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# A Roadmap for First Nations Digital Inclusion

Submission to the  
First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group

31 July 2024

Community Broadcasting Foundation acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which our organisation was founded. We pay our respects to all First Nations people across Australia, including those sitting at the heart of community broadcasting. We recognise and honour their enduring connection to country and community and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as our land's first storytellers.

We acknowledge the resilience and wisdom of First Nations people, honouring Elders who have guided in the past and those who continue to inspire us today. **Always was, always will be.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this submission may feature or link to voices, videos, images and names of individuals who have now passed, alongside content of cultural significance.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback about how the community broadcasting sector can better support First Nations people to access the media and information they need to make decisions about their lives and communities.

Our submission will primarily address the three questions outlined in the 'Media and Broadcasting' section of the *Discussion Paper – First Nations digital inclusion roadmap*<sup>1</sup>, including:

- 1. How can government and industry support First Nations media organisations to be sustainable in the long-term?**
- 2. How can First Nations media organisations be supported to skill and retain staff so that talent is not lost to other organisations?**
- 3. What is working well and what could be improved in the relationship between the media and broadcasting sector and the telecommunications sector?**

## Executive Summary

The First Nations broadcasting and media sector is grounded in the key principles of First Nations self-empowerment and self-determination, equity and equality. It provides primary and essential services for many First Nations Australians and has great potential to further improve First Nations people's lives. Organisations in the sector have grown to realise their potential to inform communities, provide relevant training and employment with dignity, to showcase and develop the creativity of First Nations Australians and to help maintain cultures and practices.

Ultimately, the creativity, connectivity and capability of First Nations broadcasting and media can be leveraged to provide access to stories and information relevant to First Nations Australians and that which can create meaningful change. The importance of access to information and the community broadcasting sector's role in providing this is demonstrated in that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are 37% more likely than the general population to listen to community radio.<sup>2</sup>

As the *Community broadcasting sector sustainability review discussion paper* highlights, the NIAA-commissioned Hugh Watson report 2021<sup>3</sup> found that sector capacity to meet community

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<sup>1</sup> First Nations Digital Advisory Group (1 May 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, Community Radio Listener Survey 2023

<sup>3</sup> Renewing a Vital Indigenous Voice and Community Asset 2021.

and government expectations is limited due to constrained National Indigenous Australians Agency ('NIAA') Indigenous Media and Broadcasting Program ('IMBP') funding that has not increased in a decade. Other contributing factors found include revenue limitations by ACMA regulations, and ageing equipment.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the Community Broadcasting Foundation's ('CBF') application process remains highly competitive with available funding unable to meet the demand as represented by the number and value of requests received per year.

We recognise the real impediment these constraints place on First Nations media and broadcasting sector's capacity and capability, particularly when it comes to employment opportunities and the added constraints experienced by regional and remote First Nations broadcasters where opportunities for revenue generation through membership, fundraising and sponsorship are further limited.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, the CBF acknowledges and supports the key guiding principles outlined in the Advisory Group's Discussion Paper and long-term roadmap vision.

In particular:

- **The importance of place-based approaches** – It is important to stress the diversity of First Nations media-making in the community broadcasting sector, ranging from dedicated First Nations media organisations in capital cities and remote Australia (where challenges are vastly dissimilar), to First Nations program makers delivering programs to audiences on non-Indigenous community radio and television services, including in regional areas.
- **Moving from Closing the Gap to innovation and excellence** – Appropriately paid employment, training and strong governance is integral to the sustainability of the sector. Roadmap 2033 has helped community broadcasters to reframe from a deficit mindset to a vibrant, united story of purpose and impact – there is much to celebrate.
- **First Nations representation** – The importance of cultural safety and responsiveness of the sector to the needs of First Nations communities cannot be underestimated.
- **Technology-agnostic approach to long-term recommendations and solutions** – Community broadcasters need support that ensures that Australians can access community broadcasting across the platforms of their choice. Fit for purpose broadcasting and digital infrastructure and facilities require sustainable funding,

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<sup>4</sup> Hugh Watson Report 2021; DTRDCA, Community broadcasting sector sustainability review discussion paper, p.10.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.9.

including reliable access to communication services and infrastructure in remote First Nations communities, closing the digital divide.

The CBF takes this opportunity to reiterate its support for First Nations Media Australia's (FNMA) Calls to Action which support the prominence of First Nations media and a self-determined model of broadcasting.

The CBF is committed to working with the First Nations broadcasting and media sector in support of a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector that is sustainable and delivers high quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We recognise First Nations broadcasting and media as an independent sector and an important part of the broader media landscape with unique characteristics and challenges requiring its own distinct funding to support Outcome 17 of the National Agreement to Close the Gap. Thus, the CBF [Supporting Content Framework](#) identifies First Nations broadcasting as a core priority in which the CBF supports the production of content and projects that acknowledge the unique status of First Nations people as First Australians and include people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as the drivers of projects; adhering to the CBF [First Nations Engagement Protocols](#).

If the funding submissions from First Nations Media Australia ('FNMA') and Community Broadcasting Association of Australia ('CBAA') are endorsed by the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group and supported by Government, and investment in the vision outlined in Roadmap 2033 is made, significant progress would be made to advance First Nations broadcasting and media so it can reach its full potential (see Appendix A).

The CBF welcomes the opportunity for further dialogue about how the CBF can work together with the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group and with Government to deliver good outcomes for the First Nations broadcasting sector.

## CBF's support for First Nations media

The CBF First Nations fund is predominantly distributed via our Content and Specialist Radio Programming grants programs given that operational support is largely provided to the First Nations community media sector via NIAA's IMBP. For more information about how we distribute grants, see Appendix B.

Below are case examples illustrating the role our funding plays in amplifying the social, economic, and cultural impact of First Nations media on communities:



*Russell Dann (Right) showing Henry Augustine (Left) how to use the new digital console in Beagle Bay.*

### PAKAM - Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media

CBF funding supported 11 part-time broadcasters in seven communities with a total of \$31,200 (in addition to wages) for the PAKAM satellite radio network between July 2023 - December 2023. These funds greatly assisted broadcasters to achieve their goal of at least eight hours of local RIBS programming contributed to the network daily. RIBS stations that were supported are in Balgo, Bidadanga, Beagle Bay, Djarindjin, Looma, Warmun, Kalumburu and Yungngora.

Improvements enabled by this funding are Closing the Gap in two key areas:

**Closing the Gap Target 16: Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing .**

**Closing the Gap Target 17: People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.**



*8PAW radio presenters and 8CCC station manager Benjamin Erin collaborating on the Desert Harmony Festival 2023.*

PAW Media – 40 hours/week of First Nations programming across 10 remote communities

CBF funding enabled PAW Media to maintain consistent RIBS broadcasting across 10 remote communities throughout 2023/24, with site visits and engagement in Yuendumu, Willowra, Nyirripi, Yuelamu and Lajamanu. Kintore and Ti-tree continue to have regular live broadcasting with a Pintubi broadcaster and an Anmatjerre broadcaster.

PAW Media collaborated with SBS Audio for Indigenous Literacy Week where they released 7 episodes of Jukurrpa stories on NITV Radio and the 8PAW radio network. This collaboration provides opportunities for larger audiences to engage with PAW and to hear stories told in language.

PAW continues to work toward engaging more female-identifying presenters to join the two women from two remote communities regularly broadcasting on air.

Improvements enabled by this funding are Closing the Gap in two key areas:

**Closing the Gap Target 16: Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing .**

**Target 16: By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken.**

**Closing the Gap Target 17: People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.**

**Target 17: By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion.**





*Yolnu Radio broadcasts from the beach.*

Yolnu Matha News – delivering critical information in language

The Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Aboriginal Corporation (ARDs) was provided funding to produce Yolnu Matha news. The funding supports critical radio programming, training for new presenters, and the delivery of high-quality news in Yolnu matha – comprised of over 40 languages of the East Arnhem region. One particular highlight was the Yolnu Radio All-Stars program - a weekly program that runs for two hours on Saturdays and where the studio is open to all-staff at ARDs. It is a Yolnu-led program and typically discusses topics relevant to the region. The programming has a positive impact on the broader community and helps to ensure that news and current affairs can be heard by community members in their first language. Some of this messaging is complex, such as the shifting restrictions and health messages provided throughout COVID-19.

Funding for this program is helping achieve Closing the Gap targets:

**Target 16: By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken.**

**Target 17: By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion.**





*Darren McElroy and his great-uncle Alfred Joseph Chief Walker*

*2BAY (Byron Bay) - 2 hours a week of First Nations programming*

Financial support for the Wirritjin show has amplified the voices of marginalised groups in the Northern Rivers of New South Wales for almost 10 years now. Presenter Darren McElroy stayed informed with research and music, and was provided with appropriate equipment to produce and present the Wirritjin show to a professional level.

The provision of wages allowed broadcasters the freedom to dedicate time to concentrate on making the Wirritjin show in a respectful and informative manner. Whilst broadcasters receive a travel allowance as part of the grant, much of the wages are used at festivals, gatherings, meetings and on many occasions; including compensation offered to interviewees for travel expenses to Byron Bay in order to attend live interviews.

Funding this program contributes to meeting Close the Gap targets for:

**Target 17: By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion.**



*Triple T presenters attend the Queer Candy festival*

#### 4TTT ( Townsville) - Yaruwala Karuwai First Nations LGBTI program

In September 2023, Triple T welcomed locally produced First Nations LGBTIQA+ program Yaruwala Karuwai to the airwaves. The program was a success and major highlights included participation and reporting from such events as Townsville Queer Candy event, Quayside terminal Townsville port which highlighted local queer community, artists and performers.

Other funded activities include reporting and features for the Yaruwala Karuwai locally and nationally on the National Indigenous Radio Service, Human Rights Conference media attendance, World Pride festival, and National Indigenous Radio Service rebroadcast weekly. This program is a first of its kind on Triple T and has had a positive impact on station activities through the experience of members, participation of the community outside of the program and learnings which have emphasised a team spirit, social cohesion and diversity of the station. In the community, the program has facilitated First Nations voices to be represented on air to discuss complex social issues, educate and encourage participation of those not represented by other local outlets.

Funding of Yaruwala Karuwai supports Closing the Gap in two key areas:

**Target 16: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.**

**Target 17: By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion.**

### 6HRV (Harvey Community Radio, WA) - 2 hours per week of First Nations programming

Two regular weekly programs play a crucial role in highlighting the rich heritage and issues faced by the First Nations community. The shows known as "GKB" and "It's Country," serve as important platforms to communicate and connect with the community. "GKB" not only focuses on Indigenous language, but also serves as a tool for effective communication within the community. "It's Country" provides a spotlight for local and national country music artists, contributing to the promotion of Australian talents.

The Indigenous Community Engagement Officer/Mentor has remained a strong advocate for First Nations communities within the wider Harvey region. Their impactful work, dedication to advocate for First Nations communities and promote culture, history, and Indigenous perspectives is truly commendable.

The funding provided to has enabled the station presenter to continue representing their community and Harvey Community Radio through the engaging shows. The ability to share a sense of pride and satisfaction among the First Nations community, while also teaching new skills, is a significant achievement. The Indigenous Community Engagement Officer's mentorship, particularly with young people, demonstrates a commitment to passing on cultural knowledge and language. Through efforts to teach the Noongar language to both First Nations individuals and other Australians, there is a broader contribution to Australian society having a deeper understanding of its significance and meaning. Overall, the role has a valuable contribution to the region and its diverse communities by fostering cultural awareness, communication, and a sense of community pride.

Funding to 6HRV for two hours per week of First Nations programming contributes to four important Closing the Gap goals:

**Target 7: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67 per cent.**

**Target 8: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-64 who are employed to 62 per cent.**

**Target 16: By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken.**

**Target 17: By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion.**





*Triple A Murri Country outside broadcasts.*

Triple A, Murri Country - Driving community engagement and technical sustainability

With CBF funding, a First Nations woman was employed in the training officer role at Brisbane Indigenous Media Association (BIMA - 4AAA) on the lands of the Turbal and Jagera people. This role supported students with their assessments and monitored their course progression to ensure all units in the training plan were completed.

In 2021/22, BIMA underwent a re-branding and is now known as Triple A, Murri Country, which helped increase their engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in south-east Queensland. Triple A also began to present events to drive community engagement, this included staging the first Brisbane Blacks Concert and Brisbane NAIDOC Ball. Their valuable community engagement partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations such as Brisbane ATSICHS and the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health continued throughout this period.

Triple A also established a new research partnership with the Lowitja Institute to learn more about their radio audiences. The CBF grant was also used to complement Triple A's new and more mobile Outside Broadcast van which has tripled the number of OBs per year.

This contributes to four important Closing the Gap goals:

**Target 7: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67 per cent.**

**Target 8: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-64 who are employed to 62 per cent.**

**Target 16: By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken.**

**Target 17: By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion.**

## First Nations broadcasting and media is a community asset

First Nations broadcasting and media production is vital to the preservation and maintenance of First Nations language and culture. A Social Return on Investment Study found that First Nations broadcasting services are “community assets that contribute to strengthening culture, community development and the local economy.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the CBF supports FNMA’s 10 Calls to Action which address challenges facing the sector and set out programs and actions that will support renewal and strengthening of the sector.<sup>7</sup> We particularly highlight the following Calls to Action to this consultation with supporting information drawn from our unique experience and perspective:

- **Operational & Employment Funding (Action 2):** Address the need for adequate operational and employment funding of First Nations broadcasting and media services.
- **Live & Local Expansion Program (Action 3):** Create an innovative program (Live and Local) to expand First Nations radio to unserved areas with significant First Nations populations.
- **Strengthen News Services (Action 4):** Increase the news and current affairs capacity of First Nations broadcasters through a targeted funding program.
- **Upgrade Infrastructure (Action 6):** Upgrade broadcasting and digital infrastructure to meet current industry standards and work health and safety requirements.
- **Annual Content Production Fund (Action 9):** Fund an annual and competitive content production fund for First Nations broadcasters and media producers.
- **Improve Access to Digital Services (Action 10):** Facilitate access to media services and online platforms.

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<sup>6</sup> Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, “More than radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services”, November 2017.

<sup>7</sup> First Nations Media Australia (Website) <https://firstnationsmedia.org.au/about/policy>.

Further information is provided below about these areas of focus.

### Operational & Employment Funding

- Through our grant programs each round we see great potential for increased capacity and capability across the community broadcasting sector, which would greatly contribute to a more sustainable and resilient sector resulting in deeper impact in local communities. However, the CBF application process remains highly competitive with available funding unable to meet the demand as represented by the number and value of requests received per year.
- CBF grant data (see Appendix C) demonstrates that the demand for funds to support station operations, development projects and content production far surpasses the level of available funds to allocate. Each round the community broadcasting sector applies for more support – in our most recent round, there was a 42% increase in value of requests for development and operational support than the total requested funding in the first round the prior year. There is an increasing gap between the average grant amount and the average grant request amount.
- Funding for First Nations Australian media organisations from NIAA’s IMBP has remained static for 10+ years and has reduced in real terms, given inflation and the growth in that part of the sector, with indexation only recently reintroduced. Increasingly, First Nations Australian media organisations are applying for operational support to the CBF to meet the gap in their operational costs that are not being met by NIAA funding. This, together with the growth of First Nations Australian programming on general stations and increased costs of producing content in remote areas, is leading to increased pressure on the CBF’s First Nations and General funding pools.

### Live & Local Expansion Program

- FNMA calls for expansion of radio services into First Nations communities without a primary First Nations Radio service, with a goal of providing services to 53% of First Nations people without access to a First Nations radio service.
- In 2022/23, the CBF supported 21 weekly First Nations programs on general licensed community radio stations through our Specialist Radio Programming grants. Of these, 5 were in locations where there is also a dedicated First Nations community radio station. FNMA has identified the areas of high First Nations population without a dedicated First

Nations service.<sup>8</sup> Of these, 2 communities have an active broadcasting group that could be leveraged (Nunga Wangga in Adelaide/Tarntanya and Orana Broadcasters in Dubbo), and 10 communities, to our knowledge, have no active local licensed First National broadcasting – representing a significant gap in an essential service for those First Nations communities, but also more coordination and support would be required to establish services.

### Strengthen News Services

- There is strong interest and engagement from First Nations media organisations in the CBF-supported Enhanced National News Project, managed by the CBAA. The project contributes to media diversity and social inclusion by providing Australians with a respected, valued and well-utilised alternative news service through building capacity for localism in journalistic reporting, particularly in regional and remote communities, and improves the quality and reliability of news content available to the community broadcasting sector through the development of technical or infrastructure capacity for news distribution. The project coordinates a national collaborative news network, building the capacity of journalists and their organisations by providing resources, support and content sharing across community broadcasting stations that are producing local news. The National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS), FNMA’s Community Reporter team and Ngaarda Media are all participating.
- There is further scope for community broadcasters to address increased media consolidation and news desertification in communities. Roadmap 2033 positions community broadcasters as a community asset that can be leveraged to counter the global trends of collapsing media business models and the rise of misinformation and disinformation. The community broadcasting sector is strategically prioritising securing capacity to meet community need in this area, in order to connect and resource broadcasters to produce trusted, independent, locally relevant news and current affairs, particularly for underserved communities.
- We regularly receive applications from community broadcasters to strengthen their news and current affairs output. In our most recent Content grant round we received 11 applications seeking \$1,476,019 to support the production of news and current affairs programming and provided funding support totalling \$991,688 to 8 of these applicants.

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<sup>8</sup> [Live and Local Program-CFA-2018 Updated.pdf \(firstnationsmedia.org.au\)](#)



Three of the funded news and current affairs projects were for First Nations produced and focused content. For example, Let's Talk is a 1-hour week daily radio program hosted by an all First Nations team, elevating First Nations perspectives, focusing on current affairs and issues of importance to Indigenous people. The program has received multi-year support through our Content grant program and is one of the longest running First Nations affairs radio programs in Australia, soon celebrating its 20 year anniversary. This program is Triple A Murri Country's flagship program and is listened to by a large Indigenous audience in Meanjin/Brisbane and around the country via the National Indigenous Radio Service. This round we also supported 20 hours of celebratory programming incorporating archival recordings that will explore historical First Nations issues as they were first broadcast and what relevance the issue has today.

- There is scope to build on the existing news and current affairs output of the community broadcasting sector through more stations having journalists, participating and creating local news content. There is interest and opportunity to deepen the engagement with First Nations broadcasters with news and current affairs production to strengthen *First Nations* news services enabling positive, balanced and culturally appropriate news with increased local community representation.

#### Upgrade Infrastructure

- Reliable infrastructure requires year-on-year capital investment.
- Roadmap 2033 identifies the need for the sector to secure capacity to meet community need, highlighting the benefit of fit for purpose broadcasting and digital infrastructure and facilities being sustainably funded, including reliable access to communication services and infrastructure in remote First Nations communities, closing the digital divide.
- We also refer you to FNMA's 2022 Infrastructure Audit report which details 22 recommendations.<sup>9</sup>
- There is some opportunity for First Nations broadcasting and media organisations to seek support through the CBF for infrastructure upgrades through our Development & Operations grants program, but the opportunity is significantly limited and highly competitive. The need has been demonstrated but we have insufficient funds to adequately respond to the need. Should the FNMA and CBAA's funding submissions be

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<sup>9</sup> [Infrastructure Audit Report - final.pdf \(firstnationsmedia.org.au\)](#).

supported, additional resourcing would support the need for accessible and reliable infrastructure.

- Challenges relating to consistent access to trained technical personnel, particularly in regional and remote locations is a theme identified in FNMA's Infrastructure Audit. There is scope for collaboration within the community broadcasting sector – and also with the telecommunications industry – to increase access to technical support in remote areas. For example, in our most recent grant round we supported five Remote Indigenous Media Organisations – Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media, Pintupi Anmatjerre Warlpiri Media and Communications, Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjtjara Media, Midwest Aboriginal Media Association (Radio MAMA) and Goolarri Media – to share a full-time technician. All services need reliable technical broadcast and IT support to maintain and manage thirty-three remote broadcast studios and transmission sites. They all need to upskill their local broadcasters and plan for future technological change. None of the application partners had funding provision to be able to employ a dedicated technician individually. Capable casual contractors prepared to travel to the very remote locations are increasingly hard to find, not readily available and are very expensive. The position included a provision for on-call remote support and future development planning and 90 – 100 days of travel to remote locations.

#### Annual Content Production Fund

- We support the call for additional resources to support the production of First Nations content. There is significant interest from First Nations broadcasters and media organisations to produce content reflecting First Nations cultures. Roadmap 2033 identifies the opportunity for more positive representation of First Nations peoples in the media, contributing to Closing the Gap targets.
- There is limited opportunity for First Nations licensed radio services to access funding for productions through our Content grants and in our understanding, limited – if any – opportunity for support for content production via NIAA. In our most recent grant round we funded 17 First Nations content projects totalling \$395,442, with all projects funded from our General funds. Our Content grants are highly competitive with limited scope to meet the significant demand and potential we see through our interactions with applicants. If the FNMA and CBAA funding submissions are supported, First Nations media organisations and First Nations artists will have more opportunity to produce and

share content projects that reflect cultures, languages and beliefs, and nurture a strong sense of belonging among audiences.

## Workforce Strategy

The community broadcasting sector has prioritised growing its capability by investing in its people to attract and develop a skilled, capable workforce. A core strategic objective articulated in Roadmap 2033, is “to create a resilient, thriving sector by leveraging the collective strength, skills and knowledge of thousands of participants” (see Appendix A).

The CBF therefore supports FNMA’s Calls to action, namely:

- Call to Action #2, which calls for workforce capability and funding to cover operations and employment funding of every existing First Nations media organisation. This involves increasing annual funding by \$9 m per annum to provide for \$30m per annum funding: restoring cuts and returning funding to a sustainable level.
- Call to Action #5, which calls for the implementation of a workforce action plan that includes the expansion of formal and informal training programs to build capacity, enable succession and career pathways and help close the gap on Indigenous employment. This includes reviewing employment funding levels to bring salaries in line with industry awards. (\$3.5m).

The community broadcasting sector is a recognised, ongoing critical trainer and incubator of talent and a provider of career pathways and skills development across the industry, including for First Nations Communities.<sup>10</sup> The wider community broadcasting sector aims to deliver a workforce development strategy and identifies that funding is required for adequate employment within First Nations broadcasting and media services.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike the broader community broadcasting sector, the First Nations broadcasting and media sector is predominantly based upon an employment model, with sustainable career pathways being an important and desirable outcome for participants. While there is some volunteerism in the sector, this is not the focus given the limited number of people having alternate income

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<sup>10</sup> FNDIAG Initial Report, <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/roadmap-discussion-paper.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Roadmap 2033, <<https://www.roadmap2033.org.au/resources>> p.22.

streams to provide their time voluntarily, and most workers seeing broadcasting and media as their primary job and are seeking a career pathway within the sector.<sup>12</sup>

For First Nations media organisations to be supported to skill and retain staff, there are two key factors that we observe through our data and consultations with First Nations media:

1. **Salaries of First Nations media workers are below the industry standard**<sup>13</sup>.
2. **Governance standards and training could be improved across the sector – particularly to drive First Nations succession planning within management.**

The [FNMA Employment & Skills Development Strategy](#), developed by Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Technology Sydney, identifies a range of relevant key recommendations, including that increased funding levels would bring salaries in line with Industry Award rates. FNMA highlights that “currently highly skilled and experienced media practitioners are working on sub-award salary levels or having to leave the sector to seek better paid jobs in other sectors.”<sup>14</sup>

We regularly see applications from First Nations media organisations seeking ‘top up’ salary support through our grant programs. The CBF is rarely able to support such applications due to limited available funding and a highly competitive process (see Appendix C).

For example, in a recent grant round, one metropolitan First Nations station applied for "Top-up Broadcaster Salaries". The application was not successful. They identified that “support to top-up the salaries for our team of staff broadcasters will enable us to immediately transition them from Announcer Class 1 to Journalist Grade 5 and offer a more fair and liveable wage as costs of living continue to rise in [city].”

"[The organisation] relies on NIAA funding to operate our radio services. This includes support for staff wages and broadcast operational costs. Over the past 6 years there has been a freeze in NIAA funding levels for Indigenous media organisations while over the same period workloads have increased, the nature of work has radically changed and costs of living have continued to rise.”

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<sup>12</sup> First Nations Media Australia, “Strong Voices, Stronger Communities’ Workforce Development Action Plan 2019-2024”.

<sup>13</sup> Roadmap 2033, <<https://www.roadmap2033.org.au/resources>> p.22; First Nations Media Australia, “Strong Voices, Stronger Communities’ Workforce Development Action Plan 2019-2024”, p.10.

<sup>14</sup> First Nations Media Australia’s “Strong Voices, Stronger Communities’ Workforce Development Action Plan 2019-2024” p.9.

“To be able to sustainably grow our service delivery for audiences and remain culturally authentic and meaningful for our communities we need to be able to pay our team fairly which means seeking additional sources of revenue. Although we do strive to grow organically and toward self-sufficiency, targeted support by the CBF now would help us to retain a currently strong team and give us a surer footing to secure external support in the future.”

Our consultation with FNMA has also identified a desire for governance skills development across the sector. The barriers to overcome sustainable longer-term employment outcomes have been identified.

In our experience, whilst not without its complexities at the grass roots level, exploring the possibility of introducing Directors Fees where they are not in place could be a mechanism to lift governance standards across the community broadcasting sector. It may contribute to a sector-wide uplift in economic and business acumen at the governance-level. This approach could also help to attract and retain First Nations people with appropriate governance skills and qualifications as such individuals are under demand across Government and broader industry where paid Directorships are standard. It is possible the absence of Directors Fees in community broadcasting and media organisations may be a contributing factor to creating barriers to involvement by skilled First Nations board directors. We are not aware of any research that identifies the take-up of Directors Fees within First Nations broadcasting and media organisations. Structured sector-wide access to the available company directors’ courses would also go a long way to addressing governance skills and capabilities.

Roadmap 2033 identifies that expanding training and career pathway programs would allow community broadcasters to acquire new skills that open employment opportunities and increase digital literacy and civic participation – especially for the First Nations broadcasting and media sector.

We recognise the integral role of First Nations broadcasting and media in amplifying the goals sought under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Re-forms. We believe a strongly supported First Nations media sector directly contributes to:<sup>3</sup>

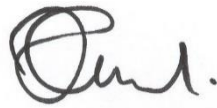
- Priority Reform 1: partnership and shared decision-making;
- Priority Reform 2: community-controlled organisations;
- Target 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap; Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion by 2026.
- Target 16 – cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.

- First Nations community broadcasting services support many other targets of the Closing the Gap Framework across health, education, and economic inclusion.

The CBF welcomes the opportunity for further dialogue about how the CBF can work together with the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group and with Government to deliver good outcomes for the First Nations broadcasting sector.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'I. Hamm', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ian Hamm  
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jo Curtin', with a circular flourish at the beginning.

Jo Curtin  
Chief Executive Officer

# Appendix A

## The future of community media in Australia: Roadmap 2033 – Community broadcasting’s plan for greater impact in every Australian community

Community radio and television has a unique role in Australia.

The sector recently developed a collective vision - a future where community broadcasting is at the heart of every community, where informed, connected communities are strengthened by trusted, independent media. This vision is laid out under community broadcasting sector’s *Roadmap 2033*, which in consultation with key stakeholders including FNMA and a broad cross section of First Nations broadcasting and media organisations, envisions a vibrant sector over the next decade and beyond. a sector that is resourced well and connected deeply. Truly enabled to share content that resonates and connects with the communities each station serves.

Co-sponsored by the CBA and the CBF, Roadmap 2033 was developed through extensive consultation with government, stations, staff and volunteers and industry experts as well as research, data analysis and surveys. The process involved people from large inner urban stations to tiny rural stations and many places in between, in a spirit of cooperation that speaks to the sector’s unity and maturity. People involved in Australia’s community broadcasting sector reflect a modern Australia and continue to welcome all, adding an essential richness to the voices in Australian media.

A core strategic priority of the Roadmap 2033 involves securing capacity to meet community need. The aim is to ensure all Australians can engage with free, independent media. Importantly, this ensures that fit for purpose broadcasting and digital infrastructure and facilities are sustainably funded, including reliable access to communication services and infrastructure in remote First Nations communities, closing the digital divide.

Another core strategic priority of the Roadmap 2033 includes amplifying diverse voices. This includes reflecting First Nations cultures and advancing First Nations self-determination in the decisive decade ahead. This priority aims to reflect the diverse cultures, beliefs and languages of Australia, nurturing a strong sense of belonging among all communities.



In addition, growing capability in the sector under the Roadmap 2033 involves investing in people to attract and develop a skilled and capable workforce. This strategic priority identifies that funding needs to provide for adequate employment within First Nations broadcasting and media services. Furthermore, by investing in strong, effective, collaborative sector organisations, strengthened sector organisations result in a regulatory environment future that is fit for purpose for community and First Nations broadcasters.

The sector invites you to use Roadmap 2033 to identify the needs of the community broadcasting sector, to recognise shared objectives, understand the public benefit of the sector's work and support the sector on its journey.

# Appendix B

## About the Community Broadcasting Foundation ('CBF')

The CBF has been an independent grant-maker since 1984, distributing funding provided by the Australian Government through the Community Broadcasting Program ('CBP'). In 2022/23, the CBF provided \$19.15 million in grants to support the maintenance and development of the community broadcasting sector.

Collaboration and partnership are central to the way we work, building on four decades of strong relationships and expertise. Together with community broadcasters, content producers and sector organisations around the country, the CBF is helping to build a thriving, impactful and resilient future for community media. Our strategic approach is to:

- **Build capability and capacity that secures a long-term future** through strategic and long-term thinking, and a focus on funding a resilient and sustainable sector, encouraging grantees to develop and embed strong governance and practice that strengthens inclusivity and accessibility.
- **Support participation and voice that creates connection and belonging throughout our diverse community** by granting for positive impact, supporting community media organisations to be engaged with and reflective of their community and supporting diverse communities access to information, cultural and local content that enriches communities and enables active participation in community life.
- **Partner and influence that champions community broadcasting** by building awareness of the sector's value and impact, purposeful collaborations and partnerships that deliver positive and meaningful change, sector advocacy and demonstrable impact by capturing, understanding and communicating the value and positive impact community broadcasting creates.

Our grant programs include:

- **Development & Operations grants** that support a resilient, thriving community media sector that reflects, amplifies and enriches the ever-evolving communities of Australia;
- **Content grants** that increase and diversify the voices heard in Australian media by supporting the creation of compelling content;

- **Specialist Radio Programming grants** that assist with the development, production and broadcast costs of specialist radio programming content to meet the needs of particular communities – including First Nations community broadcasting programming, and;
- **Sector Investment grants** that support sector co-ordination activities and large-scale projects that are of benefit to the wider sector.

Our trusted and impartial funding process is aimed at strengthening media diversity and social cohesion through community media organisations that enrich people's lives with a diversity of choice in our media producing local stories, news and cultural content reflecting the many perspectives, people and communities that make up Australia. As a result, audiences hear diverse stories and local information that helps give people a deeper, more connected and cohesive sense of place and the community they live in. Our support of independent, local and authentic voices in creating trusted news, information and cultural content builds community, and strengthens our society and democracy.

The robust peer assessment model we use to allocate our grants is respected by our stakeholders and is the exemplar independent granting model, delivering positive outcomes for community. A recent independent evaluation of the Community Broadcasting Program, conducted by the Social Research Centre, found that the Program had a range of positive impacts for broadcasters. The sector was largely satisfied with the application process and the support from CBF staff was highlighted as adding value.

Within our funding deed with Government, we administer a First Nations fund totalling approximately \$1.4 million per annum. We also regularly support First Nations programming, projects and organisations with our 'general' funding. Appendix C provides detailed information about our funding practices, outcomes and emerging challenges and related themes.

# Appendix C

## Pressure on CBF Grant Programs

The CBF application process remains highly competitive with available funding unable to meet the demand as represented by the number and value of requests received per year.

In Round 1 2024/25, we received a combined total of 327 applications requesting \$28,644,516 across our four grant programs. We allocated funding support for 227 organisations totalling \$17,758,382. With a marked increase in the number of applications received on prior years in both the Development & Operations and Content grant programs, the margin between applications received and supported is widening.

Chart 1: Number of applications received vs supported across CBF grant programs in Round 1 2024/25.

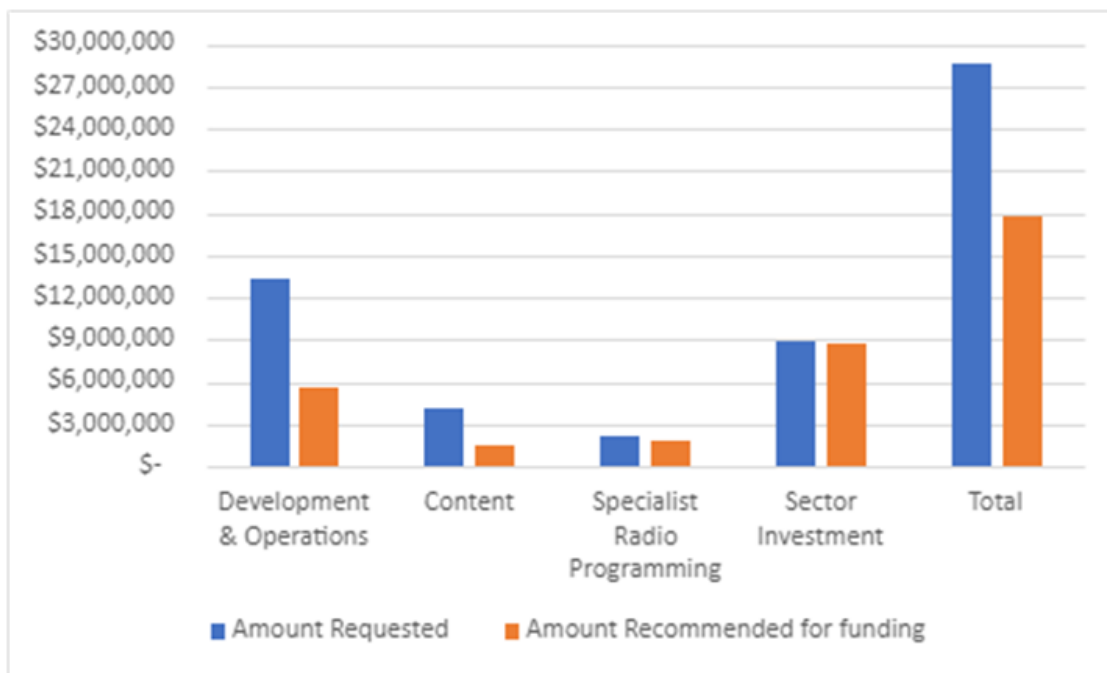


Chart 1 shows the demand for funds to support station operations, development projects and content production far surpasses the level of available funds to allocate. Applicants are pointing to increased operational costs such as electricity and wage growth, increased challenges in generating revenue through events and sponsorship and for some an increased urgency to address development goals such as improving accessibility, replacing aging infrastructure and governance improvements.

### Quotes from applicants

*“Rising transmission costs are straining the station's resources, making it difficult to provide quality programming. Funding support will alleviate the pressure and enable the station to continue serving the*

*community effectively, ensure that (station) can continue to operate as needed and provide the high-quality programming that its listeners depend on.”*

*“(Station) is in need of some operational support in the form of rent, rates and electricity bills assistance. Due to a massive increase in all over the last 12 months and no increase in funding from NIAA and limited sponsorship opportunities in (region).”*

*“Rising external costs and internal development needs have meant that we are now in a position where we are about to exceed our annual income in expenditure and therefore, are needing to seek funding to cover our transmission costs, technical support and equipment upgrades, to enable us to support our operational team to provide continuous, high-quality content to the local community. Without funding to assist with the transmission costs in particular, we would be unable to continue broadcasting. By having these costs covered, it will enable us to recruit and train more volunteers, produce more ethnic content and host more outdoor events, thereby encouraging greater community participation, which is one of the key objectives in our Strategic Plan.”*

*“Premises rental and electricity is far and away our biggest expense, being approximately 47% of our outgoings. Rising costs for utilities and building rent prevent us from adding to our current contingency funds, held in reserve. This will impact us if our current reserves are depleted in case of unforeseen circumstances that may not covered by our contingency funds.”*

We are also receiving more applications, putting further pressure on the available funds.

The most over-subscribed funding lines are the First Nations and ‘General’ funding pools. This shortfall poses significant challenges for the community broadcasting sector to sustain essential services, with impacts felt most significantly across regional Australia (regional and remote community radio stations make up about 70% of potential applicants).

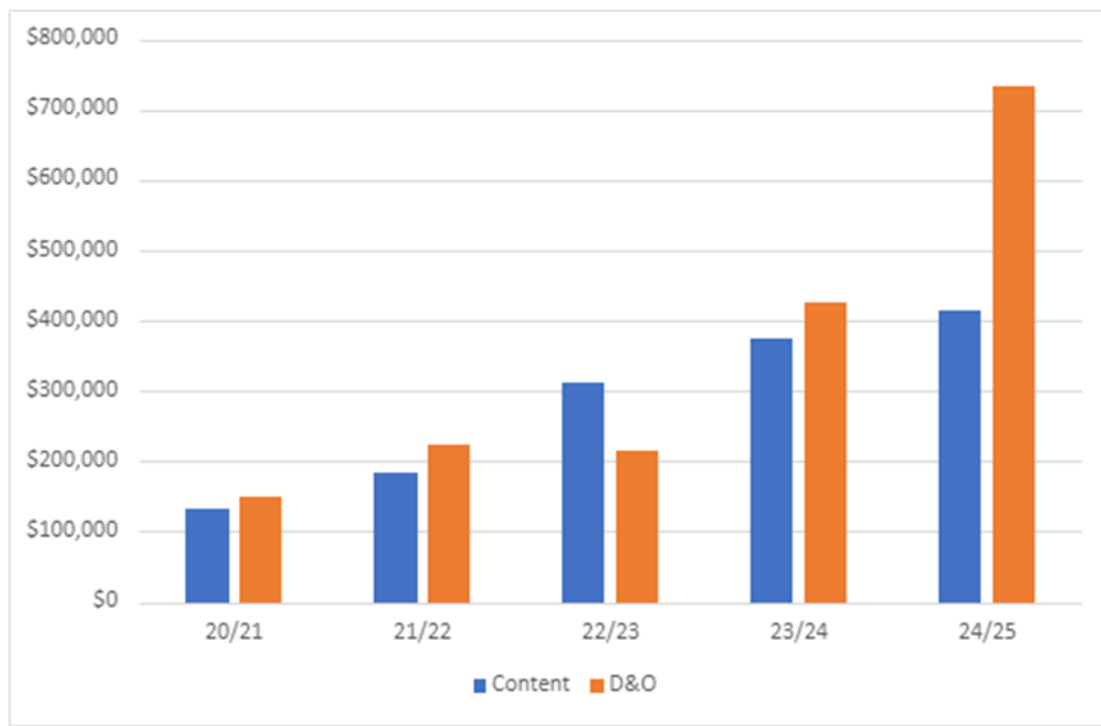
With all available First Nations Content funding this financial year being utilised for Specialist Radio Programming (i.e. generally supporting weekly First Nations programs on non-First Nations licensed stations or at Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services) to support high priority First Nations projects, the flow on effect and pressure on the General funding line was felt.

For example, in 2024/25 during the first round of applications, the CBF offered \$839,275 (81%) of available First Nations funding to 23 applicants to support regular First Nations radio programming via our Specialist Radio Programming grant program. As in previous years, the available First Nations Content funding was totally exhausted by the First Nations Specialist Radio Programming grant applications that were received in the first-round of 2024/25 applications.

This places the already highly competitive 'General' funds under even greater demand as this is the fund that all CBF applicants are eligible to access.

Chart 2 below illustrates the trend of increasing levels of 'General' funding being allocated to First Nations organisations.

*Chart 2: General funds allocated to First Nations organisations over the last 5 years*



## Appendix D

### Response to other aspects of the consultation - data sharing: CBF's Outcomes and Evaluation Framework

The CBF is investing in our data capabilities and welcome the opportunity to work on data sharing with organisations as relevant.

We have recruited a full time Outcomes and Evaluation Analyst, who in their first year of employment are charged with developing an organisational Outcomes Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. This includes streamlining and aligning the current grant program level evaluation frameworks and deepening their focus on grant outcomes. This new organisational framework will allow the CBF to measure and demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of our grant programs in line with our Strategic Plan and Roadmap 2033.

To date, an Outcomes Framework has been designed to clearly articulate the CBF's critical path between grant programs, intended outcomes for grantees and their participants, and broader sector and community impacts. We are currently in the evaluation design phase whereby we are devising the key evaluation questions that will guide all our data collection and analysis, in order to measure our impact and responsiveness to the sector's needs and goals. Anticipated timeline for implementation of the first stage of this new framework is in line with the Round 1 2025/26 granting period.