



Coalition of Peaks 2019 Community Engagements - Independent Review

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Two Point Co. acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land, sea and skies - Australia's First Peoples. We are grateful to those who have come before us and who have nurtured and protected Country for future generations, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present.

ABOUT TWO POINT CO.

Two Point Co. is a 100% Indigenous-owned consultancy, founded by Jason Timor and Tiffanie Ireland, two well respected Indigenous engagement professionals with a genuine track record in practical approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic inclusivity.

We specialise in:

- Capturing a genuine Indigenous voice to inform policy and program design.
- Uncovering shared value opportunities for Indigenous communities, corporates and government, and
- Defining and communicating how policies and programs make a tangible difference in Indigenous communities.

Two Point Co. is passionate about an inclusive Australia. One that provides the opportunity for everyone to participate in a thriving economy and to contribute to a bright future for our country and our children.

We are a Supply Nation registered organisation.

INTRODUCTION

Two Point Co. were contracted by the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks), as an independent Indigenous expert, to review their approach to engaging representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their organisations about the next phase of Closing the Gap. The purpose of the review was to ascertain if the approach had met the objectives of the community engagements and determine if the activities were undertaken in ways that were fair, accessible and transparent. It was also to include an analysis of engagement materials including completed meeting records and participation evaluation sheets.

Two Point Co. has been engaged as a completely independent party to undertake this evaluation. We do not have existing relationships with any member organisation of the Coalition of Peaks and there are no conflicts of interest. This report has been prepared independently and without interference and the findings represent the views of Two Point Co. only.

The engagements led by the Coalition of Peaks are a result of an historic Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap that was agreed between the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), led by the Commonwealth, and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations on Closing the Gap (Coalition of Peaks) in March 2019. The Partnership Agreement envisages that for the first time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, through their peak body representatives, will share decision making on Closing the Gap with governments.

The Partnership Agreement sets out how governments and the Coalition of Peaks will work together to agree on a new national agreement on Closing the Gap including new targets and implementation and monitoring arrangements. It also establishes a Joint Council for Closing the Gap comprising representatives of the Coalition of Peaks and Ministers from all jurisdictions. It was agreed that in the lead up to negotiations around a new National Agreement, the Coalition of Peaks (now numbering nearly 50 organisations) should lead engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their organisations across Australia.

Between September and December 2019, the Coalition of Peaks in partnership with the state, territory and federal governments, led engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their representatives about the next phase of Closing the Gap. The objectives of the engagements were to:

- Hear from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations on what changes are needed to improve their lives, and
- Build understanding and support for priority reforms and key elements of a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement) and how they are to be achieved.

The following paragraphs address Two Point Co's assessment of the critical channels and touch points utilised by the Coalition of Peaks to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities.

● APPROACH TO THE ENGAGEMENTS BY THE COALITION OF PEAKS

Historically, engagements with representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about government policy, such as Closing the Gap, are carried out by public servants. It is understood, however, that the Coalition of Peaks asked to make a break with the past by leading these engagements, consistent with sharing decision making in the Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap. This was supported by all of the Australian governments and it possibly constitutes the first time ever that leaders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations have led consultations on government policy. This included senior representatives of the member organisations of the Coalition of Peaks chairing face to face meetings across Australia and convening the discussions including presenting background and facilitating feedback. It also included the Coalition of Peaks taking responsibility for designing the approach to the engagements and producing engagement tools which were provided to governments to support. This is usually done the other way around and independent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations. Two Point Co. believes that this was an excellent innovation that contributed to the success of these engagements.

The Coalition of Peaks, in partnership with governments, designed a four-tier methodology for the engagements;

1. Coalition of Peak member organisations engaging with their own membership;
2. A series of state and territory engagements with communities and organisations, led by the Coalition of Peaks and in partnership with relevant state and territory governments;
3. National forums with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and subject matter experts, led by the Coalition of Peaks and in partnership with the Commonwealth Government; and
4. An online survey accessible to the public.

Two Point Co. supports this four-tier approach as it provided multiple ways in which people could engage, increasing the cross section of those providing feedback.

The Coalition of Peaks have also committed to making public, the outcomes of the engagements and it is expected that this will occur shortly. This is a critical part of the process included to allow representatives to know what was said, that their voices have been heard and to ultimately see how it has been taken account of in the proposed National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Unfortunately, publishing the outcomes of consultations is not usually undertaken by governments.

The Coalition of Peaks also proposed to governments that it would be beneficial to have an independent review of the engagements. In proposing this, a key consideration was that an independent review could give more confidence to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and governments that the outcomes of the engagements discussed in the engagement report were genuine and should be able to inform the National Agreement. This is also an important innovation that Two Point Co. supports to increase the accountability of those undertaking consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



● EVALUATION OF THE ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

DEVELOPMENT OF ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

The Engagement Tools were developed by the Coalition of Peaks with the assistance of Gilimbaa, an Indigenous creative agency that created the design, illustrations and layout. In the spirit of the Partnership Agreement the state, territory and federal governments were provided the opportunity to review, provide feedback and endorse all materials.

DISCUSSION BOOKLET

The Discussion Booklet provided an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, and key stakeholders to understand the context of the consultations, the methodology for engagement, the role of the Coalition of Peaks and insight into the Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap. It also explained what would happen with the feedback which is good practice and often not done in consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Discussion Booklet demonstrates that the Coalition of Peaks were upfront with representatives of communities and organisations about what the current situation is, what they were seeking to achieve, and how.

The document provided extensive detail on the three priority action areas proposed by the Coalition of Peaks to accelerate improvements in Closing the Gap. Questions were asked which provided a further opportunity to shape face-to-face discussions. Whilst this document is complex and detailed, the content meets the needs of stakeholders who seek engagement in a written form verses an illustrative approach.

The layout of the document is complementary to the content which effectively provides a briefing to stakeholders in preparation for feedback to the Coalition of Peaks and government.

RECORD OF MEETINGS

Providing records of meetings, the content, number of attendees, locations, dates and times and facilitator details is an excellent way to confirm the meetings occurred and that consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities reflected the objective of the engagements. This is also evidenced by feedback from the content of the face-to-face meeting reports and evaluation sheets.

The template is supported and complemented by the content outlined in the Talking Points and Illustrative Story documents demonstrating a consistent and planned approach to engagement and recording of the discussions.

The content in the meeting records indicates strongly that the Coalition of Peaks maintained a high level of commitment to their leadership role and to seeking the voices and insights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives regarding Closing the Gap.

Fundamentally, this tool is a demonstration of the Coalition of Peaks' commitment to holding themselves accountable to their mission and ensuring that key issues raised during face-to-face meetings are recorded appropriately. It demonstrates good practice.

● EVALUATION OF THE ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

ILLUSTRATIVE STORY

The illustrative story complements the Discussion Booklet by providing an alternative approach to engaging representatives on the engagements' objectives and processes. By the nature of the document, it is a more broadly accessible method of information sharing and is easy to understand, particularly during the face-to-face consultations as the facilitator followed the Talking Points document.

Two Point Co. is aware that many Indigenous organisations use this type of visual storytelling for their own governance and planning sessions and it was good to apply it in this context.

Feedback from the face-to-face engagements found in the evaluation sheets highlighted the value of the illustrative story in making it easier for participants to understand the content, objective of engagement and provide their individual input.

SUGGESTED TEXT FOR INVITATIONS TO MEETINGS

The template for the invitation provides clear and concise information on the objective of the face-to-face consultation. Each state/territory was given the opportunity to adapt it to their own circumstances. The template was quite long and a more visual and less text heavy invitation could have been used.

It is Two Point Co's understanding that most jurisdictions customised the invitations prior to distributing them and this could have resolved the challenge around the template's length.

ONLINE SURVEY

The online survey provided an opportunity for other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the public at large to contribute to the engagements. The online content directing respondents to the survey is clear, accessible, and user-friendly with no delays in loading.

The total responses (almost 1700) demonstrate that the survey was well communicated, reasonably accessible and well received. This response rate is highly commendable and can be directly attributed to the extensive campaign executed by the Coalition of Peaks to allow for representatives who did not attend the engagements and the public to have their say.

It can be assumed that people in remote locations may have had challenges accessing the survey (for a variety of reasons including poor infrastructure, mobile service, access to computers etc.). However, in the absence of data relating specifically to the regional or Local Government Area (LGA) location of the respondents this cannot be verified.

From a user experience perspective, the survey is quite lengthy at 39 questions and the impact of this was demonstrated by the continual decrease in responses to both free text and multiple-choice questions.

• EVALUATION OF THE ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

MEETING PARTICIPANT EVALUATION SHEET

The meeting evaluation sheets completed by participants in the face-to-face sessions demonstrate a range of experiences, notably most positive, some providing opportunity for improvements and a few negative. For example, some participants expressed the need for longer meeting times, more notice of meeting date, time and location and time for further consultation with local community members and services prior to the meetings.

It would have been beneficial to include questions relating to how participants heard about the sessions, how they were engaged and if the sessions were useful and easy to follow in order to comprehensively evaluate the various engagement touch points.

MEDIA PLAN

There is a good spread of television and radio in the media plan. NACCHO, on behalf of the Coalition of Peaks, distributed media releases for the engagements communicating meeting dates and the details of a contact person. It could have been beneficial to utilise more print media either through online news or newspapers.

We were advised by the Coalition of Peaks team that notice boards in local peak organisations were used to display flyers informing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities about the face-to-face sessions and online survey. This may have attributed to the high engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. However, it is difficult to make this link as neither the online survey nor evaluation sheets asked how community members had heard about the engagements and/or where they were getting their information from.

OUTCOMES OF THE ENGAGEMENTS

A total of almost 70 face-to-face engagements were facilitated across all states and territories reaching almost 2350 people in capital cities, remote communities and regional towns. In addition to this almost 1700 people completed the online survey.

Feedback from the face-to-face engagements is overwhelmingly positive with the majority of participants indicating that they either agree or strongly agree that the meetings:

- helped them to understand who the Coalition of Peaks are;
- helped them to understand what was going to happen next on Closing the Gap;
- provided opportunities to ask questions, and
- provided guidance on where to find more information about the Coalition of Peaks.

Many people shared their gratitude for the opportunity to collaborate with other community members with one Queensland attendee reflecting on the significance of the discussions - "Congratulations to QAIHC for this engagement and leadership around such an important reform agenda". Another reflected on the impact that these discussions will have on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children sharing that "it takes a village to raise a child. Our children will bring peace to our planet".

One attendee shared that it is "helpful that this is not another tick box" whilst a few others shared praise for the facilitators and how the meetings were managed.

Of the small percentage who shared negative feedback, this was predominantly related to the length of the engagement sessions with a number of people commenting that the sessions were too short and it would have been beneficial to have more time to discuss the priority reforms in more detail. Others indicated that it would have been beneficial to have more time to consider the priority reforms ahead of the meetings. Several negative feedback responses also came from one meeting in Victoria relating to a lack of notice about the meeting and key representatives being unable to attend.

Historically, Indigenous communities have struggled with being consulted about policies and programs that affect them, and a lack of follow up and follow through. Many of the attendees at the face-to-face engagements shared that they had felt heard and that it was a genuine opportunity to contribute to this important agenda. Many people also shared that it is critical for the consultations to continue on an ongoing basis, particularly after the agreement is settled.



CONCLUSION

On review of the materials provided by the Coalition of Peaks, it is evident that the most important objective of the national engagements was to ensure opportunities were provided to representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their organisations to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences about Closing the Gap including its future.

We were informed that language translators/ interpreters were offered by the Coalition of Peaks for those engagements that may have needed them. As the engagements were designed to consult with representatives of communities, the peak bodies that organised the engagements and government officials did not identify this as a priority and this offer was not utilised broadly.

Historically, the outcome of consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be unclear, overwhelming, frustrating and at times diminishing for communities. The structure and consistency of the engagements in this case, however, provided guidance on the objectives and created space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to contribute to discussions about the three priority areas and new targets.

The engagements demonstrated a commitment to designing and providing various ways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, service providers and other key stakeholders to add their point of view to the discussions about Closing the Gap.

Ongoing consultations and engagements are critical after the Agreement is finalised to ensure that this important dialogue remains a national priority. It will build confidence amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples that they really are the foundation for Closing the Gap, and they have a genuine say. Individual feedback in the evaluation sheets strongly supported this.

We conclude that the campaign to mobilise the community to participate in the engagements was effective, as evidenced by survey responses, meeting attendee numbers and responses to evaluation sheets. The approach undertaken by the Coalition of Peaks demonstrates a genuine focus on engaging broadly across communities and including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in critical discussions and decision making that affects them. It is Two Point Co's opinion that the engagements were open, fair and transparent.



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Two Point Co is a 100% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned consultancy, specialising in Indigenous engagement through strategy design, facilitation, community consultation and social impact assessment. We believe in an inclusive Australia. One that provides the opportunity for everyone to participate in a thriving economy and to contribute to a bright future for our country and our children.

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