



 Indigenous
Governance
Awards 2024



Finalist Site Locations



CATEGORY ONE

Learning on Country Program

Communities across the Top End, Northern Territory

Maningrida, Galiwin'ku, Yirrkala, Laynhapuy Homelands, Ramingining, Milingimbi, Gapuwiyak, Umbakumba, Angurugu, Ngukurr, Numbulwar, Borroloola, Gunbalanya, Beswick and Barunga.

Loddon Mallee Aboriginal Reference Group

The Loddon Mallee region, Victoria

North Bendigo, Echuca, Kerang, Mildura, Robinvale and Swan Hill.

Wintjiri Wiru Working Group

Communities located within the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Northern Territory

Mutitjulu Community and Kalutkatjara Community.

CATEGORY TWO

Melythina Tiakana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation

Gladstone, Tasmania

Mibbinbah Spirit Healing

Warwick, Queensland

Voice of Hope Aboriginal Corporation

Thornlie, Western Australia

CATEGORY THREE

Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation

Djarindjin Community, Dampier Peninsula, Western Australia

Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation

Communities across the Tanami Desert region

Northern Territory – Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Nyirpi, Willowra, Yuelamu and Tanami Downs.

Western Australia – Balgo, Billiluna and Kundat Djaru Ringer Soak.

Wajarri Yamaji Aboriginal Corporation

Land groups across the Murchison and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia

Burringurrah/Milly Milly, Minangu, Byro and Ngoonooru

About the Indigenous Governance Awards

For millennia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have had governance systems in place. Unique ways of self-governing, driven by culture and community priorities.

The Indigenous Governance Awards share and promote success from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations around Australia. There are three categories of Award for outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led organisations:

CATEGORY ONE

Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led non-incorporated initiatives or projects

CATEGORY TWO

Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led small to medium incorporated organisations (*under \$1 million annual revenue*)

CATEGORY THREE

Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led large, incorporated organisations (*\$1 million and over annual revenue*)

The awards are held every two years and are proudly presented in partnership by Reconciliation Australia, the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute and the BHP Foundation.

Message from Reconciliation Australia

I am inspired by the stories of determination, generosity, ingenuity and success embodied by the entrants to the Indigenous Governance Awards 2024.

This is the first year since 2018 that we were able to conduct in-person site visits with the award finalists, and wherever we went, we were warmly welcomed and were privileged to witness the sheer strength of First Nations peoples' determination to build better lives for their families and communities.

The finalists in the Indigenous Governance Awards 2024 are diverse in size, geographic location and purpose, but what they have in common is their ability to develop forms of governance in which culture, community and self-determination are the foundation.

Effective Indigenous governance is a prerequisite for success, ensuring First Nations peoples' aspirations guide policies and actions that are culturally relevant. These aspirations are also essential to advancing reconciliation.

A truly reconciled Australia cannot exist without Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations self-determining and making decisions for themselves, by themselves.

We have been living, succeeding, innovating and thriving on these Lands for more than 60,000 years – we know what works.

In the face of enormous challenges, they are getting on with the job of building stronger communities and a better country.

Despite the rejection by the Australian electorate of a national Voice, these organisations and the communities they serve are the strong First Nations voices being raised in communities across this continent demanding a decisive say in their futures.

There are many lessons in the development of strong local community governance for all Australians. These extraordinary organisations provide examples, to rural and remote towns and communities, of what is possible when effective decision-making and leadership is place-based. They are models for driving economic development in the bush and in the city.

Reconciliation Australia is proud to partner on the Indigenous Governance Program with the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, the BHP Foundation, and the independent judging panels.

Each and every finalist featured in this booklet gives us great confidence in the future. It is our job to ensure that their voices are heard loudly across Australia.

Karen Mundine
Chief Executive Officer, Reconciliation Australia



Karen Mundine, CEO, Reconciliation Australia. Photo: Joseph Mayers

Message from the BHP Foundation

The Indigenous Governance Awards 2024 finalists demonstrate the strength of Indigenous leadership and governance in building a better future for communities and the nation. Their achievements and resilience are celebrated as they join a distinguished alumni of organisations working towards positive outcomes.

It's our privilege to partner with Reconciliation Australia and the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute to promote self-determination and advance reconciliation by recognising, supporting and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and self-determination.

The BHP Foundation partners with organisations to support Indigenous rights, including self-determination, in a variety of ways and in locations such as Australia, Canada and parts of South America. Here in Australia,

our work with partner organisations focuses on shifting power to Indigenous Peoples through strengthened governance, partnerships, and culture-centred education.

The Indigenous Governance Awards are one example of this, and we are grateful for Reconciliation Australia and the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute's leadership to grow the awards over many years. They are the first of their kind to recognise best practice and provide a platform for Indigenous groups to share, learn, and build cross-sector partnerships. We see the importance of collaboration, now more than ever.

Please join me in celebrating the awards and congratulating this year's exceptional finalists.

Kristen Ray
CEO, BHP Foundation



Kristen Ray, CEO, BHP Foundation. Photo: Supplied

'Finalists demonstrate the strength of Indigenous leadership and governance in building a better future for communities and the nation.'

Message from the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute

The Australian Indigenous Governance Institute (AIGI) is honoured to deliver another Indigenous Governance Awards round as part of our long-standing partnership with Reconciliation Australia and the BHP Foundation. The awards shine a spotlight on the very best of what is happening in Indigenous governance around the nation and the 2024 finalists are no exception. As the role of a director continues to grow in complexity, this year's finalists rise to the challenge to reimagine effective Indigenous governance and innovate in a way that sets an example we can all learn from.

AIGI is a national, non-government, not-for-profit organisation and over the past 12 years we have contributed to research, built resources, and delivered professional development with First Nations communities both locally and internationally. In our pursuit to share stories of success and best practice we can say with absolute confidence

that effective and culturally legitimate governance is the fundamental building block for real change.

This year's finalists are inspiring, and their effectiveness reaffirms that communities thrive when those impacted by decisions are at the centre of governance design. These groups are determining and strengthening sustainable systems of governance that will set them up for generational success. We could not be prouder to know them, learn from them and tell their stories as part of AIGI's forthcoming 2024 Stories of Success publication.

At AIGI, we look forward with positivity and conviction, in solidarity with First Nations communities to a just and equitable Australia that all citizens can be proud of.

Jessica Bulger
CEO, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute



Jessica Bulger, CEO, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute. Photo: Supplied

'This year's finalists rise to the challenge to reimagine effective Indigenous governance and innovate in a way that sets an example we can all learn from.'

Messages from the Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel

The Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel plays a crucial role in fairly assessing all applications against the five selection criteria: self-determination, effectiveness, cultural legitimacy, innovation and sustainability. Composed of diverse leaders from health, academia, economic development, business, sport and governance, the judging panel brings a wealth of experience and perspectives.

For this year's awards, the judging panel worked in three teams, each allocated to one of the categories, to enable a sharper focus across each category's finalists. Each panel was overseen by a Chair, appointed for their leadership and governance experience. Chairs facilitate engagement throughout the judging process, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of each finalist organisation.

CATEGORY ONE

Indigenous-led non-incorporated initiatives or projects

JUDGING PANEL:

Romlie Mokak, Sarah Brown and Bhiame Williamson

It has been a great honour to chair the judging panel in this category for the Indigenous Governance Awards 2024.

Reading through applications was uplifting and enlightening, and choosing just three finalists was a real challenge.

The vision, professionalism and energy the panel observed during the finalists' site visits was simply inspirational. At the heart of what we saw was the powerful commitment to ensuring culture is at the core of governance processes.

An ongoing challenge to First Nations organisations and networks in this category is to develop forms of governance designed around the aspirations, priorities and needs of communities, with requirements of government and partners. This interplay means balancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous approaches.

All finalists in Category One are actively engaged with their communities and other parties, encouraging community participation, listening to and acting on feedback and pursuing long-term goals that align with their communities' aspirations.

Loddon Mallee Aboriginal Reference Group (LMARG) proves the point that while we may be strong individually, when governance structures are created to bring organisations together to collaborate and advocate as one voice, we are stronger still. LMARG's successes, including improving dental and maternal health for their communities, are proof of the impact of its collective approach.

Wintjiri Wiru Working Group demonstrates the critical importance of effective governance in collaborative arrangements between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous organisations. In the Working Group's case, these arrangements have put Anangu in the driver's seat to determine how Tjukurpa is shared. They have broken new ground in how their stories are delivered, maintaining control and confidence, underpinned by strong agreement-making with their commercial partner.

The Learning on Country Program is an inspirational example of Aboriginal people working with others, including ranger groups and schools, within the 'both ways' philosophy, innovating through merging Culture and curriculum, under the authority of the steering committee.

Incorporating strong governance and the power of local community decision-making into what is taught and how has led to strong cultural, educational and training outcomes. This was more than evidenced in the younger leaders who are program graduates.

In all site visits, judges witnessed the power of self-determination through community-based governance along with the pride and joy of community members as a result of the initiatives' successes.

Romlie Mokak – Category One Judging Panel Chair

CATEGORY TWO

Indigenous-led small to medium incorporated organisations (under \$1 million annual revenue)

JUDGING PANEL:

Shirley McPherson, Val Price-Beck and Jim Davis

Once again, the Indigenous Governance Awards are casting a spotlight on the extraordinary work being done by First Nations organisations across Australia. The diverse work undertaken by the finalists demonstrates that the solutions to the challenges confronting our people are within ourselves. These awards celebrate Indigenous self-determination through innovative governance.

The judges' challenge is always to settle on just one winner amongst organisations working tirelessly to address the needs of communities and provide a voice and vehicle for self-determination.

Melythina Tiakana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation (MTWAC), established in 2008 by a group of Elders in northeast Tasmania, aims to reclaim their rightful place as the original People of Tasmania.

MTWAC has effectively combined traditional governance with a western model. A Circle of Elders provides oversight and cultural advice to a board of nine directors, informed by a strategic plan, based on the principle of "acknowledging that our Country is sacred, our Culture is precious, and we are unique people".

Operating since 2022, Voice of Hope (VoH) assists Aboriginal women in Western Australia adjust back into community life after time spent in prison. Cultural programs help women physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually heal and return to family. It also delivers educational, vocational and networking programs and assists with housing and utilities on release.

Guided by a community-first philosophy, VoH is run mainly by Aboriginal women volunteers with lived experience. Evaluation is achieved via a series of comprehensive KPIs.

Formed in 2007, Mibbinbah Spirit Healing is a registered charity that supports First Nations people to heal, grow and resume their roles as the nurturers, teachers, and leaders in their communities. It works with individual communities in remote, rural and urban settings and has also worked extensively in prisons in WA, QLD, NSW and VIC.

Working mainly on a project-by-project basis, Mibbinbah is guided by its *Proper Way* philosophy which ensures that projects are culturally appropriate, considerate of local traditions and safe for participants. *Proper Way* guides the delivery and co-designs themes that align with each community's needs and values.

The three finalists, although vastly different in their governance structures, location and interests, all exemplify the remarkable capacity for First Nations people to find innovative solutions to the challenges facing their communities.

Shirley McPherson – Category Two Judging Panel Chair

CATEGORY THREE

Large Indigenous-led incorporated organisations (\$1 million and over annual revenue)

JUDGING PANEL:

Belinda Duarte, Val Price-Beck and Kenny Bedford

The Indigenous Governance Awards remind us that good governance is at the heart of self-determination, and is crucial to building and sustaining strong, healthy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The finalists in this category exemplify how effective Indigenous governance combines old ways, based in culture and kinship, with the requirements of mainstream systems. They provide creative, innovative and clear models that work for their communities. The three organisations are, in their own distinctive ways, working to create skilled, effective communities that are grounded in culture and building social outcomes. Their governance structures are central to self-determination practices and community wellness.

Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation shows what is possible when the vision, goals and foundational governance arrangements are in place. Djarindjin's emphatic expression of self-determination and the economic successes it has achieved are a testament to its governance.

Djarindjin has won widespread respect and trust within its own community, and more broadly, for its strong commitment to self-determination for Bardi and Jawi peoples.

Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation (GMAAAC) was established in partnership with the Central Land Council to manage and distribute payments provided to nine Tanami communities for the operation of The Granites gold mine on their Country.

Its unique two-tier governance structure comprises committees from each of the communities it serves, which then elect directors to an 18-member board.

A message that resonated with the judges during the GMAAAC site visit was 'Warlpiri will be here forever'. They have a governance structure which ensures community confidence that their children's children's children will govern, guide and care for Country for generations to come.

Wajarri Yamaji Aboriginal Corporation (WYAC) was established in May 2013 for the Wajarri Yamaji people who have traditional rights in the Murchison and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia. WYAC works for Wajarri Yamaji people by investing in programs, facilitating community and pursuing opportunity. WYAC has a robust commitment to gender equity, with a majority female workforce and policies and protocols to ensure that women remain decisive.

Though living far from city-based services and facing many challenges, the finalists in Category Three have created innovative governance and initiatives which will ensure that their children's children's children will be self-determining far into the future.

Belinda Duarte – Category Three Judging Panel Chair



Jonah Ryan worked to combine culture and curriculum as both a student and ranger participant in the Learning on Country Program. Now, he's helping to shape the future of the program as an LoC Coordinator. Photo: Tom Hoy/Wirrim Media

Learning on Country Program

Category 1



Danny Dangadanga Garrawurra, Learning on Country Program Steering Committee Co-Chair, presents the LoC *Return to Homelands Engagement Program* to Steering Committee members, rangers, teachers and program partners. Photo: Tom Hoy/Wirrim Media

'Both ways' learning

The Learning on Country (LoC) program supports sustainable collaboration between Aboriginal rangers and schools across 17 remote Top End communities.

The program, established in 2013, aims to integrate 'both ways' learning into secondary school curriculum. Students have the opportunity to learn from knowledgeable senior Traditional Owners, Aboriginal rangers, schoolteachers and VET trainers, both in the classroom and on Country.

This integration of culture and curriculum supports students to achieve training and educational qualifications and employment outcomes, while also supporting the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and culture.

'The significance is not just that someone's got a job, but the significance is that they are walking in both worlds, and, in a sense, the imagination of their ancestors is manifested in who they are. They are strong cultural leaders.'
Romlie Mokak, Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel, Chair, Category One

Values-led governance

The success of the LoC Program relies on Indigenous governance and community involvement. It operates through two levels of governance: local community committees and an overarching steering committee.

Local committees are comprised of Traditional Owners, cultural advisors, school representatives and Indigenous ranger groups. They are responsible for the direction of the program in their community and select an Indigenous chairperson to participate in the steering committee, which provides cultural and strategic guidance to the entire program.

The program's ten Indigenous values and indicators of success guide decision-making and ensure cultural legitimacy. Key values include strong language, culture, identity and wellbeing for students, intergenerational knowledge transmission and relationships, two-way education, and being on Country.

'Because of that connection of songlines and clans and relations, it's important to see how the other communities are doing, from sunrise we say and from sunset.'
Cindy Jinmarabynana (Maningrida), Learning on Country, Steering Committee

The next generation of leaders

The Learning on Country program positions young Aboriginal students as the next generation of local rangers and community leaders. Through hands-on experiences and skill-building activities, students gain essential employment and leadership skills while learning to uphold traditional Indigenous land management practices.

Recently, young people have been involved in steering committee meetings, deepening their understanding of governance practices and inspiring them to take on leadership roles within boards and committees. This engagement reflects a commitment to supporting the next generation of leaders and ensuring that Indigenous voices shape the future of their communities.

'When I started, I was like 'I love Learning on Country,' and now I'm an LoC Coordinator. I was a ranger for 5 ½ years and moving to LoC makes me think like 'Oh I know so much.' Now I get to share my stories and my skills with the next ones.'
Jonah Ryan, Learning on Country Coordinator, former ranger and student.



LMARG have successfully advocated for better legislation in the region to address Aboriginal children's access to appropriate dental health care. Photo: Ashlee Jensen/Wirrim Media

Loddon Mallee Aboriginal Reference Group

Category 1



Dallas Widdicombe, Loddon Mallee Aboriginal Reference Group Chair. Photo: Ashlee Jensen/Wirrim Media

Health and wellbeing through a cultural lens

Loddon Mallee Aboriginal Reference Group (LMARG) embodies self-determination in action for the Aboriginal people of the Loddon Mallee region of northwest Victoria.

In 1997, local Aboriginal leaders saw a need for a united voice to advocate for improved health and wellness outcomes on behalf of Aboriginal people and communities.

Its members are four Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) run by Aboriginal boards of management, each elected by the local community.

Guided by cultural working practices based on collaboration, and grounded in collective action and decision making, LMARG promotes the importance of the cultural determinants of health and wellbeing and the protective role that culture plays in the lives of Aboriginal people.

'It was a real strong sense of, "how do we come together collectively as Aboriginal organisations and strengthen each other, and stop being played off by the department individually.'"
Leanne Fary, Senior Aboriginal Advisor and Advocate

Wrap-around care for families

At the heart of LMARG's mission is a commitment to wrap-around care for families. Through initiatives like Bush Kinder, cultural camps, and healing centres, LMARG creates safe spaces for connection to culture – especially for young people in out-of-home care and members of the Stolen Generations.

These programs nurture a sense of belonging and identity, helping individuals reconnect with their culture, community and Country.

'A big part of what ACCOs do is self-determination and listen to what their community want and what their needs are.'
Jaydene Burzacott, Practice Manager, Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC)

Growing success

LMARG's impact is growing across the region, with success stories that impact health initiatives across the state.

One significant achievement has been permitting Aboriginal Health Workers to apply fluoride varnish to young children, leading to improved dental health and reduced hospital visits.

LMARG has also played a crucial role in advocating for culturally safe maternal and child health services, resulting in the establishment of the Aboriginal Maternal Child Health Program across Victoria.

Looking ahead, LMARG aims to elevate the voices of young people through the re-establishment of a LMARG Youth Council, demonstrating their commitment to future generations.

'Individually, they're all really influential and together, they're a real political force in this region and also in the state of Victoria.'
Bhiamie Williamson, Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel, Category One



Wintjiri Wiru Working Group

Category 1



L to R: Ruby James and Rene Kulitja. Senior Anangu leaders, Wintjiri Wiru Working Group members and representatives of the Kaltukatjara and Mutitjulu Community respectively. Photo: Ashlee Jensen/Wirrim Media

Self-determination in cultural tourism

Wintjiri Wiru Working Group was established in 2020 to provide cultural authority and oversight to Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia as they developed the *Wintjiri Wiru* sound, light and drone show sharing Tjukurpa (the foundations of Anangu culture) with visitors to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

The Working Group composition equally reflects Anangu Traditional Owners from both Mutitjulu and Kaltukatjara who are the custodians of the chapter of the Mala Story told in *Wintjiri Wiru*. This unique structure aligns culturally to part of the Mala Story songline shared through the show.

'We are really proud of Wintjiri Wiru, it is a big thing, it is a good thing for us here in the centre, at Uluru, and of course the world to see and the world to come visit us.'

Rene Kulitja, Wintjiri Wiru Working Group member, Senior Anangu leader, Mutitjulu Community

Benefit sharing and community support

Wintjiri Wiru Working Group has ensured the cultural integrity and oversight of the sacred Mala Story through the establishment of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols and regular community meetings.

Funds, paid by Voyages for the use of this Anangu ICIP, are equally distributed by the Working Group to the Mutitjulu and Kaltukatjara communities.

Through the governance structure of the Working Group, Mutitjulu and Kaltukatjara representatives have complete control over how income is distributed within their communities.

The Working Group funds many programs including on-Country camps, Sorry Business (including funeral costs) and a regional music recording studio to develop Anangu musical expression.

'It's now about ensuring that we continue to walk together, Voyages and Anangu, to do things the right way to bring benefit to the communities.'
Phill Pallas, Director of Regional Engagement, Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia, Secretary Wintjiri Wiru Working Group

A positive future

The Anangu take great pride in the ongoing success of Wintjiri Wiru Working Group. The Working Group are leaders for cultural tourism, demonstrating how innovation, governance and self-determination can create a sustainable model for the future.

'There is a really deep meaning behind the governance of the group. Not just in Tjukurpa, but everything. Joy, happiness, pride, excitement for the future. These aren't just projections, they are now.'
Romlie Mokak, Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel, Chair, Category One

The Wintjiri Wiru Working Group provide cultural authority and oversight of cultural experiences presented at the Voyages Resort, sharing Tjukurpa (the foundations of Anangu culture) with visitors to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. Photo: Ashlee Jensen/Wirrim Media



Tully O'Neil fulfilled his dream of becoming a ranger through the Tebrakunna Ranger program – a partnership between MTWAC and TasTAFE. Photo: Ashlee Jensen/Wirrim Media

Melythina Tiakana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation

Category 2



Aunty Patsy Cameron AO, MTWAC Circle of Elders member. Photo: Ashlee Jensen/Wirrim Media

Heart of Country

In 2008, a group of Tebrakunna Elders gathered in northeast Tasmania to create an organisation dedicated to preserving custodianship and the cultural traditions, practices and knowledges of their ancestors.

Melythina Tiakana Warrana (Heart of Country in the local Aboriginal language) conducts programs grounded in the principle of “acknowledging that our Country is sacred, our Culture is precious, and we are unique people.” They provide a culturally safe place for the community, particularly for young people, Elders and members of the Stolen Generations.

‘We were having lots of people who were coming home who had been part of Stolen Generations, who didn’t know where they came from, and they didn’t feel like they could safely connect. And so, we wanted to offer that kind of safety for people to discover and connect to people.’
Jo Cameron, Founding Board Member Melythina Tiakana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation

Supporting young people to lead

Melythina Tiakana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation (MTWAC) emphasises the role young people have in learning about and caring for country and culture.

Tully O’Neil, one of four Aboriginal Rangers employed by MTWAC, joined the organisation through a trainee ranger program where he earned a Certificate III in Land Preservation and was then offered paid employment.

Tully now works as a Junior Ranger Program coordinator, offering young people an opportunity to connect with country and highlighting career pathways at Melythina Tiakana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation.

‘They’ve [MTWAC] given us so much opportunity to grow and chase whatever aspirations we have as an individual. Ranger work’s pretty broad and there’s a lot of avenues that you can chase, you know, heritage and learning about artifacts in general. I really have a passion for that.’
Tully O’Neil, Ranger, Melythina Tiakana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation

Inclusive leadership, inclusive actions

Since its founding, MTWAC has looked to its Elders for guidance. A Circle of Elders sits above the Board of Directors as a cultural level of governance. The Circle of Elders and all members are welcome to attend board meetings, creating an inclusive space for open dialogue and shared wisdom.

MTWAC demonstrates inclusivity through their annual Mannalargenna Day celebration, which welcomes Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities to honour Tasmanian First Nations culture and strengthen community bonds.

Through partnerships with organisations including Many Rivers, Radiata Foundation and Hydro Tasmania, MTWAC have illustrated their proactive approach to economic sustainability and service provision.

‘It’s the understanding from the Elders to the board, to the executive, to the members. There’s no disagreement on the journey they’re on or started already and are continuing. I can see that they will be very quietly satisfied with what they’ve achieved.’
Shirley McPherson, Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel, Chair, Category Two



Christina Grant, Mibbinbah Partnerships Manager.
Photo: Ashlee Jensen/Wirrim Media

Mibbinbah Spirit Healing

Category 2



Jack Bulman, Mibbinbah Spirit Healing Founder and CEO, and Lisa Bulman, Lead Facilitator and Cultural Healer. Photo: Ashlee Jensen/Wirrim Media

Healing together

Founded in 2007 as a men's health research program, Mibbinbah Spirit Healing became a health promotion charity in 2009, concentrating on supporting men in their healing, leadership development and wellbeing journeys.

Over time, workshop evaluation feedback, as part of the *Proper Way* structures, identified the need to include women and children in a holistic community approach. Today, Mibbinbah programs are inclusive, inviting all community members – men, women and children – to participate together in the healing journey.

'Last year we had our national gathering, and we had 75 men and women and children, and it was the most beautiful thing you will ever see. Our fellas and our girls and kids having that space to be able to talk to each other and not feel shame and being able to work together for future generations.'

Jack Bulman, Co-Founder and CEO, Mibbinbah Spirit Healing

Proper Way

Mibbinbah Spirit Healing operates across Australia, following a *Proper Way* methodology which ensures an appropriately community-led approach for each locality. *Proper Way* applies First Nations cultural ways, including protocols, values and processes, to guide how they engage with a group before, during and after workshops.

Mibbinbah incorporates traditional decision-making practices, such as consensus building, or incorporating cultural advisors, into their governance. This innovative approach ensures decisive participation from First Nations peoples and communities in the design, implementation and evaluation of their work.

'That's what Mibbinbah creates, the energy that is a safe space, it's filled with love. People get to turn up and be themselves and the healing takes place, whether you're sitting in the office, under a tree, whether it's a gathering, or an online platform. Mibbinbah does have its own unique energy.'

Lisa Bulman, Lead Facilitator and Cultural Healer, Mibbinbah Spirit Healing

Championing the future

Mibbinbah Champions helps to identify young and emerging leaders eager to support their communities. This mentoring model ensures ongoing engagement from Mibbinbah facilitators after completion of the formal program.

Mibbinbah Champions are encouraged and supported to develop their leadership skills, allowing them to advocate for their community's needs and grow into strong cultural leaders.

'It's all about helping the individuals within the community, not the community themselves, that came across really strongly that that is actually happening and it's an overall benefit to the community.'

Val Price-Beck, Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel, Category Two



Lorraine Pryor, Director and Founder of Voice of Hope Aboriginal Corporation, with a designed jacket that her daughter made for her in Voice of Hope's Deadly Denim workshop. Photo: Ashlee Jensen/Wirrim Media

Voice of Hope Aboriginal Corporation

Category 2



Voice of Hope offer wreath making workshops as a healing outlet for women going through Sorry Business. L to R: Bella Wallam, Jadeatha Wallam and Anna TeNahu. Photo: Ashlee Jensen/Wirrim Media

Cultural reconnection

Voice of Hope Aboriginal Corporation was established in 2022 to assist Aboriginal women in Western Australia to adjust back into community life after time spent in prison.

Led by Aboriginal women with lived experience and grounded in Noongar culture, Voice of Hope provides programs and resources to help women physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually repair and recover from trauma and return to culture, identity and family.

'Some of these women shared that they didn't have anywhere to go, and just felt so good knowing that they could come and sit there with other like-minded women who were trying to make changes within their life as well. Having someone sitting there who actually has made the change, they can see that it's not just people preaching to them.'

Karla Hart, Director, Voice of Hope

Representing women and reflecting culture

Voice of Hope is led by Aboriginal women for Aboriginal women, a female Elders advisory committee oversees all programs. The organisation is run by volunteers and governed by a board of six women skilled in aspects of lived experiences, program delivery, homelessness, culture, policy development and finance. By including board directors with lived experience, Voice of Hope represents the community that they serve and illustrates the pathways and possibilities that are available to program participants.

'Every session our Elders are present because our Elders are the ones that help us with the decision making. This is matriarch Country. It's all from a cultural lens and it's all done with cultural respect, in a culturally safe space.'
Lorraine Pryor, Founder, Voice of Hope

The ongoing journey of hope

Voice of Hope supports women throughout their journeys. The *Walbreninj Yorga* (Healing Women) program, a 10-week initiative within the prison, helps women physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually heal and return to family. It addresses personal and systemic challenges to reduce recidivism, domestic violence and addiction while providing resources and support such as counselling, education and housing.

Upon release, the women are supplied with a Hope Bag which includes clothing, toiletries, a mobile phone and contact list of essential services. Ongoing workshops, yarning circles and education opportunities ensure continued support.

'To have an organisation like the Voice of Hope, which is a standalone Aboriginal focused support organisation, working with some of the most vulnerable members in the community is really important. The way that the Elders wrap that support service around people who need the assistance, that was beautiful.'
Jim Davis, Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel, Category Two



Vincent McKenzie, Language Teacher, Choose your own way program, Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation. Photo: Ashlee Jensen/Wirrim Media

Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation

Category 3



Samara Cox, Community Liason Officer and the youngest serving Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation board member. Photo: Ashlee Jensen/Wirrim Media

Independence driven by self-determination

The Djarindjin community in Western Australia's Dampier Peninsula was established as a defiant act of self-determination by Bardi and Jawi people escaping the control of missions in the 1980s.

For years, Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation (DAC) has become largely self-funded as a necessity, as it has received little infrastructure, funding, housing and support from the government. It has developed several independent enterprises to generate revenue, employment and support the community.

Today, DAC is the Dampier Peninsula's largest employer of Aboriginal people and operates various businesses including the Djarindjin Airport – the only Aboriginal-owned and operated airport in Australia.

'This is where DAC is different: it doesn't believe in toeing the same line that everyone else believes in. It's about owning everything that we have and sharing the wealth with the people of the Dampier Peninsula.'
Nathan McIvor, CEO, Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation

Embracing risk through strong governance

The Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation (DAC) operates under an all-First Nations six-member board of dedicated community members. This diverse team ensures equal representation, including both men and women, and young directors who provide a balanced view of community needs. There is a specific role for Elder directors to culturally and consistently guide governance practices.

By prioritising non-staff members on the board, DAC fosters accountability and clear separation between strategy and implementation. An open-door policy encourages informal feedback, while established community protocols safeguard cultural safety and wellbeing.

Through its collaborative governance model, DAC embraces strategic risks, generating revenue from innovative enterprises like the airport, which supplies 70% of its funding, allowing the community to shape its economic and cultural future.

'To see an Aboriginal owned and operated airport was an inspiring experience. It really reflects and shows just what we can do in our communities if we have the drive and dedication.'
Kenny Bedford, Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel, Category Three

Strengthening identity and wellbeing

With established revenue streams, the Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation can focus on ensuring the social and cultural strength of their community. The corporation delivers a range of essential services and wellbeing programs including a safehouse, aged care program, men's shed, municipal services, community store, programs for early childhood and parenting and youth and community service outreach. These efforts reflect DAC's deep commitment to nurturing community wellbeing and upholding cultural integrity, ensuring that the benefits from their enterprises meaningfully support the needs of the community.

'Teaching language is one of the main things that we've talked about. We have a lot of culture, but the language we needed the most. That gave me the push to say, "Ok, we'll bring language back, I'll start from the school and then bring it back into the community.'
Vincent McKenzie, Language Teacher, Choose your own way program, Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation



GMAAAC Chairman Derek Japangardi Williams.
Photo: Tom Hoy/Wirrim Media

Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation

Category 3



GMAAAC representatives and awards judges in Yuelamu. A GMAAAC Committee goal is to create a cultural and community hub in Yuelamu to provide more opportunities for community and for visitors. Photo: Tom Hoy/Wirrim Media

Collaborative governance for community projects

Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation (GMAAAC) was founded in 1991 in partnership with the Central Land Council to manage and distribute payments to nine Tanami communities for the operation of The Granites gold mines on their Country.

At least 50% of the income is invested for future use; the rest for community benefit projects for all nine GMAAAC communities.

GMAAAC operates within a two-tiered governance structure. Each community elects a committee to prioritise, plan and fund projects; the committees elect 18 directors who oversee the corporation's investments. This structure enables communities to address their concerns and work towards community aspirations through the allocation of their own resources.

'It's really clear to me that so many community members are invested in the future. The project investments are significant and can be transformational to these communities in so many ways.'
Belinda Duarte, Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel, Chair, Category Three

Identifying emerging leaders

Young people across the Tanami are crucial to GMAAAC's sustainability. In 2022, the Corporation piloted a Youth Governance Project in Yuelamu where emerging leaders attended GMAAAC Committee meetings and then planned a community benefit project.

The same year, committees across the organisation encouraged young people to participate in upcoming elections, resulting in people under 35 years of age representing 18% of GMAAAC membership in 2023. Three of these young members have been nominated to the board. By encouraging young leaders GMAAAC aims to secure the future of the Corporation.

'Communities are actively choosing to nominate younger community members to be on those committees so that there is intergenerational learning in the context of the committee. GMAAAC's trialling things all the time to engage younger people and it's certainly a priority.'
Rebecca Humphries, Regional Coordinator, Community Development Unit, Central Land Council

Good governance and strong culture

GMAAAC directors meet quarterly to participate in the Good Governance Program (GGP) and conduct board meetings.

The GGP, funded by GMAAAC and facilitated by external trainers and advisors, provides education in governance and financial literacy and has been well-received over the past six years of delivery.

The GGP is underpinned by a strong respect for culture and includes training resources and discussions in language, separation of men's and women's business, and cultural sessions taught by the directors to the external facilitators. This two-way learning practice builds strong, trusting relationships between Yapa (Aboriginal) and non-Yapa, and leads to greater understanding across the Corporation.

'We keep our culture strong. The Good Governance Training Program is really good and we're going to set ourselves for life, for a future, for up-and-coming generations and future leaders.'
Derek Japangardi Williams, GMAAAC Chairman



Jamie Strickland, CEO of the Wajarri Yamaji Aboriginal Corporation (WYAC). Photo: Tom Hoy/Wirrim Media

Wajarri Yamaji Aboriginal Corporation

Category 3



Aunty Robin Boddington has been involved in Native Title rights with Wajarri People for the past 32 years. With WYAC, she delivers Cultural Awareness training for contractors working on County and is a Director on the Wajarri Enterprises Limited (WEL) board. Photo: Tom Hoy/Wirrim Media

Opportunities through native title

After a decades long legal battle, Wajarri Elders were awarded native title to over 92,000 square kilometres across the Murchison and Gascoyne regions of WA, one of the largest native title determinations in Australia. Today, the Wajarri Yamaji Aboriginal Corporation (WYAC) plays a pivotal role within the Wajarri Group, which includes the Winja Wajarri Barna Ltd trust, which manages the two charitable trusts, and Wajarri Enterprises Ltd, a sustainable business enterprise for the benefit of all Wajarri Yamaji people. Through strategic investments and community initiatives, WYAC is dedicated to enhancing the lives of Wajarri Yamaji people.

'Growing up as a kid here in Geraldton, when there'd be projects and opportunities blackfellas were never part of that. Now through WYAC, we're actually part of those conversations. We're an active part of leading what happens and ensuring that there's broader benefits and opportunities for young Wajarri people.'

Jamie Strickland, CEO, Wajarri Yamaji Aboriginal Corporation

Income and employment for the future

WYAC holds key Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) which they have leveraged to create economic and employment opportunities for Wajarri people. The ILUA with CSIRO relates to an international radio telescope project being built on Wajarri lands at Boolardy Station. As part of the ILUA, WYAC partnered with Traditional Owners to establish a Heritage Protection Committee, a Cultural Heritage Management Plan and a compulsory Yamaji cultural training for all site visitors.

'As a young fella, it's good to see things actually progress after so long. We do a lot for our young people through our member services, employment opportunities, whether that's working out at the village at Boolardy, or working out in the field with Heritage Service Providers, getting that knowledge transfer.'

Jaquille Bell, Project Officer Conservation, Wajarri Yamaji Aboriginal Corporation

Empowered governance and representation

At the core of Wajarri Yamaji Aboriginal Corporation (WYAC) is a governance structure that reflects the diversity of the four Wajarri land groups: Minangu, Burringurrah/Milly Milly, Byro, and Ngoonooru. With a nine-member board comprised of representatives from each land committee, decision-making is grounded in local perspectives and community needs. WYAC prioritises the ongoing development of its directors through training in governance, strategy, and finance, ensuring that leadership is both skilled and informed. This thoughtful separation of powers, where the board focuses on strategic direction and the CEO manages daily operations, fosters a culture of respect and collaboration throughout the organisation, empowering every voice in the community.

'I really want to congratulate the Wajarri Group and encourage them to continue on their path of leadership in the region. What they're doing is providing a shining example of what can be achieved through effective Indigenous governance.'

Kenny Bedford, Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel, Category Three

Judges biographies



Romlie Mokak – Chair, Category One

Romlie Mokak is a Djugun man and a member of the Yawuru people. In March 2024, Rom completed a five-year term as the first Indigenous Commissioner at the Productivity Commission. Previously he was Chief Executive Officer of the Lowitja Institute and the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association. Earlier, Rom held policy and program management roles in the Australian and New South Wales governments. Responsibilities spanned a range of areas including substance use, eye health, ageing and disability. Rom is a patron of Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services and a member of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Board.



Shirley McPherson – Chair, Category Two

Shirley McPherson is a Yamatji and Nyongar woman from the Perth and Murchison regions of Western Australia. She has experience in program delivery and business development at the regional, national and international levels of government. Shirley is a Chartered Accountant and has held senior positions in the private, government and university sectors. She is currently a National Business Development and Engagement Manager for AFL SportsReady. Shirley has been a consultant to the mining industry in negotiating land use agreements in Western Australia and held roles as Group Manager of Indigenous Strategy and Business with Leighton Contractors Pty Ltd. She was member of the Australian Government delegation to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Her previous board appointments included Chair of Ngarda Civil and Mining Pty Ltd (2011–13) and the Indigenous Land Corporation (2001–11), and board member of McArthur River Mining Community Benefits Trust (2009–14). Shirley is a member of the Indigenous Businesses Australia board.



Belinda Duarte – Chair, Category Three

Belinda Duarte is Wotjobaluk and Dja Dja Wurrung descendant with Polish and Celtic heritage. As an accomplished leader in elite sport, social equity and First Nations communities, Belinda is CEO of Culture is Life, an organisation which is dedicated to Aboriginal-led solutions for the prevention of First peoples youth suicide. She has been appointed to the Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games Organising Committee, is a director of the Western Bulldogs, MCG trustee, board member of the AnnaMilla First Nations Foundation and Djaara Aboriginal Corporation. Belinda has a vision of equality across all aspects of living for Aboriginal people. As a former elite athlete, Belinda is working on innovative projects to influence the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to improve relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. In 2020 she was recognised for her work and awarded a CEW Vincent Fairfax fellowship. Additional awards include Football Woman of the Year 2012 and Emerging leader under the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership in 2006-2007.



Sarah Brown – Judge, Category One

Sarah Brown AM is the Chief Executive Officer of Purple House and has been helping the Indigenous Directors to run the organisation since its inception more than eighteen years ago. As well as being a judge this year, Sarah and Purple House were the winner of the Indigenous Governance Award Category A (incorporated organisations) in 2016, helping to provide her a unique perspective to this year's judging panel. Sarah holds a Master of Nursing, a Graduate Diploma in Aboriginal Education, and a Graduate Diploma in Health Service Management. Prior to joining Purple House, she was a remote area nurse and university lecturer. Sarah has been recognised in many ways for the work she does, being named Hesta's Australia's Nurse of the Year in 2017, being listed as one of BOSS magazine's 'True Leaders' in 2018, and in 2020 Sarah received an Order of Australia Medal for "her significant service to community health, remote nursing and Indigenous communities."



Bhiamie Williamson – Judge, Category One

Bhiamie Williamson is a Euahlayi man from northwest New South Wales with familial ties to northwest Queensland. In 2014, Bhiamie graduated from the Australian National University (ANU) and in 2017 from the Masters of Indigenous Governance at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Bhiamie also holds graduate certificates in Indigenous Governance from the Native Nations Institute at the University of Arizona and Indigenous Trauma Care and Recovery Practice from the University of Wollongong. Bhiamie has extensive research experience in Indigenous land management, and cultural burning, while his PhD investigated Indigenous men and masculinities. He currently leads the National Indigenous Disaster Resilience program at Monash University.



Jim Davis – Judge, Category Two

Jim Davis is a descendant of the Daurareb tribe from Mer (Murray Island) in Zenadh Kes (Torres Strait). He has over 20 years' experience supporting Traditional Owner led land and sea management initiatives, the implementation of cultural and corporate governance, the co-design of economic opportunities and the reaffirmation of cultural values on traditional estates. Jim has worked within the public service sector in Canberra, the Indigenous not for profit sector focussed on Cape York and for the past two years been with the Indigenous Engagement team at BHP. He holds a Bachelor of Arts attained at Griffith University, is an accredited Mediator and an executive member on government, corporate and philanthropic boards.



Val Price-Beck – Judge, Category Two and Category Three

Val Price-Beck is a Kamilaroi woman from the Liverpool Plains of New South Wales with over 20 years' experience in Indigenous economic development. Val also has extensive experience in both corporate services and corporate governance having worked in both the private and public sector. This has included being the Chief Executive Officer of the Indigenous Business Council of Australia and a member of Indigenous Business Australia's executive management team. Currently Val is a Director on the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute where she holds the position of Duty Chair in an Executive role, as well as a Director at the National Health Funding Body, a body that supports the obligations and responsibilities of the Administrator through best practice administration of public hospital funding.



Kenny Bedford – Judge, Category Three

Kenny Bedford is a Traditional Owner of the Meuram Tribe of Erub (Darnley Island) Torres Strait. Kenny has served his community and region as the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Member for Erub and held the Fisheries Portfolio on the TSRA Executive for almost a decade. Kenny was also a Councillor and Deputy Mayor of the inaugural Torres Strait Island Regional Council. As President of the Erub Fisheries Management Association (EFMA) Kenny re-established the only community owned and managed commercial fishing operation in the Torres Strait. Kenny Bedford is an Owner Director of his own business, Indigenous Initiatives and Innovation and is an establishing Board Member of Zenadh Kes Fisheries. He is also a Director of the My Pathway Group and Board Member of Reconciliation Australia. Kenny will graduate with a Masters of Indigenous Business Leadership from Monash University in 2024.

Partnerships to expand Indigenous Governance

Reconciliation Australia's Indigenous Governance Program (IGP) expands the impact and reach of Indigenous governance by facilitating partnerships between Indigenous Governance Awards finalists and Stretch and Elevate RAP organisations.

Valuing and implementing Indigenous governance practices recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as decision makers for their futures. While these partnerships require dedication and mutual respect to build and maintain, their success can lead to significant positive learning and behavioural shifts.

Though many Stretch and Elevate RAP organisations may have existing relationships with Indigenous organisations, these partnerships offer connection under intentional Indigenous-led agreements, fostering sustainable collaborations and amplifying the impact of Indigenous governance.

Partnerships contribute to a broader understanding of reconciliation in Australia and serve as models for effective relationships between Indigenous and other governance structures. Indigenous governance is a strength to be valued and not underestimated.

Benefits to Indigenous Organisations

The Indigenous Governance Awards Finalists/Winners determine an area of focus, then work with the IGP team to select an aligned RAP partner. The resulting partnership supports the Indigenous organisation with business development support through coaching sessions, fostering open discussions to identify meaningful, two-way collaboration opportunities.

With the RAP organisation the awards finalist/winner will:

- Host an on-Country experience to deepen relationships
- Work together while self-determining goals
- Receive guidance and support in self-identified areas
- Deepen practical skills in organisational governance and engagement with corporate and government sectors
- Grow connections with different markets and potential new industries
- Develop strong respect, relationships and opportunities through RAP organisations

Benefits for Stretch and Elevate RAP organisations

The Indigenous governance partnerships offer a path for Stretch and Elevate RAP organisations to enhance their impact by partnering with Indigenous organisations in a culturally responsive manner focused on self-determination.

In the process partners:

- Increase cultural awareness through immersive opportunities
- Build a deeper understanding of Indigenous organisations and their operational contexts
- Develop an organisational skillset and approach for effective engagement with Indigenous-led organisations
- Develop a deep relationship with a respected and successful Indigenous-led organisation
- Gain a better understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprise development and governance
- Receive guidance to achieve and enhance RAP goals

Success Stories

Recently the partnerships program matched Indigenous Governance Awards 2022 finalist Naru Goori Groms, a wellbeing focused ocean awareness and learn-to-surf program that builds community resilience and cultural connection developed by Naru Aboriginal Corporation, with Elevate RAP partner National Rugby League (NRL) to positive results.

Learn about their experience through the QR code below.



Indigenous Governance Awards 2024

Acknowledgements

Reconciliation Australia, the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, and the BHP Foundation would like to acknowledge all the applicants in the Indigenous Governance Awards 2024. We thank the applicants for the time and effort they invested in the application process. The strength and quality of applications is testament to the outstanding work of organisations demonstrating leading Indigenous Governance practice.

We would particularly like to thank the finalists in this year's awards. Every finalist went to extraordinary efforts to present their organisations to the judging panel and broader Indigenous Governance Awards team. The team was privileged to join many organisations on Country and is grateful for the opportunity to witness direct community impact of successful Indigenous governance.

This publication, and the awards more broadly, provide opportunities to showcase the finalists' governance practices, share their stories and assist them to achieve the recognition they deserve.

The dedication of the judging panel members has been essential to the success of the awards. The panel is made up of a diverse group of individuals from various sectors, bringing with them extensive experience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. Every judge contributed significant time in their busy schedule to the rigorous judging process and we thank you.

Finally, a special thank you goes to Wirrim Media for joining the judging panel on each site visit and documenting the stories and work of each finalist. These recordings create an archive which will teach and inspire long into the future.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia, and particularly thank all those on whose land we have travelled during the 2024 awards period.

