

PARTNERSHIPS – A ONE WAY STREET? PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA AND THE PHILANTHROPIC AND CORPORATE COMMUNITY

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I acknowledge the Gadigal people. It is good to be on your ancestral lands. Mr. Chairman, I've been asked to speak to you about partnerships between Indigenous Australia and the philanthropic and corporate community. And I have been posed a question – are these partnerships a one-way street? At first glance, the idea of a one-way street sounds a bit negative.

But a one-way street has its advantages. Traffic uses one-way streets every day. Those streets are used because they point in the right direction and everyone on them wants to get to the same destination. Once we appreciate this, the main issue becomes how to make the journey – and a partnership is a shared journey – as enjoyable and worthwhile as possible.

No doubt, though, the question “Partnerships – a one-way street?” really queries whether the philanthropic ‘giver’ receives anything in return. I believe they can. To illustrate this, I'd like to tell you about the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre (AILC) and the type of partnerships that we've formed in order to deliver our programs. The AILC was established about two years ago after Australia-wide consultations showed overwhelmingly that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people felt there was a need to develop our own leadership in order to meet the diverse and increasingly complex issues and challenges facing us. The consultations also showed that our mob wanted Indigenous people in control of the process.

The AILC is a not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee, and run by a Board made up of myself and four other Indigenous people – Russell Taylor in Canberra, Joe Ross in the Kimberley, Tanya Hosch in Adelaide and Kerrie Tim in Brisbane. The AILC is in the business of community capacity building. We are trying to move away from the “band-aid” approaches of the past towards the regeneration of communities from the inside out – communities renewing themselves by identifying, appreciating and using their assets.

Building community capacity involves empowering individuals to maximise their potential, creating sustainable employment and creating lasting partnerships between communities and the government and corporate sectors. No one individual will have everything needed to undertake community capacity building. But groups of individuals do.

The AILC is building the capacity of Indigenous communities by running leadership courses, and facilitating networking and mentorship. Our course

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participants – and we have had 89 of them through at the Certificate level since we started running courses less than a year ago – learn about leadership, governance, ethics, lobbying and communication, mediation, networking, and working with governments at all levels as well as the corporate sector.

In essence, the AILC's destination is an Australia where Indigenous leaders at all levels have the knowledge, skills, confidence and shared vision needed to lead communities, organisations and the nation. Our travelling companions on the road to such a place are many and varied. For example, we've received some assistance from Government:

- The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) recently signed on to invest \$400,000 in a series of regional AILC leadership courses throughout Australia;
- We received significant funds from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) for our initial research and development, and continue to enjoy in-kind support in the form of office accommodation, administrative support, IT equipment and more; and
- We have also had support from ATSIC and the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

However, the days of government alone shouldering (or in some cases, shirking) support for community development have been replaced with a new, smarter way of doing business – three-way partnerships between the community, Government and corporate/philanthropic sectors.

A range of companies, organisations and individuals have supported the AILC, including:

- BHP Billiton which will invest \$240,000 over two years for the salary of our Executive Officer, two regional leadership programs, and the production of an historical video on Indigenous leadership;
- QANTAS which assists us with travel costs and arrangements;
- And others such as the Rio Tinto Foundation, Accor Asia Pacific, Lend Lease, News Ltd, Sixmilebridge, Westfield Capital Corporation, Macquarie Bank, our pro-bono lawyers Gilbert and Tobin, Nick Greiner, Paul Keating and Dick Smith.

Our major partner, though, is Citigroup - whose name appears on the top of this very big building, along with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags. We believe the partnership between the AILC and Citigroup is the first of its kind in Australia and a sound model. Citigroup will invest up to one million Australian dollars in the AILC over a three-year period – enabling up to 125 Indigenous Australians to undertake Certificate and Diploma level courses in leadership.

This really is a 3-way partnership though. The third corner of the triangle is a company called Corporate Good Works, run by Wendy McCarthy and Brian Babington. Corporate Good Works' role is critically important, in that they facilitate and manage the relationship between the AILC and Citigroup. We sometimes refer to Corporate Good Works as our partnership "marriage broker".

Underpinning our partnership is shared agreement that AILC programs and others like them are not only good for Indigenous people but also the corporate sector and the nation. The experience of other Indigenous peoples, in Canada for example, tells us that the more control people have over their lives and their affairs, the more functional they become.

In the AILC's relationship with Citigroup, BOTH parties give and receive. Although Citigroup's very generous financial support is crucial to the AILC's activities, the transaction is about so much more than cash.

Citigroup also lends the AILC its influence and contacts with other corporations. It has committed to involvement with the AILC's mentorship program. It lends invaluable in-kind support to each of our courses. And it has contributed to our course curricula by developing a key session on financial viability versus relationship management. Importantly for both parties, all of this is given in a low-key, hands-off way.

Just as important to the AILC is Citigroup's own articulation of what it gets out of the partnership. And one of the critical success factors in the AILC/Citigroup partnership is the absolute commitment shown by the leadership within Citigroup - people like CEOs Rob Thomas, Shayne Elliott, Ron Bunker and Les Mathieson.

No doubt, leadership programs and the development and entrepreneurship that can be expected to flow from them will create loan and financing opportunities in Indigenous Australia for the financial sector. And our partnership creates an opportunity for Citigroup to differentiate them in corporate Australia.

Our colleagues at Citigroup also speak about being proud and privileged to be involved in a meaningful relationship with Indigenous Australians. They see it as a unique opportunity to contribute to the broader community or society in which we all operate and, in a wider sense, to contribute to the reconciliation process. They speak of "tremendous benefits" through cultural awareness training which has already given 160 of their staff an understanding of the cultures of Indigenous people and their aspirations -- understanding which Citigroup admits did not generally exist before. And they recognise that the best mentorship will always be an exchange between two parties.

This notion of an exchange provides the best possible foundation for relationships between Indigenous Australia and the philanthropic and corporate community. Eventually, through Indigenous community and corporate partnerships, Indigenous Australians will walk confidently and with influence in two worlds. But, even better than this, Indigenous Australians will stop seeing the corporate sector as an "other". They will be an integral part of it. The next step for

the AILC and Citigroup is to assess whether we are on track to deliver our shared aim of building capacity and social entrepreneurship within Indigenous communities, thus enabling them to lead and manage their development more effectively.

Sustainability is a key issue in Indigenous communities. Usually this refers to sustainability of good outcomes. But there must also be a sustainability of support for those outcomes. When the AILC's programs are highlighted - and we've had some very good press - I'm always a little anxious about creating an impression that we have all the support that we need, that our ongoing success is a done deal. This is not the case. Garnering corporate and philanthropic support for programs that might appear "un-sexy" to some in the broader Australian community will be an ongoing challenge for us.

Fortunately, the precedent set in the fifties and sixties by unions, churches and individuals like Lady Jessie Street and continued by the hundreds of thousands of Australians actively involved in the people's movement towards reconciliation, is now being embraced by the big end of town. The bottom-line that recognises social responsibility too is becoming a reality. If together we can build the capacity of Indigenous people to move from a position of impoverishment to one of prosperity; if together we can help Indigenous people to participate fully in the social, political and economic activities of our nation; and if, together, we can do all of this without compromising Indigenous cultures and identities - that will be cause for celebration.

As Indigenous relationships with corporate and/or philanthropic Australia unfold, we discover new areas in which we can all interact and benefit. Inevitably, our various partners will share some disappointments with us, but they will also share our successes.