



Pre-Budget Submission 2023-2024

Submission by First Nations Media Australia to the Australian Treasury



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About First Nations Media Australia

First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) is the peak body for Indigenous media and First Nations Media Australia is the peak body for Indigenous media and communications. Our purpose is empowering Australia's First Nations people through our culturally connected media industry. As at January 2023, FNMA's membership includes 36 organisations and 40 individuals who work in or alongside the community-controlled media industry as broadcasters, freelance journalists, photographers, filmmakers and allies.

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

About the First Nations broadcasting and media sector

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

The scope of the First Nations media sector includes:

- **Television:** National free-to-air (NITV); satellite delivered narrowcast (ICTV) TV services; local narrowcast TV services (Goolarri TV at Broome, ICTV in Alice

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

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

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

Springs and Broome and Larrakia TV at Darwin). The ICTV satellite TV service reaches 371,846 smartcards nation-wide as at April 2021, not including terrestrial services in Alice Springs and Broome.

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

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

A strong First Nations owned media industry enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access to relevant news, information services and emergency warnings and to actively participate in the appropriate delivery of media and information services for their communities. First Nations media provides a voice for

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

their communities. It is uniquely placed to hear and share communities' strengths, priorities and concerns. In providing news and information to a community, they provide the community with the information they need.⁵

This submission was prepared by FNMA Senior Policy Officer, Dr Eleanor Hogan. It was on based on research undertaken by FNMA and its partner organisations.

FNMA acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

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

Introduction

First Nations Media Australia acknowledges the federal government's recent commitments in the October 2022 Budget to fostering First Nations people's digital inclusion and to supporting the referendum process on the Voice to Parliament. FNMA commends the government's investment of \$2.5 million over 5 years to establish a First Nations Digital Advisory Group to lead consultation with First Nations people on the design and delivery of digital inclusion initiatives. We also welcome the October 2022 Budget's renewed commitment of \$88 million over the next four years for the community broadcasting sector, which includes funding for specialist programming for First Nations broadcasting.

However, FNMA urges the government to recognise the First Nations media services' role in providing essential information services and to review the long overdue indexation of operational funding for our sector. First Nations media organisations play a crucial role in communicating with First Nations peoples; in some remote areas, our broadcasters are the only source of information for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. However, they must compete with other community broadcasters for grants to fund content production from the oversubscribed Community Broadcasting Program.

First Nations media outlets are primarily focused on the wellbeing of the community they serve, which was evident in their support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities during the COVID-19 pandemic in providing them with essential information and addressing pockets of misinformation.⁶ Increasing extreme weather events have highlighted the essential service that First Nations media provides in distributing information to our communities. During such crises, First Nations communities turn to community-controlled media services as a trusted source of information, relaying relevant and relatable information in accessible languages.

The lack of indexation on operational funding for our sector has long been a major barrier to the growth of local First Nations media services and urgently needs to be addressed. Commonwealth funding for the sector has remained static for over a decade, while First Nations media services have expanded and inflation has increased. Provision of an ongoing infrastructure maintenance program is fundamental to supporting First Nations people's access to telecommunications and broadcasting services, and to addressing digital inclusion. This is especially the case for remote broadcasting networks, which often struggle with limited, outdated infrastructure to deliver vital messages and information services to First Nations people living in to hard-to-reach areas.

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

FNMA notes that the Australian government and the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Linda Burney MP, are committed to replacing the Community Development Program in 2023 with 'a new program with real jobs, proper wages and decent conditions for Australians living remote communities.'⁷ We commend this development and encourage the government to engage the First Nations media sector as an avenue of employment, training and career pathways. The sector offers a range of opportunities in journalism, broadcasting, multimedia production, digital archiving, technical and IT services, many of which utilise newer digital and communications technologies, and have the potential to engage young people in meaningful career pathways. This is particularly relevant to remote-living First Nations people, who experience high levels of unemployment, especially among youth.

FNMA views effective communication as essential to the ongoing viability of First Nations communities and central to the success of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This submission suggests actions the Australian Government can take toward implementing elements of the Agreement such as 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media, in particular community-controlled media, have a central role in communicating activities under this Agreement to allow culturally relevant messages to be developed and shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,' measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages used in media under Outcome 16 and the achievement of Outcome 17.⁸



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

Infrastructure Audit Report, 2022

⁷ The Hon Linda Burney MP, 'Putting remote employment issues on the table', 31 August 2022, <https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/burney/2022/putting-remote-employment-issues-table>

⁸ National Agreement on Closing the Gap, July 2020

Summary of Budget request

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

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

1 Provide essential information services	
Infrastructure maintenance program	\$5.05m
Emergency relief support, including mental health	\$4.73m
Strengthen news services	\$1m
Expanding local media services	\$3.5m
2 Increase jobs & skills	
Expand training and career development opportunities	\$4.3m
Content production fund	\$2m
Digital Archive workers and equipment	\$1.4m
Address recruitment and retention barriers	\$2.2m
3 Improve community-controlled sector sustainability	
Business development actions	\$5.1m
Address indexation pressures	\$4.4m
TOTAL BUDGET REQUEST:	\$33.68m

Budget Item Details

1. Provide essential information services

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasters translate and relay key information in languages that are accessible to communities around the country every day. First Nations media is the preferred channel for receiving news and government messaging as it crosses language and cultural barriers to connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences in a way that resonates in their local setting. No other media outlet provides news services in Indigenous languages.

First Nations media organisations address a market gap through providing essential information to many remote communities not serviced by any other form of media. This includes the dissemination of vital emergency, health and government information. First Nations radio is the only radio service available in 82 regions across the country. In a further 16 locations, First Nations radio is the only local service in addition to ABC services retransmitted from other regions.

Indigenous Australians have relatively levels of digital inclusion, and the digital inclusion gap between Indigenous Australians and other Australians is evident across access, affordability and digital ability considerations. Over 2.5 million Australians remain offline.⁹ This includes 24.7% of Indigenous Australian households who do not access the internet from home, compared with the national average of 14.7%. Levels of home internet access for Indigenous Australian households diminish further with remoteness, with up to 45.2% of households in remote and very remote locations unable to access the internet¹⁰. First Nations media is the primary information source for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences in many remote communities.

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

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a recent demonstration of First Nations media organisations' capacity to deliver timely and relevant information. Over 2021–22, the Department of Health funded 18 First Nations media organisations to produce

⁹ Roy Morgan, Centre for Social Impact – Swinburne University & RMIT University, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide – The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2020*, Telstra, November 2020.

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2016*

content for publication across their media channels providing COVID-19 vaccine information tailored for their audiences through locally relevant content production, including drawing on influential spokespeople, local languages and culturally appropriate references.

In 2023–24, the First Nations media sector requests funding to enable adequate responses to:

- Increasing extreme weather events and localised crises (floods, cyclones, food shortages, road closures, fires);
- Increasing requests for public health messaging, most recently concerning the COVID-19 pandemic;
- the retraction of public interest journalism; and
- maintain broadcast infrastructure vital to the delivery of emergency information.

'The ABC is not relevant here. It's not watched, it's long and boring and not relevant. We are the spot where people would actually go for their information that was relevant to them. We weren't talking about case numbers in Victoria, we were talking about what mattered here. Without that, I do wonder what information would have been here in the community... Would they have really understood that you can't go to town anymore? How seriously would it have been taken? What would have happened in our communities?'

PAW media staff in Yuendumu, *Above & Beyond Broadcasting: a study of First Nations media and the COVID-19 pandemic, 2022*

Infrastructure maintenance program

Trends in extreme weather events (cyclones, hurricanes, floods and fires) have been increasing both globally and in Australia since the 1980s.¹¹ First Nations media organisations have an essential role in ensuring community safety during these extreme weather events, providing emergency information relevant to local regions, especially in remote areas. Media services themselves are not immune to the effects of extreme weather events – cyclones regularly knock down transmitter towers, earthing equipment is required to protect against lightning damage and sites require fireproofing. A broad range of costs are involved with the protection of existing infrastructure, prevention maintenance and occasionally, emergency replacement of damaged specialist infrastructure not covered by insurance policies. For example, last year unprecedented rainfall in Port Augusta damaged the roof of Umeewarra Aboriginal Media Association, putting its radio service out of action for months.

Such extreme weather events are difficult for First Nations media services to budget for, especially given the financial pressure they experience due of lack of indexation to operational funding for over 15 years coupled with increasing operational expenses. Given the increasing regularity of extreme weather events, provisions need to be made for their inevitability. Currently services outages are being resolved inconsistently through redirected operational funds in the absence of contingency funding to address equipment failure and maintenance.

Up until 2015–16, the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet held a contingency fund available for First Nations media organisations to apply for emergency assistance at any time during the year. Currently there is no capacity for media organisations to seek this type of support.

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

There is some shared infrastructure between telecommunications and broadcasting services that can be used to build on existing government investment in broadcast infrastructure and to generate maximum public value from new infrastructure

¹¹ Climate Council of Australia, *Weather Gone Wild*, <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Climate-council-extreme-weather-report.pdf>, 2019

rollouts. However, First Nations media organisations may also be called upon for technical skills, capacity building activities and infrastructure requirements, especially in remote areas and in response to extreme weather events.

Increasingly, technical personnel *must* be considered part of a media organisation's infrastructure requirements due to the dual reliance on equipment and IT/IP expertise to resolve emerging issues. This has been a common theme arising in FNMA's sector-wide *Infrastructure Audit Report* (April 2022) and through industry consultation.¹² The lack of technical expertise in regional and remote areas is an industry-wide barrier, resulting in avoidable service outages for other media (such as the ABC) and telecommunications (such as Telstra).

Opportunity exists for the First Nations community-controlled sector to provide technical support across multiple communications services with support for relevant training and expert coordination. If the federal government's proposed Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan results in a funded program, it would present a potential opportunity to grow communications jobs through the provision of IT, technical and training expertise.¹³ To respond to these needs, the *Infrastructure Audit Report* recommends that a national database of technicians be made available to First Nations media services and that a coordinated career development program be designed to bring more technical personnel into the sector, especially in regional and remote areas.¹⁴

The First Nations media sector is well placed to provide place-based employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a culturally safe environment for the benefit of multiple stakeholders requiring services in remote and regional locations. This network would be readily available to respond to technical issues during extreme weather events, but more importantly, would be taking steps to ensure a continuous robust broadcast network to avoid outages in times of crisis. Support for technicians, including travel and accommodation costs, to provide regular maintenance and repairs, especially for regional and remote transmission sites, should be included as an essential component of an ongoing infrastructure maintenance program. Additionally, in line with Recommendation 7 of *Renewing a Vital Indigenous Voice and Community Asset*, funding should be provided to support the expansion of smart technologies enabling remote monitoring and repair of broadcast services, whose use First Nations media organisations are currently pioneering, which save maintenance and travel costs.¹⁵

¹² Wayne Binder & team, *Infrastructure Audit Report*, First Nations Media Sector 2022, Alice Springs, FNMA, 2022. [https://firstnationsmedia.org.au/sites/default/files/files/Submissions/Infrastructure%20Audit%20Report%20-%20final.pdf]

¹³ See Recommendation 8 of the Government's [response](#) to the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review.

¹⁴ See Recommendations 18 and 21 to the *Infrastructure Audit Report*, pp.30–31.

¹⁵ Hugh Watson Consulting, *Renewing a Vital Indigenous Voice and Community Asset*, commissioned by the NIAA, February 2021.

The Commonwealth provided \$2.05 million as part of its COVID-19 emergency response to help address the most urgent repairs required to keep services on air. However, a targeted broadcasting, infrastructure and digital network upgrade program is needed to bring First Nations media services up to industry standard. A lack of funding for capital equipment and/or repairs and maintenance programs over the past 15 years has hampered the First Nations broadcasting sector's capacity to migrate to new IT based technologies.¹⁶

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

- the reinstatement of contingency funding for emergency equipment to be managed through the National Indigenous Australians Agency (\$500,000);
- support for the employment of 12 x broadcast technician trainees to provide regional support across multiple First Nations media outlets (\$900,000);
- the employment of 6 x experienced technicians to supplement existing technical capacity in the First Nations media sector, providing networked advice and maintenance services (\$600,000);
- a targeted broadcasting, infrastructure and digital network upgrade (\$2,000,000);
- coordination of a scheduled maintenance program and associated training activities to ensure the longevity and consistency of broadcast infrastructure, including travel and training activities (\$400,000);
- the rollout of smart technologies to increase industry efficiency (\$650,000) as recommended to the NIAA by Hugh Watson Consulting.¹⁷

Total request for infrastructure maintenance program	\$5.05m
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¹⁶ *Infrastructure Audit Report*, pp.4–5.

¹⁷ Hugh Watson Consulting, *Renewing a Vital Indigenous Voice and Community Asset*, commissioned by the NIAA, February 2021

Emergency relief support, including mental health initiatives

In emergency situations people need to receive key messages on a large scale, as well as relevant advice at state, municipal and community levels on how to respond locally. First Nations communities require local information about basic amenities such as when is their clinic open? What roads are closed? Where are the closest shelter points? This information needs to be immediate, distributed widely, free to access and updated regularly. First Nations media services are experts in providing information in a manner that resonates with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, employing relevant local language and trusted spokespeople in content production.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a recent demonstration of First Nations media organisations' capacity to deliver timely and relevant information through FNMOs production and delivery of 'bespoke' content about the preventing the spread of the coronavirus and communicating the government's vaccine campaigns. Communities turn to First Nations media services as trusted sources of information, and the FNMOs worked to address misinformation particularly amid conflicting reports about the COVID-19 and the available vaccines through social media and other networks.¹⁸

Early in the pandemic, the Commonwealth government provided a small injection of funding (approx. \$230k in April 2020) through the NIAA to support First Nations media organisations to facilitate broadcast services, including the equipment and workload involved in producing and distributing key messages in both Indigenous languages and English, and the provision of COVID-safe workplaces. However, as businesses, First Nations media organisations have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic over both the short and medium-term. The primary impact of the pandemic has been increasing pressure on the capacity of small teams to deliver essential information services. Broadcasters faced ongoing significant increases in workload to effectively respond to rolling announcements and relay information specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences. This included a significant increase in translation requirements and a fast turn-around on information as situations changed. The ongoing nature of this pressure affected media workers' mental health and wellbeing across the sector, compounding existing issues of racism for workers responsible for monitoring social media feeds in particular.

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

¹⁸ Above & Beyond Broadcasting: a study of First Nations media and the COVID-19 pandemic, University of Melbourne, January 2022

organisations were just some of the lost income opportunities First Nations media organisations suffered. While First Nations community broadcasters are less reliant on self-generated income than other broadcast services, the loss of sponsorship, membership and fundraising opportunities resulted in significant dips in revenue sources needed to supplement Government funding support.

FNMA members reported reductions of up to \$20,000 per month during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some estimating self-generated income losses of up to \$180,000 in 2020-21. These figures do not include the additional workload required to convey timely messaging to communities over an extended period, plus additional equipment purchased to facilitate COVID-safe work environments for broadcasters to disseminate vital information. The cost to the sector has been huge.

First Nations media organisations sustained significant impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic, both in terms of loss of revenue and impact on staff, especially on their mental health and wellbeing. The pandemic is not over and its impacts on the sector have been compounded through ongoing climate emergencies and extreme weather events, such as bush fires and flooding, as well as social emergencies such as the 'summer crime wave' and crisis situation in Alice Springs and other regional centres, such as Katherine, Tennant Creek and Townsville, and remote areas, including the Kimberley and the Pilbara. These events are likely to escalate over the next decade, emergency relief funding, disaster readiness and risk reduction planning, mental health initiatives should be available to support First Nations media organisations, who are broadcasting's 'frontline' in many remote areas.

In view of the essential work that First Nations media services provide as a primary information and messaging channel to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we ask that the Commonwealth provide:

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

Total request for emergency support, including mental health	\$4.73m
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Strengthening News Services

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

This imbalance in participation in the media still permeates Australia's media landscape today. Thirty-two per cent of the general community cites the media as their main source of information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹⁹ Yet all too often the information reported is unbalanced in a negative way, misinformed and/or excludes First Nations perspectives with very real outcomes of compounding issues of racism, bias and barriers to employment for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. First Nations broadcasting and media has a vital role in providing balanced and culturally appropriate reporting in order to promote awareness and understanding among non-Indigenous Australians, participate in the truth-telling process, encourage participation in democratic processes and promote reconciliation. In this way, all First Nations news reporting is public interest journalism in Australia.

First Nations media services counter the lack of balance in mainstream media outlets when reporting on matters relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While they do report challenges and negative stories, they also take pride in reporting successes and in doing so showcase examples of good news within First Nations communities. Seventy-seven per cent of surveyed listeners indicated their primary reason for listening to First Nations radio was to hear positive stories on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.²⁰ The result is high levels of audience engagement.

The Public Interest Journalism Initiative notes a net reduction of 105 newsrooms in Australia since 2019.²¹ This contraction of news services has made creating opportunities for regional journalism even more important and has been identified as a concern to the Government. While social media platforms can share information to known and adjacent networks, they do not attract the same audience consistency as radio and television media. First Nations journalists are increasingly well placed to fill this market gap and provide information of relevance to local communities alongside national headlines. Similarly, the First Nations media sector has covered the gap in news and weather services for many remote and regional communities, as the ABC has scaled back its local news and weather coverage for

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

²⁰ McNair yellowSquares, *Indigenous Communications and Media Survey*, 2016, <https://www.firstnationsmedia.org.au/projects/indigenous-communications-and-media-survey-2016>

²¹ Gary Dickson, The Australian Newsroom Mapping Project, Public Interest Journalism Initiative, <https://anmp.piji.com.au/>, cited 4 February 2022.

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

To achieve these aims, FNMA has piloted a First Nations News Initiative throughout 2021–22, which:

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

The pilot program was successful with 12 emerging journalists from 10 regions undertaking a training program and contributing stories to a national 'wire service' for use by both First Nations and community licensed broadcasters. This cohort of trainees were supported by a Regional Editorial Coordinator and a set of partnerships coordinated by the FNMA as the peak body. Key learnings were made through the pilot phase and a set of training resources produced. Several journalists trained in 2021 have now moved on to roles in mainstream media or received promotion within their First Nations media employers.

FNMA seeks to consolidate the gains from the News Initiative pilot program and expand it to benefit the sector through ongoing training, mentoring and support of First Nations journalists. In early 2023, the FN News Initiative coordinator plans to recruit another 12 emerging journalists to undertake a training program with mentoring support from the 2022 and 2021 cohort groups. The 2022 group will continue to produce and share news content and be supported to develop career pathways for ongoing journalistic work.

This will require funding support to:

- train and mentor another 12 emerging First Nations journalists (\$200,000)
- expand access to existing news sharing software for multiplatform content (\$50,000)
- operational funding to support a network of regional journalists and manage content distribution (\$170,000)

- resources and reference materials (\$20,000)
- employment support for First Nations journalists to provide regular news reports (\$560,000)

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

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

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

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

The First Nations media sector seeks funding to support:

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

Total request for expanding local services	\$3.5m per annum
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2. Increase job & skills

The First Nations media sector produces an effective opportunity to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Training & Career Development opportunities

Employees in the communications sector are highly skilled, with a higher proportion of the workforce with postgraduate and Bachelor level degrees, graduate diplomas and certificates, and advanced diplomas and diplomas compared with other industries.²² The First Nations media industry offers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a culturally safe environment in which to develop ‘work ready’ skills and to continually upgrade those skills to define their own career paths. For this reason, we see many media workers move into communication roles in other industries, such as the mining and resources industry, politics and the public service and information technology. We also see employees develop skills within our industry and then transition to other roles in media, including becoming freelance agents or starting small businesses themselves. While the impact of this role is largely positive for communities, the media organisations receive no recognition or compensation for acting as a work-ready training hub and lose efficiencies in the continual cycle of training and replacing new staff.

The First Nations media sector resources over 40 organisations and over 120 licensed services with between 500-600 staff, including part-time and casual employees, working in organisations in urban, regional and remote locations.²³ Approximately 28

²² Bureau of Communications research analysis and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011), Census of Population and Housing.

²³ Clague, P, *Employment and Skills Development Strategy Report*, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, December 2018

per cent of those positions are full time, with 72% are part-time or casual.²⁴ There is industry desire to increase activities to a scale that would require twice the number of staff that are currently employed across the sector, but budget constraints currently prevent the training of new staff or the capacity to provide career opportunities to people who do undertake training. The Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research developed an *Employment and Skills Development Strategy* in consultation with the sector that outlines a career development action plan, policy recommendations and assistance for First Nations media organisations to meet the IAS Indigenous employment target. It recommends investment in training and targeted employment programs such as traineeships and pathways roles in areas such as management, training, project management, production, technical and IT services.²⁵

The First Nations media and communications industry is a community-controlled sector with significant potential to increase its contribution to Closing the Gap. First Nations media organisations across the country act as training and skills development hubs, empowering people to move into a range of roles within other sectors, such as tourism and resources. The communications sector provides enabling services to support opportunities and outcomes in service sectors, such as health and education, and promotes inclusiveness and participation.²⁶

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

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

The ratio of Indigenous staff employed at First Nations media organisations is approximately 79 per cent. There are currently about 46 FNMOs or other organisations which are funded by NIAA for delivery of broadcasting activities, of which 22 have a non-Indigenous manager, although nineteen of those organisations have more than 90% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment levels. This indicates an area of focus within the First Nations media industry to upskill and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

²⁴ Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

²⁵ Clague, P, *Employment and Skills Development Strategy Report*, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, December 2018

²⁶ Department of Communications and the Arts, *The Communications Sector: recent trends and developments*, Bureau of Communications Research, Commonwealth Government, Canberra, October 2016

people into management positions. Due to the risk associated with changing the manager role in a small organisation, this becomes an issue for small organisations where total staff are often below 9 employees.²⁷ The Jumbunna Institute reports, 'A holistic approach which facilitates the development of best practice models for overcoming unemployment in Indigenous communities. Good leadership and partnerships between media organisations, stakeholders and government are factors that will significantly contribute to job readiness and the skill capacity of Indigenous peoples in the media sector.'²⁸

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

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

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

Over 2021–22, FNMA has developed multiple successful mentoring programs in partnership with the CMTO, the ABC and other industry partners to develop skills particularly relevant to media and support cross-sector networking. This has included a leadership skills mentoring program tailored specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, with mentoring support provided by Aboriginal and Torres

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

Strait Islander people with established media careers. Feedback on this program has been especially positive, demonstrating the benefit of providing mentoring opportunities to supplement skills-based training units.

FNMA is aware of the opportunities available to some industries through the JobTrainer program, but notes Screen and Media qualifications are not eligible for JobTrainer support. Similarly, the program relies on individuals having the information and means to apply for program support online, a situation that is rarely feasible for people living in remote communities. A Support Officer is required to help navigate the opportunities of these programs adjacent to the media sector, and to provide advice to government agencies to ensure such programs are accessible to trainee workers coming into the communications sector.

Resourcing levels required include:

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

Total request for training and career development programs	\$4.3m per annum
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'I think it's been particularly important for us to put our own Indigenous community spin on all the messaging. A lot of the messaging might have been a language or a style that wouldn't resonate with our community listeners. It's not just about saying "hey you mob" to make it resonate, it's about using appropriate sort of language and making it culturally sensitive to our needs.'

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

Content production

There are strong correlations between media portrayal, self-determination and wellbeing. For this reason, some of the key themes from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody identified that 'action is needed to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the media, and to educate non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve community attitudes and address ignorance.'²⁹ For decades, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly within the First Nations media sector, have strived to combat racial stereotyping, inaccurate and imbalanced reporting within mainstream media. This has positively influenced the ways that First Nations communities perceive themselves and how they are perceived.

The Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2020 shows that nearly half of the Australian population thinks media usually portrays Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a negative way (44% of the general community and 46% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people), with only 12% of the general community and 19% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community believing that media portrays Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people positively. This has a significant impact on racism and unconscious bias faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the context of 32% of the general community citing media as their main source of information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.³⁰

First Nations media organisations must serve their communities. In an era where media delivery is both fragmented and convergent, this means being in all the spaces that audiences expect to access content. Radio stations are now expected to be 'more than just radio' by audiences, funders, content-maker and marketing platforms. The era of media convergence has made it easier for First Nations radio stations to produce and deliver content across a range of platforms. Therefore, in addition to providing 24-hour radio services, First Nations radio stations are producing an average weekly total of 30 hours podcast content per week, 209 hours of video content and 51 hours of online only content sector-wide.³¹ The production of multi-platform content and social media publishing takes additional time and skills which are not accounted for in the operational funding provided to First Nations media organisations but must be done to meet audience expectations and maintain community relevance.

Content production is vital to the maintenance and preservation of First Nations languages and culture. First Nations produced content also serves to enhance social cohesion, truth-telling, education and understanding of First Nations culture across

²⁹ Deloitte, *Review of the Implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody*, Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet, 2018

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Survey Matters, *Community Broadcasting Sector Programming & Community Development Census*, CBAA, June, 2017

the wider Australian society. Eighty-one percent of Indigenous licensed radio stations report regular engagement with marginalised or disadvantaged communities through their program content.³² Social Ventures Australia noted the core business of Indigenous Broadcast Services is to broadcast information, news, interviews, music, community events and stories to large audiences and that content funding allows our services to 'keep culture alive by creating culturally rich environments and by recording, preserving and broadcasting culture in an appropriate way. IBs also play a crucial role in increasing community cohesion, building community resilience and supporting people into meaningful employment.'³³

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

First Nations media organisations in all locations apply for project-based support to produce documentaries, animations, special series, outside broadcasts, language revitalisation initiatives, podcasts and multimedia productions across radio and screen content. Limited funding for content production by Indigenous and community broadcasters is available through the Community Broadcasting Foundation. Alternative sources of funding for First Nations media content, beyond NITV for video content, are limited. Local producers are unlikely to have the level of broadcast credits required for funding through screen agencies and need support to develop their own skills and provide on-the-job training and mentoring for others. Similarly, existing levels of funding rarely allow for producing the cross-platform content, podcasts and online content modern audiences seek. Increased funding support for content production exponentially increases the capacity of First Nations broadcasters to increase social value through engagement with stakeholders, musicians, artists and the Australian Government.³⁴

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

- The loss of video content funding through changes to the Indigenous Broadcasting Program in 2007

³²Survey Matters, *Community Broadcasting Sector Programming and Community Development Census*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, June 2017

³³ Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

³⁴ Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

- Inadequate funding under the IAS for content production, which is currently drawn from already over-extended operational funds
- Limited funding for content production is available through the Community Broadcasting Foundation for Indigenous and other community broadcasters.

The production of radio and television content projects varies between about \$5,000-\$60,000 depending on the scope and production requirements of the series or documentary.³⁵ A co-investment of \$2million per annum through the IAS would likely fund around 50-60 radio and video projects per annum to produce one-off documentaries, interviews, series and increase audience engagement through increased outside broadcast activity and multiplatform content delivery. This would support the development of freelance careers in media and filmmaking. There is significant scope to increase the training and employment opportunities created by project-based production work. FNMA suggests the IAS could co-fund content projects or provide matched funding to the Department of Communications investment.

Total request for content production	\$2m per annum
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³⁵ Community Broadcasting Foundation, funded projects: <https://cbf.org.au/grants/successful/>

Digital Archiving

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

However, infrastructure and human resources are required to undertake this urgent work in the remaining timeframe to preserve priority recordings. It also presents an opportunity for the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in culturally meaningful roles as Community Archive Workers to engage in the extensive and time-consuming work of digitising, cataloguing and managing community access for these collections. A National Plan for Preserving First Nations Audiovisual Collections has been developed by First Nations Media Australia in partnership with the National Film & Sound Archive, AIATSIS and Traditional Custodians. The plan outlines agreed standardised methods and metadata cataloguing for a digitisation process. Over 30 organisations are identified as beneficiaries of the Audiovisual Collections Plan.

The cultural sensitivities relating to these recordings makes sending them to centralised Government agencies inappropriate. First Nations communities must retain control of community collections with oversight from Traditional Custodians. Social Ventures Australia noted the trust Indigenous Broadcasting Services have developed within communities makes them well placed to manage ‘a cultural archive of national significance.’³⁶ On-country archiving work is more cost-effective, enabling local decision-making about access and media handling, and identifying cultural metadata for cataloguing, and provides meaningful employment opportunities in remote and regional locations.

In 2022, a First Nations Media Digitisation Facility was built in Mparntwe Alice Springs in partnership with AIATSIS and with funding support from the Aboriginal Benefit Fund. The FNMA Archiving Team are on track to move into the facility in early 2023, along with FNMA office staff. During 2022, FNMA’s Archiving Team provided support, equipment and training for First Nations organisations across Central Australia and

³⁶Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

further afield (such as PAKAM). This included digitising tapes for over 14 First Nations stakeholders and providing equipment for 6 organisations to digitise their own collections. The Alice Springs Archiving Team is to share their learnings about digitising material and training digital access archive workers on Country with other First Nations media services and organisations.

In view of the limited timeframe available to preserve priceless First Nations cultural heritage stored on magnetic tape, FNMA recommends that funding be provided to support digital skills training and wages for a network of localised digitisation officers and technical equipment in digitisation hubs located within First Nations media organisations across the country. For example, 10 digitisation officers could be funded to help archive precious historical material across at First Nations media organisations located across a range of areas, such as the Kimberley, Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Torres Strait, Port Augusta, Townsville, East Arnhem Land and other locations.

Localised archiving work will provide digital skills training and employment opportunities for First Nations people in regional and remote areas, as well as facilitating greater community access to heritage audio-visual collections under the oversight from Traditional Custodians, which will significantly contribute to the maintenance of culture and languages.

Additional funding will be required to provide technical equipment to support digitisation at these hubs, especially for analog playback equipment and replacement parts. Analog playback equipment is required in processing audiovisual material stored on magnetic tape and is increasing in price as analog technology becomes more obsolete. Investment in analog equipment will support the long-term preservation of cultural stories and histories through the digitisation of material on magnetic tape.

Investment required:

- 10 x digitisation officers (\$800,000)
- Analog playback equipment for 10 digitisation hubs (\$600,000)

Total request for digital archiving	\$1.4m
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Address recruitment and retention barriers

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

The First Nations media industry produces professional media services, and yet our workers are often receiving wages that are well below modern award rates. These low wages produce challenges for staff retention as skilled and experienced media practitioners seek higher paying jobs in other sectors and offer little incentive for career advancement within the sector.³⁷ Only 12% of staff at Indigenous licensed radio stations are aged 26 years or younger.³⁸ Additional funding support could redress these numbers as it would create opportunities to engage young employees in training options and create space to offer ongoing employment with career development. This in turn would enable First Nations media organisations to build capacity whilst ensuring that key roles are recompensed with an award-wage.

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

The award wage for a radio broadcaster is \$999.90 per week.³⁹ In 2021, the average salary for a Radio Announcer in Australia is \$55,625 annually (approx. \$1,070 weekly).⁴⁰ The minimum award wage for a full-time employee working in the commercial radio industry (which includes support staff and trainees) is \$ 893.60 per week. By comparison, rates of payment under the Community Development Program (CDP) – remote Australia's Work for the Dole scheme – have historically been significantly lower than minimum wages hours (for example, around \$11.60 per hour compared

³⁷ Clague, P, *Employment and Skills Development Strategy Report*, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, December 2018

³⁸ Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

³⁹ FairWork Ombudsman, Pay Guide: Broadcasting, Recorded Entertainment and Cinemas Award 2010, Australian Government, viewed 19 January 2023. https://awardviewer.fwo.gov.au/award/show/MA000091#P394_27341

⁴⁰ Fuller, David, Commercial aRadio Industrial Awards – Rates of Pay, Commercial Radio Australia, 1 July 2021 <http://www.commercialradio.com.au/hr-training/commercial-radio-awards-pay-rates>

to the minimum wage of \$18.29 per hour in 2018).⁴¹ As CDP is the only available support for remote media organisations to employ reporters in communities, in effect this means their broadcasters work for below minimum wage rates which creates a barrier to both the recruitment and retention of media workers. While FNMA understands the CDP is currently under review with a new remote jobs program to be announced in 2023, we request that any remote employment initiatives seeking to provide First Nations people with 'real jobs, proper wages and decent conditions' include remote broadcasters and media workers within its scope and support genuine career development pathways which reflect industry award rates for media workers.

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

Total request to align with Award wage rates	\$2.2m per annum
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⁴¹ Rod Campbell, Bill Browne and Matt Grudnoff, *Remote control: The Community Development Program, remote Australia's Work for the Dole scheme*, 2 May 2018, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/remote-control-the-community-development-program-remote-australias-work-for-the-dole-scheme/>

3. Improve community-controlled sector sustainability

Grow business development

A lack of operational funding has constrained the sector's capacity for business development and increased dependence on government funding, rather than increased financial sustainability. Indigenous Broadcasting Services receive approximately 75% of their funding through NIAA and an additional 8% from other government sources at the state and federal level.⁴² Social Ventures Australia found that, 'Indigenous Broadcasting Services have demonstrated their capacity to generate their own revenue but there is a minimum resourcing threshold that must be maintained to enable Indigenous Broadcasting Services and their staff to diversify their activities and funding.' Further, the report found there is a minimum resourcing threshold required for First Nations media organisations to explore new projects that may attract more funding, employ more community members and better suit the needs of their community, if they have capacity to hire and train staff to do so.⁴³

In its *Australia's Tech Future* report, the Australian Government identified, 'while it is hard to predict the skills in demand in the future, we know employers are looking for workers who have a combination of transferrable digital skills and collaborative, creative, communication and entrepreneurial and problem-solving skills.'⁴⁴ The First Nations media industry is well placed to expand on existing activities to generate new employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in these roles, as well as prepare workers with the skills to meet these emerging business demands.

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

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

⁴² Social Ventures Australia, 2017

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Department of Industry, Science and Technology, *Australia's Tech Future*, Australian Government, Canberra, December 2018 <https://www.industry.gov.au/data-and-publications/australias-tech-future>

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

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

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

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

Demand and competition for operational funding has also increased with significant increases in the number of broadcast services (stations and outlets) over the past 30 years. In the past decade, the lack of CPI increase has meant a loss of over \$4million to the sector in real terms as the cost of power, equipment, wages, copyright licence fees and other operational expenses has increased. For example, the operating costs of transmission sites (electricity and lease expenses) increased 49.6% between 2011-12 and 2015-16 across the community broadcasting sector.⁴⁵ The stagnant funding pool has increased pressure on reserves, resources and personnel, limiting the capacity of First Nations media organisations to absorb income shocks, respond to crises, or address arising opportunities.

Government funding has been supplemented by sponsorship and social entrepreneurship income sources. Over the past 15 years, economic pressure has resulted in shrinking sponsorship income with Indigenous licensed radio stations reporting a reduction from an average 248 minutes of sponsorship per week in 2011-12 to 97 minutes per week in 2015-16, with an average revenue rate of \$10 per minute.⁴⁶ In many instances, these figures dropped further still during the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁴⁵ Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

⁴⁶ Ibid.

First Nations broadcast services increasingly draw on funds from the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF) for development and operations (transmission costs, salaries, training costs, equipment and infrastructure upgrades) and for emergency relief to cover shortfalls in operational and emergency funding available from the NIAA. The CBF reports a rise in applications from First Nations broadcasters, who comprise over 30 % of community broadcasting services, to its non-competitive Specialist Radio Programming grants program, through which it administers funding from DITRDCA to community broadcasting stations and sector peak bodies. In the October 2022 Budget, the government renewed its commitment to funding the community broadcasting sector over the next four years, including sector development initiatives (\$4M) and annual indexation. This incorporates funding just under \$1.3 M for First Nations broadcasting specialist programming over 2023–24, with increases through indexation over the four years. Although the reinstatement of this funding is welcome, it does not represent a substantial increase in funding for First Nations – and other specialist broadcasters – programming beyond the application of annual indexation.

By contrast, the October 2022 Budget committed \$83.7 million to restoring savings from the indexation pause applied to the ABC's operational funding in 2018–19. Likewise, while the October 2022 Budget promised funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations to address CPI and increase their capacity to deliver services, there were no increases in operational funding for the First Nations media sector despite the role it plays in providing essential information services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The lack of indexation on operational funding for the First Nations media sector has long been a major barrier for the growth of local First Nations media services and urgently needs to be addressed. FNMA requests the Government provide an additional \$4.4million per annum, bringing the total amount of operational funding provided to support the approximately 43 organisations delivering radio, television and online services to reasonably address CPI.

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