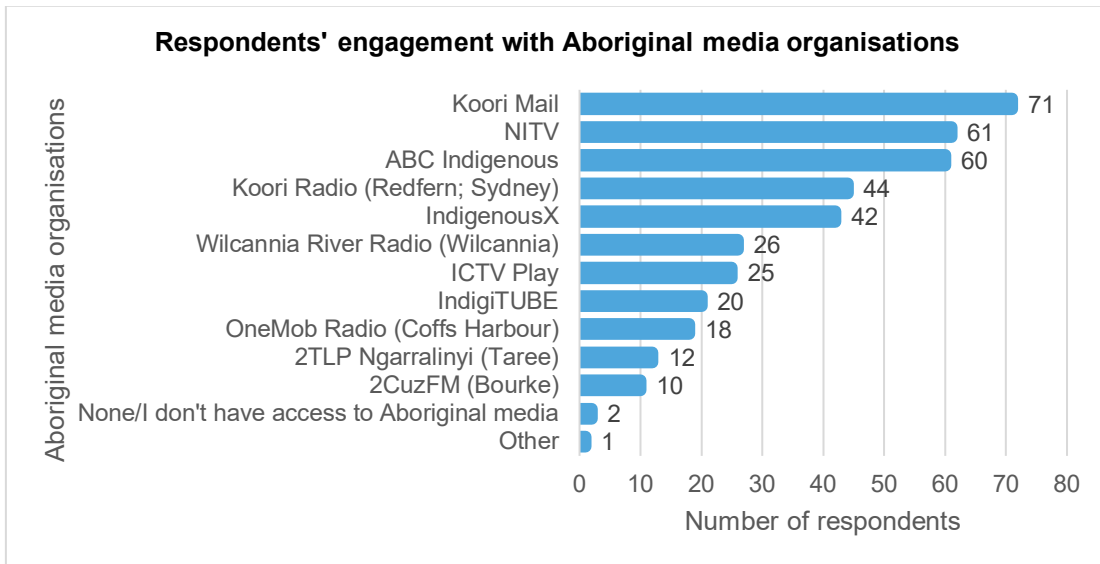
Table 6: Frequency of respondent engagement and level of trust, by media type (from most to least trusted)

How often do you access the following media sources?	Daily	Sometimes	Rarely or never	No response	Do you trust this news and information source most of the time?
Aboriginal media (e.g. NITV, Koori Mail, Aboriginal radio stations)	32 (28.3%)	60 (53.1%)	20 (17.7%)	1 (0.9%)	61 (54.0%)
Major online news (e.g. ABC, news.com.au, The Guardian)	48 (42.5%)	46 (40.7%)	17 (15.0%)	2 (1.8%)	59 (52.2%)
People in my community or my family	47 (41.6%)	53 (46.9%)	11 (9.7%)	2 (1.8%)	46 (40.7%)
Public TV stations (e.g. ABC, SBS)	30 (26.5%)	51 (45.1%)	30 (26.5%)	2 (1.8%)	45 (39.8%)
Local Aboriginal organisations	40 (35.4%)	50 (44.2%)	19 (16.8%)	4 (3.5%)	44 (38.9%)
Major print newspapers (e.g. Sydney Morning Herald, Daily Telegraph)	28 (24.8%)	40 (35.4%)	41 (36.3%)	4 (3.5%)	40 (35.4%)
Major radio station (e.g. ABC, SBS)	32 (28.3%)	49 (43.4%)	31 (27.4%)	1 (0.9%)	38 (33.6%)
Social media	83 (73.5%)	25 (22.1%)	3 (2.7%)	2 (1.8%)	37 (32.7%)
Local newspapers	31 (27.4%)	40 (35.4%)	39 (34.5%)	3 (2.7%)	29 (25.7%)

While not accessed daily by a majority of respondents, Aboriginal media was the most popular source for information 'sometimes' amongst respondents. As discussed below, answers demonstrated enthusiasm for Aboriginal media even when access was infrequent, difficult or less available. Aboriginal media, including NITV, has significantly less exposure than most forms of media. The results also show that community networks were more trusted than major media sources by respondents. Access to both local and major print newspapers was below 50% in all categories, while information from community and family and local Aboriginal organisations was popular in the 'sometimes' category. Consistent with findings on the fading popularity of television stations and radio, major print newspapers and local newspapers were amongst the least engaged with. Major online news remained popular. Notably, there were some correlations between usage and trust as explored below: local and major mainstream

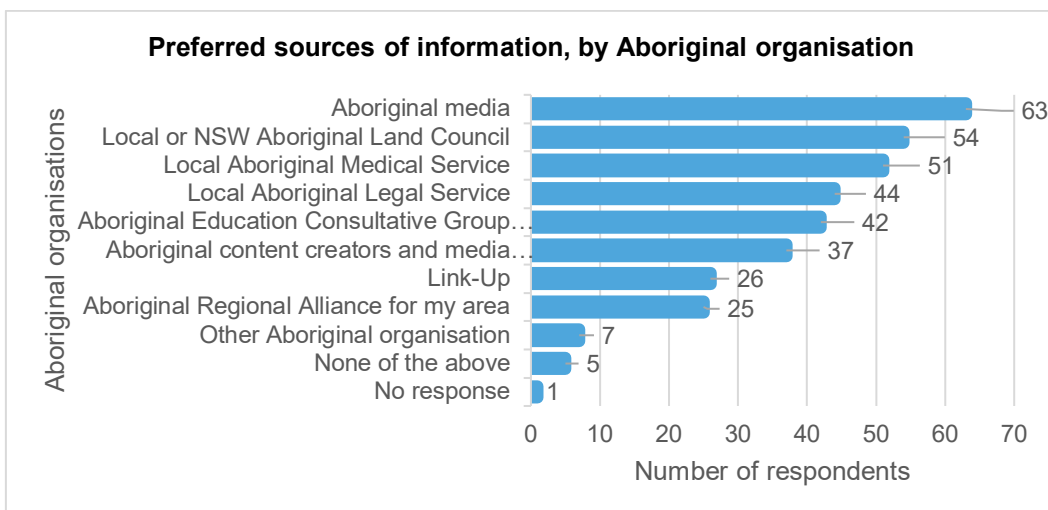
print newspapers were distrusted, Aboriginal media and major online news were trusted, Aboriginal organisations and people in community were trusted sometimes, and public television was trusted over commercial television. Our survey asked specific questions about engagement with Aboriginal media (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Respondents' engagement with Aboriginal media organisations



This demonstrates the *Koori Mail* was accessed by the largest number of respondents, closely followed by NITV and ABC Indigenous. As the three national media sources, they have the most extensive capacity to reach larger audiences, so this result is unsurprising. The *Koori Mail's* reach amongst respondents as community-run newspaper in the digital era is particularly impressive. Similarly, Koori Radio's audience is notable, especially considering they have few resources to produce digital content. The results also suggest strong support for Koori Radio, and also support for Wilcannia River Radio, 2CuzFM and Ngarralinyi. This may indicate strong affiliation with Aboriginal radio amongst the respondents. Further questions were asked around information seeking from Aboriginal services (see Figure 3). Aboriginal media as well as multiple Aboriginal-led organisations remain key sources of reliable information. Notable is the relatively strong result for a more informal network of Aboriginal content creators and media personalities.

Figure 3: Preferred sources of information, by Aboriginal organisation



Social media

As the most popular source of daily news and information amongst respondents, social media is clearly an important tool for communicating with Aboriginal audiences.

Table 7: Frequency of Aboriginal engagement with social media in NSW

Social media platform	Frequency of engagement by respondents (results show number of respondents and (%))			
	Daily	Sometimes	Rarely or never	No response
Facebook	73 (64.6%)	29 (25.7%)	11 (9.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Instagram	66 (58.4%)	25 (22.1%)	20 (17.7%)	2 (1.8%)
YouTube	48 (42.5%)	50 (44.2%)	12 (10.6%)	3 (2.7%)
TikTok	46 (40.7%)	32 (28.3%)	31 (27.4%)	4 (3.5%)
Twitter	44 (38.9%)	35 (31.0%)	31 (27.4%)	3 (2.7%)
SnapChat	22 (19.5%)	34 (30.1%)	53 (46.9%)	4 (3.5%)
Linked In	19 (16.8%)	43 (38.1%)	49 (43.4%)	2 (1.8%)

Facebook and Instagram were the most popular, with mixed engagement with TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, and less frequent engagement with Linked In and SnapChat. This largely corresponds with research showing more engagement with Facebook amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, with some research showing Facebook's 'Groups' functionality is used for community building activities and information sharing (Carlson & Frazer, 2018).

The popularity of social media for news and information sharing could have both benefits and drawbacks for Aboriginal users. The immediacy of the platform allows communities to share important information quickly, and it can also be a space to react to or counterbalance negative narratives that sometimes characterise mainstream news. It can also create a space to reach audiences that may otherwise be disparate, especially when government works in collaboration with communities and develops localised strategies. At the same time, all major social media platforms have been susceptible to the spread of misinformation that has encouraged behaviours like vaccine hesitancy (Stuchbery et al., 2022). Social media can facilitate racism, doxing and bullying against individuals (Carlson & Frazer, 2018).

Seeking information

Respondents were asked where they would seek advice on health information, schools and further education, and job opportunities. This was a freeform response. In order of preference, responses were grouped into categories. They show a strong preference for community services and online information sources. These results demonstrate that a combination of universal services and targeted services are used by respondents to seek information on essential services.

Table 8: Aboriginal preferred information source by service information need, in NSW

Service information need	Information source (from most to least preferred)
Health information	Community and family Doctor Aboriginal media services NSW Health or Service NSW Government websites

	Internet in general Social media
Schools and further education information	Internet in general Social media Community and family Department of Education Schools Aboriginal media
Job opportunity information	Online recruitment sites (including Seek, Indeed) Social media Local Aboriginal organisations LinkedIn Newspapers and media (including the Koori Mail) Networks and word of mouth

Trust

A crucial finding in both the literature and our research is that Aboriginal audiences consider Aboriginal media to be more trustworthy than mainstream media. The literature shows that mainstream media tends to be distrusted in its representation of Aboriginal people and issues e.g. NITV, 2020). This finding largely aligns with our survey results which show some distrust. There is also a strong tendency towards 'neutral' on some statements. This also suggests some ambivalent or complicated views on the trustworthiness of media that are not captured in an agree/disagree question format.

We found that 41.0% of people agreed with the statement, 'I trust information about my community that is reported in the media', which was the majority. A very significant 37.5% were neutral while 21.43% disagreed. This broadly aligns with the Reconciliation Barometer's findings and shows a high level of distrust and scepticism. This question only differentiated between Aboriginal and mainstream media, and did not drill down to more specific media types, organisations or companies.

Table 9: Respondent trust in mainstream or Aboriginal media

Statement on media trust	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	No response
I trust information about my community that is reported in the media	46 (40.7%)	42 (37.2%)	24 (21.2%)	1 (0.9%)
Aboriginal media is a trustworthy source	77 (68.1%)	31 (27.4%)	5 (4.4%)	0 (0.0%)

The results clearly demonstrate trust in Aboriginal media, and desire to engage with Aboriginal media if available, amongst respondents. Respondents broadly considered Aboriginal media a more trustworthy source and were enthusiastic to engage with it. This may not correspond to actual frequency of engagement, or easy access to local Aboriginal media. An important but complex feature here is that audiences may engage frequently or have frequent access to media they distrust. Therefore, quantitative statistics about access need to be counterbalanced by an understanding of trust and availability.

Table 10: Respondent support for Aboriginal media

Statements on Aboriginal media	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	No response
Seeing/hearing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the media makes me feel proud	87 (77.0%)	23 (20.4%)	3 (2.7%)	0 (0.0%)
I would access Aboriginal media if there was a service in my area	70 (61.9%)	31 (27.4%)	10 (8.8%)	2 (1.8%)

The results demonstrated a high level of scepticism surrounding government communication—while an equal majority either trusted information from government or were neutral (suggesting, as above, a more complex view), less than a quarter of respondents felt that government knows how to communicate with Aboriginal people with respect. This demonstrates the challenge for government engagement with Aboriginal audiences. Responses to the survey suggest communicative approaches led by Aboriginal organisations, media and personalities to generate positive responses, but as noted, this will need to be led by engagement with Aboriginal organisations.

Table 11: Statements on governments and trust

Statements on government and trust	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	No response
Government knows how to communicate with Aboriginal people with respect	24 (21.2%)	49 (43.4%)	39 (34.5%)	1 (0.9%)
I can trust information from the government	46 (40.70%)	46 (40.70%)	20 (17.70%)	1 (0.9%)

Questions around accessing content were informed by an effort to understand the connection between digital inclusion, access and affordability. A majority felt that their mobile phone and internet coverage was affordable and had good connectivity. Close to a majority were interested in learning about creating and sharing content, suggesting an audience for digital literacy workshops and initiatives amongst respondents.

Table 12: Statements on accessing content

Statements on accessing content	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	No response
I know where to go if I want help with accessing news, information and services online	73 (64.6%)	30 (26.5%)	8 (7.1%)	2 (1.8%)
Mobile phone coverage in my area is affordable for me	76 (67.3%)	30 (26.5%)	6 (5.3%)	1 (0.9%)
I have good mobile phone coverage in my area (no drop outs)	67 (59.3%)	30 (26.5%)	14 (12.4%)	2 (1.8%)
I have good internet connectivity in my area (few drop outs)	64 (56.6%)	40 (35.4%)	9 (8.0%)	0 (0.0%)
I want to know more about how to create content to share online	54 (47.8%)	31 (27.4%)	26 (23.0%)	2 (1.8%)

4 Case studies: developing Aboriginal-led, localised communications approaches

This section explores ways that some Aboriginal organisations engage and use the media to realise their own interests and goals, and their perspectives on their relationship with government as it relates to communications. It considers their recommendations and preferences for future capacity building, and their recommendations for challenging racism and institutional bias. It also reports on their views on how government can adopt appropriate policies for communicating with Aboriginal audiences that promote self-determination and avoid deficit approaches. It does this through spotlighting organisations which participated in interviews and consultations informing this research.

Some people below agreed to share their names while others were deidentified. This was because some were participating on behalf of their organisations and employers and others were participating on the condition of anonymity. All sections below have been read and discussed with respondents to ensure that they reflect their interests.

'I know just about everyone in the local community': 2Cuz radio station

2Cuz is 24-hour Aboriginal radio station based in Bourke on Gomeri/Gamilaraay land. It is part of Muda Aboriginal Corporation. It is run by two staff and one volunteer. Muda Aboriginal Corporation also run an art gallery and has run the company Bourke Aboriginal Cultural Tours.

2Cuz shares live content for three hours a day, and pre-recorded material for the rest of the time. They previously reported on local news, but resources are now too stretched. The station is funded by both the NIAA and the Community Broadcasting Association Australia (CBAA). This covers operational funding, but does not provide for any equipment upgrades, digitisation or new material. Chairperson Dot Martin explains that the station 'needs more on the ground staff, people to go out and do interviews in the community, people to attend anything that's happening in the local community.' 2Cuz is keen to partner with other Aboriginal media after success in partnering with Koori Radio on shared material during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2Cuz works with local organisations, such as the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS), and promote AMS activities through interviews focused on current initiatives. Dot explains 'I know just about everyone in the local community.' 2Cuz often runs these advertisements and interviews free of charge to support the local Aboriginal community. They noted that the COVID-19 pandemic led to increased engagement with government, as Manager of 2Cuz Codey Martin explained, 'our locally produced ads and the community announcements and the government ads, they've come in flooded since COVID.' These were contracted through media buying agencies that took a ten per cent cut. In addition to these free and purchased advertisements, 2Cuz have created their own infomercial material focused on issues of family violence in the community.

Recently, the Spirit Program has also been active in Bourke. They are a non-profit organisation that operates on grant funding. They are focused on teaching young people radio and media skills through interviewing Elders and recording Aboriginal community history and stories.

‘Provide narratives reflective of our communities’: Barang Regional Alliance

Barang Regional Alliance represents the Central Coast Aboriginal community on Darkinjung land. Barang is a broad coalition of local Aboriginal organisations that works to empower local Aboriginal people, advocate for reforms, improve service delivery and keep government accountable. Barang’s regional governance model has been supported as part of the NSW Government’s Local Decision Making initiative. Regional Alliances negotiate accords across NSW government departments and agencies, designed to increase Aboriginal representation in key decisions that affect their local area. Barang is also a part of the Empowered Communities program, funded by the NIAA, which is being delivered in ten regions across Australia.

The consultation with Barang Regional Alliance involved a focus group interview with nine representatives, conducted via Zoom. Subsequent consultations took place to ensure that the conclusions developed from the meeting transcript were accurate representations.

Research should be co-designed from the outset

Barang participants raised the process of research design, and the fact that consultation occurred after the research process was well underway. Barang representatives noted that research design should begin with consultation that identifies problems and research questions from the bottom up and provides Aboriginal leadership over research and sovereignty over data. Where Aboriginal people are the ‘researched rather than the researchers’, the paradigm of government ‘coming in from the outside’ with pre-determined plans and goals prevails.

Local organisations are known and trusted information sources

Representatives explained that ‘influence’ in the Aboriginal community is achieved through a local understanding of ‘known and trusted sources’. Barang participants explained that they ‘know who the community trust’ and are well-placed to facilitate the sharing of information and promotion of programs. This can be tailored according to the message, with different people in communities more trusted in particular arenas. Representatives noted that localised knowledge is a key feature of local Aboriginal governance. Representatives emphasised the importance of local governance to effective information sharing and trust-building.

Better media opportunities and representation are needed in the region

Barang pointed out the need for better opportunities for Aboriginal media makers and the need for positive Aboriginal representation in mainstream media in their region. The lack of effective Aboriginal community-controlled media spaces in the area meant that talented voices tended to leave for opportunities elsewhere. There was also a gap in mainstream representation, with no mainstream media or local media in the area focused on the Aboriginal community despite the growing population. Representatives considered how the shape of mainstream journalism could change more broadly to improve Aboriginal representation. It was noted that Aboriginal people ‘are portrayed through a disadvantage lens ... pushed to the outer’ in the mainstream media, and that this contributes to negative perceptions of Aboriginal people and a disproportionate focus on ‘disadvantage’ as the driver of policy. They discussed the need for journalism education to encourage Aboriginal journalists, and ‘provide narratives reflective of our communities’.

Stereotypes and deficit narratives in government discourse need to change

Barang participants also discussed the broader effect of negative discourses and narratives in policy making. Representatives discussed how, in their view, government funding and grant opportunities that exist as part of policies like Closing the Gap are set up in ways that appear to reflect negative or deficit frameworks. This meant that Aboriginal organisations often needed to ‘fall victim to the narratives’ in order to receive necessary funding for their work. Barang participants also pointed out how government often follows ‘stereotypes’ when trying to reach Aboriginal audiences, with advertising and public campaigns sometimes following a limited view

of Aboriginal authenticity. The need to represent the diversity of the Aboriginal population in terms of skin colour and language use was considered crucial to representing the breadth of the community.

Local leadership needs to be supported for effective communications

Barang participants also discussed the strength of local Aboriginal organisations in developing localised communication strategies. Barang representatives felt that Aboriginal peak organisations sometimes 'don't reach out to regions' in developing campaigns and may not have knowledge of specific local campaigns. For example, Barang participants pointed out one focus of the peak Aboriginal health organisation NACCHO is rheumatic heart disease. This is a major issue in northern Australian Aboriginal communities, but not in the Central Coast region. Peaks, in their view, did not always reflect 'regional needs', nor have the local connections to facilitate campaigns. If solutions are to be driven locally, governance structures like Barang allow effective decision-making within relevant local regions. They are therefore ideally placed to identify and solve problems, and to understand where there are serious resource gaps. However, the constantly shifting government policy frameworks can undermine successful regional governance structures. For example, there was discussion that the recent emphasis on Closing the Gap and the forthcoming Voice to Parliament may change the Aboriginal organisational structures that government works with. There was a feeling that this shift was constant, allowing little time for stability and trust to develop, and this hampers the possibility of developing effective joint communications strategies.

Barang's communication strategies

Barang distributes a quarterly newsletter via email to share information and achievements. As an under-resourced organisation, they rely on social media. Greater resourcing for communications could enhance distribution. Barang, as a coalition of organisations, can identify what local needs are and identify strategies for communicating locally. Barang argues that Government supporting this approach would be a responsive way to facilitate communication and improve service delivery and Aboriginal wellbeing. At the moment, much communication in the region is facilitated by local Aboriginal health organisations.

An example of the AMS's outsized role was the work of Yerin Eleanor Duncan Regional Health Service during the 2021 COVID-19 outbreak and lockdowns. Yerin developed a video with the chair of the Local Aboriginal Land Council which encouraged mob to get vaccinated. Yerin and other local organisations also collaborated on the 'Booby Bus'. Yerin had identified that local women and others with breast tissue were less likely to be getting regular mammograms and ultrasounds to identify breast cancer. The bus turned this into a safe event and encouraged awareness. These strategies are not the 'core business' of organisations like Yerin, but happen out of necessity in emergencies.

At the moment, Barang has a 'Koori Calendar' that gathers all relevant Aboriginal community events and allows organisations to co-organise their schedules. This allows greater participation, collaboration and more efficient use of time, as organisations are available to support each other's plans. This allows a community approach to information sharing. During the height of the pandemic, Barang hosted online connection sessions and ran exercise classes and yarn-ups.

'The only Aboriginal-controlled data network in the country': Ngiyang Wayama

As part of their mandate to deliver for community-controlled organisations in the Central Coast region, Barang Regional Alliance has developed their own community data, data governance and community training around data. Through their organisation, Ngiyang Wayama, they have emerged as a leader in the data sovereignty space. Ngiyang Wayama is 'the only Aboriginal

community-controlled regional data network in the country'. We spoke to Corrine Hudson of Ngiyang Wayama, who explained their motives and activities. Their efforts are instructive for considering how to enact data sovereignty and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research, two priorities of the Closing the Gap Agreement that relate directly to media and communications.

Ngiyang Wayama felt that Aboriginal communities had been excluded from decision-making over what data to collect about their communities. They collaborated with the Indigenous Data Network at the University of Melbourne, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and a number of other partners. They developed terms of reference and asked local Elder and language custodian Aunty Bronwyn to name the network. The name means 'we are all together and we all tell.' Ngiyang Wayama aims to start a data network focused on auditing community data and establishing shared measurement.

Barang Regional Alliance runs youth summits for young people on Darkinjung Country to share their 'voices, views and opinions' so these can be delivered 'directly to government and key stakeholders'. Around a quarter of the population in the region is under 20 years of age, and the Central Coast is also the fastest growing region in Australia. Many Aboriginal people on the Central Coast have ancestral ties to other countries, but refer to the Central Coast as 'spirit country'. Barang developed surveys which asked young people to rank their priorities, and also asked others to rank priorities for youth. The surveys were designed to provide 'non-deficit' focused statistics about the region and emphasised Aboriginal connection in the region and its meaning for creating positive change.

Ngiyang Wayama are seeking to challenge the common belief that data sovereignty is 'just communities accessing data from government and other data holders.' Data sovereignty also includes data governance, including data storage, control and collection. Ngiyang Wayama have developed a Demystifying Data training package, which includes two 1.5 hour data literacy education sessions including on what data is, and what it means for Aboriginal communities. Ngiyang Wayama also run a working group, Data Discovery, to understand what data is available, how it can be localised, how data sets can be combined and how to identify gaps in data. They have also developed technical training in data visualisation. The next phase for Ngiyang Wayama is developing local leadership in the region to find 'data champions.' This includes upskilling others to run data training. Currently the data training is not 'productised', and there is a desire to 'scale those training packages' towards different levels of understanding. The project is unfunded and would require support to expand.

Corinne Hudson, the coordinator of Ngiyang Wayama, sees the language of Closing the Gap as an obstacle in empowering Aboriginal communities via data. Rather, she sees Closing the Gap as 'aiming for the minimum standards that white people enjoy in this country.' From the perspective of Ngiyang Wayama, there has been a lack of consultation with regional stakeholders in the process of developing parameters and priorities as part of Closing the Gap. This is seen as another example of government setting the agenda and controlling the narrative. Corinne says, 'the gap is a construct that comes from government'. Ngiyang Wayama is not interested in just being consulted by government on community priorities, but also wants to develop processes so that the community can set priorities, decide what data is needed, and develop and control research. 'If community aren't inputting into the original design, then it's still being done to us, not for us, not with us', Corinne explains.

‘Need to be across it all’: Aboriginal Affairs’ Central Coast and Hunter Region

In recognition of the need for regional and local approaches to government communication with Aboriginal audiences, the research team worked with Aboriginal Affairs NSW regional offices. The team at the Central Coast and Hunter region office were particularly enthusiastic about the research.

The regional offices explain that they ‘need to be across it all’. They reported that a key part of their role is knowing which organisations and individuals are known and respected in the wider Aboriginal community. This means they are well-placed to partner with local organisations to identify issues related to wellbeing and Closing the Gap, and to develop joint communications strategies. Another key part of their role is monitoring the way that negative discourses and media reporting are impacting on community. Aboriginal staff from the office noted that local news content does not reflect the needs or interests of the local community. Aboriginal staff reflected that they confirm information from the media with local mob and look for consistent congruence between what is being reported in a particular media source and what local mob are saying before trusting that media organisation. They reported that Facebook is often used for support groups and local communication in the region.

As with the consultation with Barang, the regional staff raised research design as an issue during the discussion. The regional office project staff noted their desire to be included in research design and to inform decisions over what research would be conducted.

‘Roadblocks for new Indigenous businesses coming through’: Awesome Black

Awesome Black is an Aboriginal media business that brings together over a dozen creative workers, aiming to create and attract work for First Nations creators. It functions as a creative media production business and as an agency. Founder Travis De Vries started the company after seeing how traditional creative grant schemes did not cater for emerging digital media, podcasting and information sharing. Models such as the Australia Council, Create New South Wales and the Community Broadcasting Association worked with traditional screen and broadcasting models in mind, when many young Aboriginal creators were developing content for social media, video and podcasting that were focused on information sharing and community building. Further, ABC and SBS, as well as the commercial media, regularly purchase creative content focused on Indigenous stories. Yet the production pipeline tends to be controlled by non-Indigenous production companies. Travis and the team develop programs and ideas and seek commercial sponsorship. While podcasting has a reputation for being a DIY space, large media conglomerates are now dominant, meaning it has become another space that can be difficult for minority creators to make an impact in. Awesome Black collectivises resources to increase impact and potential.

Awesome Black have partnered with Spotify Australia, who regularly contract them including as trainers for the First Nations training program, Sound Up. There is an Awesome Black audience membership program which is run internally, so all funding goes back into the business and to creators. Podcasts developed by the team include Trash Tiddas, Yarn Quest, Broriginals and Fear of a Blak Planet.

Travis argues that government could start to change their relationship with Aboriginal communities by directly contracting Aboriginal creators and media through Aboriginal agencies, rather than through media buying agencies. This ensures that funds go directly to Aboriginal media. Currently, forms of ‘gatekeeping’ ‘create roadblocks for new Indigenous businesses coming through.’ Initiatives like Awesome Black are designed to give government and others potential funders the ability to deal directly with Aboriginal agencies and creators in developing meaningful communication strategies.

‘A lot of people built a vegetable garden ... I built a radio station’: OneMob online radio station

Lachlan Skinner is a proud Gumbaynggirr man from Coffs Harbour. When he was 14 years old, he got involved in a program run by Koori Radio through a local radio station. There he developed a passion for radio and built his confidence. He then visited Brisbane Indigenous Media Association (BIMA) and decided that it was time for Coffs Harbour to have ‘our own space where we can share stories and everything else’. For ten years, Lachlan hosted a one-hour radio program, and consistently was asked for internet radio links and links to listen to the program later. This was what propelled him to start the online radio station, OneMob Radio. Internet radio created a cheaper option for broadcasting and did not require expensive radio spectrum. He sought support from local Aboriginal organisations in Coffs Harbour, and the Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan organisation agreed to auspice the station. Then the pandemic hit, and all the local Aboriginal services were forced online, creating a sense of isolation amongst the local community. OneMob radio stepped into the breach, bringing the community together and creating a space to provide ‘culturally safe information coming from reliable sources for our mob’. Lachlan started broadcasting in November 2020. As he puts it, ‘A lot of people built a vegetable garden or whatever, I built a radio station.’

The vast majority of the work is volunteer based, with around 15 volunteers including 10 volunteer announcers. The station now runs 24/7. Lachlan runs the breakfast show. There is a twice-weekly evening program called Tidda Talk aimed at Aboriginal women, and the Goori Guuyu show aimed at men’s storytelling. Other shows are being developed. The station motto is ‘celebrating our people’s stories, achievements and culture.’ Conscious that Aboriginal people are ‘very often pigeonholed’, the station aims to share ‘the real views of First Nations people’, and ‘come from a place of truth telling’.

OneMob Radio often hold ‘little outside broadcasts to get kids and young people on the microphone’. These experiences led to the creation of a two-day training workshop, including discussions of identity, cultural activities and building confidence in public speaking. Lachlan created a booklet on how to do radio, including information such as how to schedule, plan and produce. This was aimed specifically at young Aboriginal people and making it ‘a little bit more culturally safe for them.’ OneMob has developed their own app. Lachlan notes that internet access is ‘a bit of a barrier for Elders’, and some people have not heard of internet radio. They have led outreach at community events to assist people in downloading the app which has been successful.

So far, the NIAA has said they are unable to fund OneMob as they already fund projects for Bularri Murray Nyanggan. OneMob is investigating the process of becoming their own corporation. The radio station has just under 2,000 unique listens a month. They have been engaged in small government contracts, primarily through media buyers. They have also received funding for local revitalisation projects and have recorded Gumbaynggirr language sessions. OneMob Radio have also developed a podcast on cultural mindfulness. Currently they are housed by a local youth centre.

Lachlan says that ‘an FM station is an ideal goal’, and that they could increase their audience that way. But he explains that he wants it to be more than a radio station, ‘I want it to be something that’s looked at as [as] big as the health service.’ Lachlan hopes to take OneMob into a studio location which includes facilities for video and digital and offers training to locals. He sees the possibility of the station acting as a local hub and facilitating content creation across the region. Local news is another aim, as is providing a platform for local music. Lachlan sees that OneMob has built ‘trust within the community’, and now is the time for ‘getting a lot more money through the door’ for the station’s ‘own property and own bigger set up.’

Lachlan says that the Closing the Gap Agreement represents ‘a good place to start’ and a recognition that ‘most of the time we’re at the grassroots, we know what’s affecting our communities.’ As he explains, ‘We’re listening to the stories, we’re covering the stories, we’re seeing where things could be better.’

Employment hubs, community hubs, regional hubs: First Nations Media Australia

First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) is the peak organisation representing Aboriginal community-controlled media in Australia. Its key concerns are around how both funding and policy stagnation are restricting the development of a robust Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled media sector. FNMA is in regular consultation with members, and well-placed to propose meaningful and practicable solutions for creating a genuine partnership between Aboriginal media and government in NSW.

Funding, policy and infrastructure shortfalls limit the Aboriginal media sector

National operational funding to Aboriginal community-controlled media via NIAA has not been indexed for at least five years, which means that funding has decreased substantially in real terms. FNMA explains that as a result, there has been no capacity for funding new or developing organisations or for new content production. Providing broadcasting media with the bare minimum to keep on air means that they are unable to plan strategically and generate new funding. FNMA explained there has been a 'hollowing out of support staff'. While some mainstream community media fundraises through subscriptions, this is more difficult for Aboriginal media, especially in areas of greater poverty. The lack of opportunities also means that Aboriginal community-controlled media organisations lose skilled staff to communications roles in other industries, or to major players such as NITV and ABC. Moreover, the media and communications policy frameworks that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Australia have not changed substantially in the same era that digital convergence has substantially reshaped the media landscape.

Infrastructure problems are an issue at a broader level, with small Aboriginal radio stations operating with inferior internet connectivity. For example, uploading video and audio content during COVID-19 proved too slow for Wilcannia River Radio. At the moment, some shared content is still sent via the post to avoid this issue. Information on regional internet speeds is often held in confidence by telecommunications companies. This has implications for Aboriginal data sovereignty, as Aboriginal communities are not able to access data relevant to their needs.

Aboriginal media organisations act as employment hubs

Content production, strategic planning and upgrades and maintenance create job opportunities. In this sense, Aboriginal media organisations can be seen as 'employment hubs'. FNMA note that many staff at small local Aboriginal media organisations have government or corporate standard production skills, but little capacity to market those skills or to take up production service opportunities.

Aboriginal media organisations act as community hubs

Aboriginal media organisations also act as 'community hubs', facilitating consultation, digital translation and even emergency assistance for communities. Amidst the proposal for a Voice to Parliament and treaty and truth-telling initiatives in some states, Aboriginal media can play a significant role in this space. Aboriginal media organisations could be funded for special truth-telling initiatives. Aboriginal media already partner with local organisations to host consultations, such as Closing the Gap consultations in 2021. FNMA points to the success of those consultations as evidence of local Aboriginal media to engage populations. Aboriginal media organisations also act as 'digital translators', helping people understand how to access and navigate online services.

Aboriginal media organisations also play an expanded role in communities beyond the provision of information. For example, during the recent severe floods in northern NSW, the *Koori Mail* played a critical role in supporting communities as first responders, providing emergency assistance months before any financial or practical support was provided by government (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2022). In addition, FNMA is collecting and recording Aboriginal community histories through a major project to archive more than 40 years of Aboriginal radio material, funded until 2025.

A regional ‘hub and spoke’ model can expand the impact of Aboriginal media organisations

FNMA argues that short of providing support for 24-hour broadcasting in new communities, a ‘hub and spoke’ model offers an efficient way to build on existing resources. Some of the advantages of recent technology means that already existing radio stations can exist as hubs, with local freelancers contributing content from regions. Through this regional ‘hub and spoke model’, satellite studios in neighbouring towns feed into the central station which is then broadcast across the region. For example, in the Central West, local freelancers or correspondents could host regular shows that are broadcast through the existing radio stations, 2Cuz or Wilcannia River Radio. However, currently this form of content creation is not possible for either radio station due to insufficient funding for freelancers or correspondents.

Local Aboriginal media organisations resonate with community audiences

As members of the community, local Aboriginal media organisations are accountable to and trusted by community. They are embedded in local community life and approach issues from lived experience. This means that the ‘way information is received when it’s from a trusted voice’ is ‘significantly different’. This allows creators to ‘educate in a way that is authentic.’ Yet this means government needs to ‘let go of the reins a little bit.’ Rather than centralised messaging, there can be agreement on general themes that can be locally adapted, allowing organisations ‘to produce that content in a way that is going to resonate with its own audience.’ This can often mean more extended content, rather than a short notice. Strategies like a panel of respected local leaders allowing for a place-based dialogue, for example, require flexibility from government and funding bodies, but can be ‘really effective.’ It can draw on the knowledge of local leaders who are ‘well-placed to identify issues and respond to them.’ This was demonstrated through COVID-19 messaging which was adapted for local circumstances (Stuchbery et al., 2022).

Aboriginal media organisations promote cultural pride and self-determination

More broadly, FNMA argues that the ‘situatedness’ of Aboriginal media allows it to facilitate cultural pride and diversity. Facilitating the inclusion of Aboriginal voices into larger public discussions is also crucial. For example, the work of Koori Radio in organising the Yabun Festival on 26 January has been a direct way to include Aboriginal voices in discussions about this date and to allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to be celebrated on that day. This demonstrates how Aboriginal media works to challenge and reduce racism. Aboriginal media, then, can combine both practical, locally situated reach with a less tangible but equally important ability to shift local and national conversations in ways that promote Aboriginal self-determination.

‘Start making opportunities directly’: Aboriginal content-creators and journalists in mainstream spaces

We conducted ten interviews with Aboriginal journalists, editors and managers working across mainstream spaces, including public broadcasters and commercial media. All of these interviewees were based in NSW. As the Aboriginal community-controlled media sector in NSW is small, Aboriginal journalists form an important part of the ‘Indigenous news network’ from which bodies seeking to communicate with Aboriginal audiences can learn and cooperate (Nolan et al., 2020).

Building Aboriginal audience trust in media

Interviewee #4 noted that ‘Aboriginal people can be so wary’ of media and slow processes of trust-building are necessary. Interviewees discussed the connection between mistrust of mainstream media, misinformation and the advantages of Aboriginal media. Interviewee #1 commented that for Aboriginal audiences, ‘there is a lot of mistrust’ of mainstream media and there are also ‘a lot of people getting their news from Facebook.’ This was borne out by the

survey results discussed above. Interviewee #2 noted that 'every Aboriginal community has a Facebook page', and 'it's a beautiful thing to see people in media space and sharing and deepening a sense of who they are and what their culture is through those platforms.' This space of connection could be a space for sharing community-led messaging linked to Closing the Gap goals.

However, Interviewee #1 explained, 'I've seen family members go down these very disturbing rabbit holes of misinformation' on social media platforms. Interviewee #1 suggested that there is a direct connection between mistrust of mainstream media and reliance on social media misinformation. They commented that, 'once that trust [in mainstream media] is broken, it's so difficult to get back', creating reliance on alternative sources. Without strong local networks of information-sharing, misinformation can gain a hold. They suggested that resourcing local Aboriginal media could rebuild trust in trustworthy media assist in combating this.

Interviewee #2 noted that 'social media is very unfiltered'. This both creates the opportunity to get messages out immediately and make an impact, but may also sometimes clash with 'our approach to collective responsibility' (Interviewee #4). These interviewees argued that this is where a community-led approach to developing media can promote social media engagement that aligns with cultural priorities and builds community.

Several interviewees commented that increasing engagement with media means that Aboriginal organisations and individuals are better equipped with critical media literacy, built through experience and exposure. Also, there is clear evidence of deliberate media strategies utilised by Aboriginal communities, groups and individuals. It is this consciousness over appropriate media representation and connection with community that enables Aboriginal media makers to communicate effectively with Aboriginal audiences. Such strengths are critical in developing the Joint Communications Strategy for Closing the Gap.

Aboriginal media provides leadership, training and sustainability

Aboriginal media was considered 'the bedrock of our media' (interviewee #4), with many respondents noting the work of Aboriginal media in response to the pandemic; 'It's like a community noticeboard' and it 'persists despite the fact it gets little money' (interviewee #4). Interviewee #6 noted how the work of Aboriginal media influenced their own reporting, and how they worked to get stories from Aboriginal media 'out to a national audience'. Interviewees resoundingly supported increased resourcing for already existing small broadcasters, noting they are 'really challenged by funding' and 'so focused on keeping the doors open and stories coming out on air', hampering the ability to grow the organisation, identify funding opportunities and train new talent (Interviewee #5).

Many saw expanding support for staffing, resourcing and technology as a great opportunity for young people. Interviewee #4 argued Aboriginal media was essential to creating a sense of possibility amongst youth—'if you have a good healthy community media, you have a place for people to experiment, to speak up, to get their skills up, to think about what's possible.' Media work was seen as a great outlet and educational tool for 'community and our young people who might have been disengaged in the education system or may have been failed by the education system with reading and writing and the likes' (Interviewee #6). Radio provides a space for diverse voices without requiring highly formalised literacy skills. Interviewee #1 noted how there are 'people that are just kind of giving it a red hot go with the equipment they have got a hold of and that young Aboriginal people are making content for social media and podcasting without training or access to professional studios. Interviewee #2 noted that there is an opportunity 'to grab onto the very strong uptake of digital media and self-publishing' to develop digital literacy programs and media career pathways. Interviewee #4 argued that local broadcasters should be 'places where young people' who are experimenting with these platforms 'can go and submit ideas and get some experience'. Government can assist to 'build pathways between school and university for the Indigenous media makers' through tools such as scholarships, and internships at Aboriginal media organisations (Interviewee #5).

Several interviewees spoke of their experience working in community radio prior to joining major media organisations, noting its crucial role as incubator of talent. Others noted how major media personalities, such as Brooke Boney and Tony Armstrong, started their media careers at NITV. Others still were concerned that those with leadership capacity were inevitably leaving

Indigenous media, but saw this as inevitable while wages stayed at award rates, if paid at all. Interviewee #9 commented, 'you can't keep running things on the smell of an oily rag ... you've got to have some kind of succession planning.' The sector 'hasn't been empowered, it's not improving, we're still trying to get basic funding to keep stations on air' (Interviewee #9).

Aboriginal media makers are calling for digital convergence

Interviewees reflected on the need for Aboriginal media to digitise and create content that was accessible across multiple digital platforms in the 'fast evolving digital landscape' (Interviewee #7). A first step is creating processes to share existing content, but as Interviewee #8 noted, this requires particular expertise:

If you're a community radio broadcaster, you tell a good story, you have a good interview, you broadcast on your radio station, what then is happening with that? And it's also having the staff who have the experience ... it's no longer just making a story. There's this whole communication, promotional, marketing, understanding of the experience that's needed at these places. It's digital storytelling. It goes beyond just interviewing someone and getting the story out. There's a whole like, how is this going to be marketed? How is it going to be promoted?

Thus, supporting digital convergence in Aboriginal media contexts requires access to multiple platforms as well as specialised training in digital marketing.

Aboriginal media organisations can play a key role in improving government messaging

Interviewees noted a range of limitations of government communications with Aboriginal peoples and suggested practical strategies to address these.

First, interviewees noted that the lack of a trauma-informed, whole of government approach and lack of trusted relationships limits the efficacy of government communications with Aboriginal audiences. Interviewee #8 commented on the crowded landscape of health and other campaigns targeted at Aboriginal people, with messages coming from multiple government agencies at the same time. A whole-of-government approach to major campaigns that are led by Indigenous media was touted as a suggestion to improve the 'noise'. Crucially, several interviewees explained that for many Aboriginal communities and individuals in leadership roles, there is 'lots of pressure on their time and they're dealing with really complex traumatic issues' (Interviewee #4), this means that 'you have to respect that and wait your turn'. Long processes of relationship-building are necessary to ensure trust can be built.

Secondly, interviewees suggested that by working with and supporting Aboriginal media organisations, government communications would more effectively reach regional Aboriginal audiences. Interviewees proposed that because the small broadcasters and print organisations have an existing base, they represent a place to possibly expand and create media 'hubs' that can facilitate broadcasting and media content across regions. This would require government support to expand radio broadcasting licenses, digital footprints, major facility upgrades and funding for new staff. If these organisations were able to expand, similarly the reach of government into these regions could expand, with 'all the benefits that that can bring to government across all range of things that state governments look after, be it education, health, the criminal justice system, policing' (Interviewee #9). This could be a cost-saving for communication spending over time, as Aboriginal media organisations are a very cost-effective model.

Thirdly, interviewees noted that Aboriginal-led messaging is important in terms of both content and production, to enable government information to reach Aboriginal audiences. Many noted the shift towards 'Indigenous-led messaging' (Interviewee #3) and noted the importance of 'engaging First Nations media in ways where they have control over the message and the production' and are invested in making sure the message gets through (Interviewee #5). When messages come, 'from locals to locals', it has been particularly successful (Interviewee #5).

Finally, interviewees identified many opportunities for government to collaborate better with Aboriginal media organisations to better reach Aboriginal audiences and achieve outcomes. For instance, government can 'start making opportunities directly for Aboriginal media to deliver the things that they want delivered rather than going through media buyers' (Interviewee #7).

Several interviewees noted that mainstream media buyers have little connection with the Aboriginal populations they are trying to reach. Nevertheless, the buyers, agencies and producers of the 'non-Indigenous production pipeline' profit from Aboriginal media talent because they hold the connections with government and media (Interviewee #7).

Another suggestion was for government to provide support for small Aboriginal broadcasters to partner with major media organisations such as ABC and SBS/NITV so as to facilitate training and bring local content to state and national audiences. Several interviewees also raised the possibility of more frequent government commissions of mainstream media linked to Closing the Gap goals such as spotlighting language renewal work in NSW. They noted that currently there is a lack of connection between the major Aboriginal news and media organisations in NSW, NITV, and the NSW Government.

Many interviewees expressed their desire to be included in future discussions with government. They proposed a roundtable discussion between government, Aboriginal media organisations and Aboriginal journalists, editors and managers in mainstream media to develop a place to 'flush out ideas' (Interviewee #9).

Implications

This research demonstrates multiple ways that government and Aboriginal community-controlled media and organisations can collaborate. This section draws out some conclusions, implications and ideas emerging from the research.

Aboriginal media organisations are multipurpose service providers that facilitate self-determination and improve Aboriginal wellbeing in NSW

Aboriginal media organisations have multiple functions. They function as a communications and creative service. In some cases, they also provide essential services, sometimes filling large gaps in service provision, as was the case with the *Koori Mail*'s coordination of the emergency response after the 2022 floods in Lismore. Aboriginal media acts as a language and cultural preservation tool. Aboriginal media organisations can provide unique employment and training opportunities that are transferable across industries. Aboriginal media organisations provide a deeper, more considered reflection of Aboriginal political and social issues, and report sensitively. Aboriginal community controlled media organisations are deeply embedded in and accountable to the communities they serve.

Aboriginal media organisations can support Closing the Gap outcomes through:

- promoting health, childcare and other services, and partnering in government communications campaigns and strategies
- promoting digital inclusion and digital literacy
- communicating in culturally appropriate ways
- challenging racism through Aboriginal-led storytelling
- promoting wellbeing through fostering pride, connection and community
- creating employment opportunities across media, digital and communications
- supporting Aboriginal languages through language programming and recording
- preserving culture and history through archival and digitisation and
- facilitating and promoting events and consultations.

Aboriginal media needs a 'dedicated, reliable and stable' funding model

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap notes the need for a 'dedicated, reliable and stable' funding model for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (clause 51). Aboriginal community-controlled radio stations exist on the bare minimum of staff and lack the resourcing and funds to create digital media content or to create sufficient opportunities for young Aboriginal creatives and journalists. This also prevents the development of more involved investigative or creative work, with the Aboriginal radio stations having to largely rely on talk, music and content shared by other creators. Staffing and resourcing issues often prevent the cost-effective sharing of content between media organisations. If Aboriginal media organisations are to truly be the joint communication partners of the National Agreement, their funding and resourcing must reflect the task. Ultimately, this relies on state and national government support. The NSW Government and the NIAA could consider avenues for stable, ongoing funding increases and pursue this task with the Australian Government. Notably, care must be taken to ensure that the freedom of Aboriginal media organisations to work as independent media organisations is not impacted by government funding.

A flexible approach is needed when working with Aboriginal media in NSW

The Aboriginal community-controlled media sector in NSW is small, so a flexible approach to understanding 'community-controlled' is needed here. This is to account for the fact that the expansion of Aboriginal community-controlled media in NSW has been neglected and/or hindered by existing policy and legislative frameworks, funding arrangements, and broader changes in the media. Such a flexible approach should encompass working with emerging Aboriginal businesses in NSW, the direct contracting of Aboriginal creators, consultation with Aboriginal media professionals working in mainstream media, and working in partnership with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations such as Aboriginal Medical Services and Aboriginal creators to develop communications campaigns.

Government can directly engage Aboriginal media

Currently NSW Government policy stipulates that 7.5% of budget must be spent on multicultural or Aboriginal audiences. However, many government departments and agencies are also required to purchase time and space for their information and advertising campaigns via media buyers. These agencies take a cut of funds, reducing the amount that directly goes to Aboriginal media organisations. By amending existing policies, the NSW Government could work more directly with Aboriginal media organisations in a collaborative fashion and increase the funds going to Aboriginal media organisations without dramatically increasing spend.

In the spirit of the National Agreement, Aboriginal media makers and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations can be given control over communications production

The experience of COVID-19 messaging shows that Aboriginal media makers and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are best placed to understand the needs of their communities and develop localised communications strategies. Evidence from Aboriginal organisations suggests that generic campaigning controlled and developed by government is less effective than more specific strategies, such as localised discussions with respected Aboriginal experts and Elders.

Aboriginal media organisations need intensive support to promote digitisation

Aboriginal community-controlled media organisations were born during the era of print and broadcasting, and experienced funding and policy neglect while media has rapidly changed. Aboriginal audiences expect digital convergence, where content available live on radio or television, or in a print newspaper, is also available online and in a timely fashion. They expect that media sources will have a presence across social media platforms to share and promote their work, and their own apps. NITV's success with social media demonstrates the possibilities of this approach, as does the ability of OneMob Radio to recruit users to their online and app-based radio station. However, without additional staffing, training, and the ability to share content between media organisations, Aboriginal media has been left behind. In addition to the resourcing and funding issues, internet speeds and access may require attention in some regional areas to facilitate content creation and sharing. That would necessitate, in partnership with telecommunications providers, investment in equipment and adequate internet speeds in regional areas that can facilitate uploading of large audio and video content.

New media initiatives do not need to start from scratch

NSW has the largest employer of Aboriginal media workers in the country (NITV), the nation's only national Aboriginal newspaper, the *Koori Mail* (which also boasts an exceptional reputation), and a handful of broadcasters. All of these can be used as bases for further expansion. At the same time, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and Aboriginal businesses have been filling the gap in Aboriginal-led communications in lieu of an expansive community-controlled media sector. These organisations and businesses, across a variety of fields, can lead and create communications campaigns in partnership with Aboriginal creators. The existing print and radio stations, if properly resourced, could also act as a 'hub' for regional 'spokes' of smaller content creators. Support for creation of regional 'spokes' could generate more local content and expand the reach of campaigns. Regional content could also be shared

with Koori Radio, giving Aboriginal people based in the city from other areas of NSW a connection with home and Country.

The framing of Closing the Gap could be an obstacle

The narrow framing of Closing the Gap and the focus on statistical change may appeal to governments looking to measure, report and evaluate policy outcomes. Yet it potentially undermines the desire expressed in the new National Agreement to focus on Aboriginal-led solutions and to support self-determination. Aboriginal communities and media organisations are often sceptical or openly critical of the Closing the Gap framing, and the majority have instead adopted various 'strengths-based' methods in their day-to-day practice. A flexible, partnership approach to communications campaigns can allow openness to types of messaging that move past 'gap talk'.

Trust patterns and consumption patterns are not the same when it comes to Aboriginal media

Aboriginal audiences in NSW are highly likely to consume a variety of mainstream media, but less likely to trust it than Aboriginal media, even if they access Aboriginal media less often. Trust, however, is likely to be the crucial component for effective information sharing.

Aboriginal audiences in NSW are digitally able and diverse

Aboriginal audiences are predominantly younger than mainstream audiences. Survey results also suggest that audiences may be engaged in language renewal and reclamation. The respondents largely trusted Aboriginal media. Respondents reported accessing both universally targeted media and communications and also relying heavily on locally trusted sources and networks in their communities. While the survey sample was small, these results are consistent with existing knowledge and with the qualitative findings. It is important to note that more remote areas have serious access barriers that require whole of government and industry collaboration.

Collaboration is needed to start collecting data for Target 17

Target 17 of Closing the Gap on equitable digital inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by 2026 is currently difficult to measure. While there are broad measurements of digital inclusion available, they are based on limited data, often exclude separate figures for Aboriginal audiences, and often exclude remote and regional areas. Current national Aboriginal digital inclusion research is primarily focused on remote areas, with one NSW case study on Wilcannia (Featherstone et al., 2022). Apart from issues of access, affordability and digital ability, to achieve Target 17 measurement of numbers of Aboriginal staff working in media organisations and measures to assess the quality of Aboriginal representation in media are also required. A national strategy for developing this data is needed. The recent report by the Lowitja Institute (2022) offers some suggestions.

Government urgently needs to consult with on-the-ground specialists

Aboriginal media makers, journalists and organisations interviewed in this research expressed their desire to be directly involved with government in developing the Joint Communications Strategy for Closing the Gap. There are benefits to a roundtable approach that brings together all key Aboriginal community-controlled media organisations; Aboriginal journalists, editors and managers in NITV and mainstream media; Aboriginal communications businesses; regional alliances and peak bodies; and communications leads from departments and agencies across the public service. This could be a launching pad for implementing the Joint Communications Strategy and developing real partnerships.

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