

**'Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?' Respectful  
Philanthropy and Culturally Aware Relationships  
with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Communities and Peoples**



**Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership**

Conversations and related work on respectful relationships by the Fellowship for  
Indigenous Leadership in partnership with Philanthropy Australia,  
Woor-Dungin and Pro Bono Australia

# Background

---

We are using the term Aboriginal in this document in reference to Australia’s original inhabitants. The terms Indigenous and Australia’s First Nations Peoples are used when part of a quote or a title. References to Torres Strait Islander people will be specifically stated where relevant.

---

*“We want philanthropy to walk with us: not over us or behind us ... philanthropy has a vital role in creating (a) glad tomorrow for us Aboriginal peoples ... we want philanthropy to understand, and even enter, our dreaming.”*

**Peter Aldenhoven**

---

Respectful, culturally aware relationships remain at the heart of strong philanthropy. In recent years, amplified questions have emerged among people working in the philanthropic sector about how to engage more respectfully and effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their organisations and communities. In addressing these questions, the need for specialist knowledge and understanding on how to navigate this space has become a priority.

In 2016, the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership (FIL), alongside Philanthropy Australia and Woor-Dungin, sought to leverage the shifting momentum in this space and drive the conversation further. This culminated in a well-received presentation at the Philanthropy Australia National Conference in Sydney in September 2016: *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way? Stories from the field, practical steps and tools to forge respectful funding relationships and invest in leadership of Aboriginal Australia.*

The presentation was a pivotal opportunity for Aboriginal leaders to create open dialogue with their peers as grantmakers and funders about good practice in philanthropy: the essential elements, and the challenges involved when working with Aboriginal groups and peoples.

Ultimately, what are the barriers and limitations to building mutually supportive partnerships with Aboriginal communities? Where are the opportunities? How should funders and grantmakers approach Aboriginal leaders, communities and organisations in order to cultivate effective and lasting relationships? Tools, insights, and steps forward were shared and revealed.

In February 2017 an Executive Webinar event was delivered titled *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?*, a collaboration with Pro Bono Australia and Philanthropy Australia, presented by the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership and Woor–Dungin to engage a wider domestic and international audience.

The Fellowship has chosen to capture the wisdom and experience of contributors in this document which distils and shares the key learnings, advice and insights that emerged from the *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* events. It also covers the pivotal work around respectful

relationships conducted by Woor-Dungin, particularly their keynote presentation at the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples Pacific Regional Hui gathering in Otaki, New Zealand in May 2017, which further developed the themes explored in *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?*

As well as marking a refreshed commitment to healthy and sustainable relationships with Aboriginal Australians through philanthropy, this document aims to help equip people in the Australian philanthropy sector to engage more effectively with Aboriginal-led community groups, and galvanise grantmakers and social investors to journey, listen more deeply, and engage consciously in accord with the principles and lived experience of Australia's First Nations Peoples.

By respectfully advancing the leadership and capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the groups that represent them, may we work – and walk – more powerfully together.

---

### ***The Long Term***

*My question was about 'what do they want to gain from having a yarn with us?' What are the barriers stopping people from coming in and having a yarn with us? And what would that look like for them to feel safe in an environment where they may not have dipped their toe in the water, or that they have an interest, or that they want to feel that they want to contribute to a difference – and what would a difference look like? One of the biggest things is around the element of 'what is the investment that you're looking for', because in my view in our space, it's that it's not a quick fix: it's about the forming of the relationship, identifying what mutually we want to change, and look at it from a long term investment ..."*

**Daphne Yarram**

---

# Contributions

---

Information in this document is drawn from recordings, transcripts, PowerPoint presentations, stakeholder feedback and articles related to:

- The *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* session held at the Philanthropy Australia National Conference in Sydney, in September 2016, featuring keynote presentations from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal panellists, and questions from the floor.
- The *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way* Executive Webinar in Melbourne, conducted in February 2017 with co-partner Pro Bono Australia, as an adjunct to the session presented at the Philanthropy Australia National Conference. The Webinar was logged into by a diverse audience throughout Australia and New Zealand, and questions were taken and responded to throughout.
- A presentation by Woor-Dungin on respectful relationships in May 2017 at the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples Pacific Regional Hui gathering in Otaki, New Zealand: *How can philanthropy walk with us? A key to successful philanthropy with Aboriginal communities.*

---

### ***It Should Be Hard***

*“If we actually went according to need, 90% of philanthropic money would go to Aboriginal people in this country. And we congratulate ourselves when 10% goes to Aboriginal funds. We are exceptional people ... but that idea of Aboriginal exceptionalism sometimes gets in the way of philanthropy actually getting in and doing it, and learning ... Now, you might get burnt ... it’s associated with a long history of disadvantage. It’s not personal. And I think that’s what a lot of philanthropy does: it gets burnt and then it never funds Aboriginal programs again, because ‘it’s all too hard’ ... well ... it should be hard: we’re dealing with structured violence associated with entrenched inequity. It should be hard. If it’s not, something’s wrong.”*

**Tim Goodwin**

---

# Who was Involved?

---

## FELLOWSHIP FOR INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

Initiated in 2002, the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership (FIL) empowers Aboriginal leaders through support and investment: a vehicle for developing the skills and capacity of emerging leaders and amplifying the impact of established leaders within the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. FIL sponsored and co-presented the *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* session at the Philanthropy Australia National Annual Conference in September 2016, and the Webinar event in February 2017.

## PHILANTHROPY AUSTRALIA

Philanthropy Australia (PA) is the peak body for Australian funders, social investors and social change agents working to achieve positive social, cultural, environmental and community change. PA collaborated with and co-presented with the FIL and Woor-Dungin as part of the *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* events.

## WOOR-DUNGIN

Woor-Dungin is a coalition of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, philanthropic foundations and donors, and pro bono service providers working in partnership to enable Aboriginal organisations to access the resources and support they require, and to achieve self-determination.

Woor-Dungin plays a pivotal role in supporting successful linkages between philanthropy and Aboriginal communities throughout Australia. The Respectful Relationships Working Group, informed by its Aboriginal members, has facilitated a number of initiatives to progress this work including the role of Philanthropy Australia's National Moderator for Indigenous issues.

FIL invited Woor-Dungin to be involved with the *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* session and Executive Webinar events.

## PRO BONO AUSTRALIA

Pro Bono is a social resource and premier online gateway to Australia's social economy, philanthropic and not-for-profit sector. Pro Bono co-organised and co-delivered the *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* Executive Webinar alongside FIL, PA and WD in February 2017.

## INDIVIDUALS, KEYNOTE SPEAKERS AND PANELLISTS

### Belinda Duarte



A descendant of the Wotjobaluk people, Belinda Duarte was the 2006-2007 Emerging Leader for the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership and is currently the CEO of Culture is Life.

Culture is Life's campaign is directing funds that support community driven initiatives that are successfully tackling Aboriginal suicide.

Belinda was the inaugural Director of the Korin Gamadji Institute at Richmond Football Club and has developed a strong track record in cross-sectoral engagement and a depth of experience in senior roles and governance, from voluntary, Aboriginal controlled, not-for-profit through to statutory bodies.

Belinda co-moderated the *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* session at Philanthropy Australia's 2016 National Conference, and co-presented the follow up *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* Executive Webinar event.

### Daphne Yarram

A proud Noongar woman, a champion of the Victorian Aboriginal community, Daphne Yarram was the 2006-2011 Fellow for Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership.

Daphne was a foundation member and elected to the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples Board for three terms and has undertaken leadership and governance roles which she currently holds on a number of Boards and Committees. She is the Manager at Yoowinna Wurnalung Healing Service and Chairperson for the ATSIC Binjirru Regional Council.



Daphne has been involved with many Aboriginal organisations, including Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation, the Indigenous Leadership Network Victoria, Sale Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Gippsland Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee, Premiers Aboriginal Advisory Council, East Gippsland Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group and the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum.

Daphne was a panellist at the *'Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?'* session at Philanthropy Australia's 2016 National Conference.

### Peter Aldenhoven



A descendant of the Nughi clan of the Quandamooka peoples of Moreton Bay, Queensland, Peter Aldenhoven was appointed as the 2017-2018 Emerging Leader for the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership. He is an Aboriginal educator, and the President of the Woor-Dungin partner Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association, an Indigenous gathering place on Melbourne's Mornington Peninsula. He is also a member of Woor-Dungin's Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

Peter represents the local Aboriginal community on a number of panels and committees, and through various agency partnerships.

Peter co-presented at the *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* session at Philanthropy Australia's 2016 National Conference, as well as the follow up *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* Executive Webinar event. He also took part as a panellist at Woor-Dungin's presentation at the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples Pacific Regional Hui in Otaki, New Zealand in 2017.

### Tim Goodwin

A member of the Yuin people of south-eastern New South Wales, Tim Goodwin is a Melbourne-based barrister. He is a Board Member of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, the National Apology Foundation and a member of Woor-Dungin.

In 2016 and 2017, Tim was Junior Counsel assisting the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.



He is a Board Director of the Sharing Stories Foundation and Trustee of the Roberta Sykes Indigenous Education Foundation, an organisation that assists and funds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to undertake postgraduate study in Australia and abroad.

Tim was a panellist at the '*Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?*' session at Philanthropy Australia's 2016 National Conference.



### Maree Davidson, AM



Maree Davidson is a consultant in the health and social change area, co-founder of the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership, and current Chair of the Advisory Committee.

Maree has held a range of both not-for-profit and executive board appointments over the past 25 years.

Maree opened the *'Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?'* session at Philanthropy Australia's 2016 National Conference.

### Genevieve Timmons

Genevieve Timmons holds a range of board appointments, including membership of the Advisory Committee for the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership, Director of the Mornington Peninsula Foundation, and Council Member for Philanthropy Australia. She has over 30 years of experience in grantmaking and social investment, and is the author of *Savvy Giving*.



Genevieve co-moderated the *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* session at Philanthropy Australia's 2016 National Conference, and moderated the follow up *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* Executive Webinar event.

### Peter Maher



A founding member of the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership, and a Melbourne businessman, Peter Maher is the Chairman of the DOXA Social Club, a previous Board Member of DOXA Youth Foundation, a former Director of Melbourne Storm and was the inaugural Chairman of the Premiers Drug Prevention Council.

In 2004 Peter walked alongside footballer Michael Long to Canberra to meet with the Prime Minister to raise awareness of about the needs of Aboriginal Australians, an event leading to the establishment of The Long Walk.

Peter was a panellist at the *'Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?'* session at Philanthropy Australia's 2016 National Conference.



### Additional Participants

Other members of the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership and Woor-Dungin attended the Philanthropy Australia National Conference. These included:

- FIL Representatives Paul Briggs OAM Senior Fellow 2014-2016 and Inaugural Fellow 2003-2007, Stephanie Armstrong Emerging Leader 2013-2014 and Terori Hareko-Samios Emerging Leader 2015-2016.
- From Woor-Dungin were Martin Gutride Social and Emotional Wellbeing Co-ordinator, Trudy Wyse Secretary Committee of Management and Paul O'Shea Special Projects Co-ordinator.

### The Woor-Dungin Team for New Zealand

The Woor-Dungin Team that took part in the New Zealand presentation included Peter Aldenhoven and Wenzel Carter from Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association, Sherree Chaudhry and Jacy Pevitt from Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation, Robyne Latham from the Woor-Dungin Committee of Management, Simone Spencer from Woor-Dungin's Committee of Management and Mallee District Aboriginal Services, Brooke Wandin from Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association and Jem Stone from Woor-Dungin.



Other members of Woor-Dungin who attended the New Zealand presentation were Christa Momot Executive Officer and Community Development Co-ordinator, Lorraine Langley Committee of Management and Martin Gutride Social and Emotional Wellbeing Co-ordinator.

# Event Summaries

---

## ***RIGHT WAY, WRONG WAY, WHICH WAY?***

### ***PHILANTHROPY AUSTRALIA NATIONAL CONFERENCE, SYDNEY - 22 SEPTEMBER 2016***

Maree Davidson welcomed the audience to the *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* session, acknowledging the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation on which the event was held. Maree mentioned the importance of mutual respect and reciprocal learning, and the importance of investment in Aboriginal leadership, capacity, and vision. She went on to introduce, and hand over to, the two session moderators: Belinda Duarte and Genevieve Timmons.

In acknowledging Country, Belinda invited the audience to consider the assumptions and belief systems of their own ancestral legacies as a way of deepening their perspectives and receptivity. She spoke strongly about the importance of *nyernila*, or 'deep listening': a vital ingredient not only for building trust with Aboriginal-led groups and communities, but for cultivating a personal connection to the space. She also invited the audience to connect with the 'authentic position' in this space: the realities of Aboriginal life and the actual need on the ground, no matter how uncomfortable or challenging this might be.

---

#### ***The Authentic Position***

*"There's been fundamental things talked about: trust, trusting the destination experts, unique positions of power and control, impact investment ... explaining and connecting to the reality of what's happening here ... and sometimes sitting with the authentic position is a challenge. Because it might be uncomfortable."*

**Belinda Duarte**

---

Genevieve Timmons invited the audience to scribble down their feedback and thoughts onto post-it notes throughout the session on anything that might help build the momentum around this space.

Daphne Yarram spoke about the importance of viewing any philanthropic commitment to this space as a long-term one, where the investment of time is even more crucial than material support. She also raised the importance of viewing any initiatives in this space with a far broader vision and mindset, beyond isolated, project-based one. Daphne invited the philanthropy audience to connect on common terms by having a "yarn and a cuppa" with their relevant local communities as a first point of contact.

---

**Having a Yarn**

*“The way we engage – to have a yarn – is to engage in a ‘cuppa tea’ moment, because you feel safest when somebody is offering you something... sitting around in a safe environment is the most important thing.”*

**Daphne Yarram**

---

Peter Aldenhoven spoke about the importance of walking ‘with’ Aboriginal communities and individuals on a pathway of two-way learning, while reminding the audience about the collective nature of decision-making amongst Aboriginal communities: a time consuming and shifting attribute that can be a challenge for people working in philanthropy to understand.

Tim Goodwin delivered a passionate and driving speech about how essential it is to get to know the people you’re funding: without trust, effective engagement is virtually impossible. He went on to debunk the idea of ‘exceptionalism’ that often obstructs engagement in this space, so too the erroneous notion that businesses are ‘too busy’ to engage with Aboriginal groups, because it’s ‘too hard’ or ‘too messy’. As Tim reminded, it *should* be hard – but the benefits far outweigh the risks.

Peter Maher offered a non-Aboriginal, business sector perspective, relaying the importance of shirking all cultural assumptions and notions of superiority, while championing the privilege and incomparable benefits that businesses stand to gain from engaging with Aboriginal groups. He encouraged the business-based audience to acknowledge the asset at their fingertips: the opportunities for them to learn about leadership, empathy and resilience from Aboriginal leaders, and how one’s life can change dramatically when you really listen.

Questions from the floor highlighted the need to unpack privilege and the assumptions of our cultural conditions, as well as the challenges around governance and national political leadership.

***RIGHT WAY, WRONG WAY, WHICH WAY?***  
***EXECUTIVE WEBINAR, MELBOURNE - FEBRUARY 2017***

Building on from the successful session at the Philanthropy Australia National Conference, the *Right Way, Wrong Way, Which Way?* Executive Webinar went a step further in defining best practice and the essential first steps involved for successful engagement in the space.

Introduced by Genevieve Timmons, Belinda Duarte acknowledged the Wurundjeri People, the traditional owners of the land upon which the event was conducted.

Genevieve went on to talk about the risks of philanthropic giving being ineffective and inefficient, even damaging, and how philanthropic organisations are trying to 'catch up' on the best ways to engage for optimal impact. In essence, she reminded, the heart of strong philanthropy relies on healthy relationships between those funding, and those receiving.

A short participant poll was undertaken to gauge the audience profile:

- 7% indicated they were from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage,
- 65% indicated they'd had some experience working with Aboriginal and Aboriginal-led groups,
- 20% indicated they'd never worked in this space before, and
- 8% indicated they had a lot of experience in this space.

The audience was also geographically diverse, showing a spread of postcodes across Australia and New Zealand.

Peter Aldenhoven furthered the main messages that emerged from the PA National Conference, reflecting on his experience with Woor-Dungin and as President of the Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association. Discussing the barriers and perspectives from each side of the philanthropic fence, Peter reminded participants that relationships in this space can only thrive on trust and a commitment to Aboriginal autonomy. He also went on to highlight the importance of 'tone', and communicating Aboriginal issues with positive, forward-thinking language.

Belinda Duarte spoke about her passion towards the new generation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, discussing the importance of investing time into healthy partnerships, and reinforcing the need to build trust through personal commitment. She noted the current momentum around the space, and how positive it was to see more and more groups willing to share knowledge. She also mentioned how important it was to unpack our cultural conditioning as we strive to understand each other's points of view.

If you would like to listen to the webinar please refer to the following link:

<https://probonoaustralia.com.au/events/right-way-wrong-way-way-respectful-funding-relationships-cultural-safety-aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-peoples/>

Finally, Belinda and Peter offered a checklist for strong engagement:

BELINDA DUARTE	PETER ALDENHOVEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Remember the importance of initiatives being Aboriginal designed, led or controlled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Walk with us</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Build in essential elements of Trust and Reciprocity in relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Go local</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Be informed and look for evidence-base when making decisions, follow what is known to work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Invest in small grants and then upscale when two-way trust has been established</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Be willing to take the journey of learning, never assume you know it all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Invest in capacity building (support community leaders, fund our staffing, get your staff to visit and advise us, especially with evaluation of programs)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Consider your life experience and mindset, what conditioning influences your approach and perceptions?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate your own funding experiences with Aboriginal organisations: reflect on success stories</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Know this is not a 'sheep dip experience'*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Make your websites culturally respectful</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Walk with the enablers, find the organisations doing it well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide cross-cultural training for your grants manager, staff and board</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Don't reinvent the wheel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Employ Aboriginal staff in philanthropy; recruit Aboriginal people to boards</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use your networking power for good</li> </ul>

Audience questions prompted further advice about the next steps to build engagement: the importance of going local, seeking out Aboriginal-led organisations and groups at the local community level, and reaching out to these touch points accordingly.

\* 'Sheep dip experience' - it's not a single experience but a life long journey of cumulative experiences.

## **HOW CAN PHILANTHROPY WALK WITH US? A KEY TO SUCCESSFUL PHILANTHROPY WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES.**

### **INTERNATIONAL FUNDERS FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PACIFIC REGIONAL HUI GATHERING - OTAKI, NEW ZEALAND - 8-9 MAY 2017**

Woor-Dungin delivered this presentation to an international audience in New Zealand, further developing the themes explored in the *Right Way, Which Way, Wrong Way?* events.

They began to build an answer around the core question: What are the keys to building successful, enduring, respectful relationships between philanthropy and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and the communities they represent?

They concluded that successful, enduring, respectful relationships between Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and philanthropy relied on deep listening, transparency, reciprocity and flexibility.

Woor-Dungin's presentation was well received by the audience, many who were visibly moved by the power and truth of the session.

---

#### ***Walking Together***

*"We've benefitted from a relationship with four philanthropies, and each of those have come and visited our place and walked around, and they've spent time walking around the tracks around our little bit of bush that we're restoring ... they've heard our stories ... how we're building a stone hut ... how we've got these wetlands, setting up a Koori plant trail ... they've spoken to our mob down there, and all those four philanthropies that have invested in us have spent that time and developed that relationship ... they touched on our dream ..."*

**Peter Aldenhoven**

---

# Key Points Across the Events

---

## WITHIN ABORIGINAL PARTICIPANTS

### Relationships are Everything

Relationships underpin almost every transaction and interaction in our lives. The bond of relationship is especially integral to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and without building this bond, there can be no effective dialogue. In short: relationship is everything. This must be upheld before anything else.

---

*“The philanthropic people funding that Bunjil statue ... are very keen on statues, and the family has a statue garden down on the Mornington Peninsula, and we did invite them to the opening of Bunjil – but they’ve invited us to jump in a bus and go out and tour their sculpture park. So there’s an example of a real relationship: a potentially enduring relationship.”*

**Peter Aldenhoven**

---

### Open Up

In the business world, face-to-face conversation (and the intuitive bond and understanding that comes from it) often plays second fiddle to a more impersonal communication approach. While organisations may be used to operating from behind the company banner, it’s crucial that they engage Aboriginal communities and groups with face-to-face dialogue and an invested, personal approach.

### Consider Identity and Perspective

Though it may call for some ‘thought change’, it’s crucial for people in philanthropy to consider the Aboriginal perspective: the realities, complex history and sensibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and listen to their peers - Aboriginal people working in philanthropy.

This can begin at the individual level. Belinda Duarte reminded about the importance of considering identity: whether we happen to be Aboriginal, or non-Aboriginal, ancestry is universal. Our cultural ancestry has a story, and a whole range of gifts and belief systems come with that. Consider your own identity, and how this fits in with Australia’s cultural lineage. Do you know the Country in which you were born on, reside on, and walk on? Who is your mob and where are you from? What unconscious beliefs do you carry as a result of that lineage?

Fleshing out identity allows us to better understand perspective – by claiming our own identity, we can more easily begin to understand another’s. This helps foster mindfulness about the rich



fabric of lineages we live amongst, all of which we're connected to, and which helps us reach a place of mutual respect.

### Lasting Change

As Belinda Duarte said, “building relationships is about spending time.” It takes time to get to know, understand, and build trust with Aboriginal communities and the people within them. There is no room in this space for short-term commitment or a piecemeal approach. Strong relationships necessitate a commitment of time – indeed, this ‘time’ commitment always speaks stronger than any financial or material investment. It’s a long-term challenge, not a project challenge.

---

#### **Going Local**

*“The most important thing is ... acknowledging the land where you live, the people in your community, and if you have Aboriginal community organisations or Aboriginal people who are leaders, or who work in that space, whether you have them in your organisations – and I would encourage you to employ Aboriginal people – because they give an insight into not only building their capacity, but enriching your organisation’s life, because you have someone there who has wonderful life stories and skills that will absolutely prove an asset. The first thing is that you make sure you connect with people relevant to your communities.”*

**Daphne Yarram**

---

### A Healing Approach

A fundamental aspect of the Aboriginal sensibility is a healing approach to life and spirit. To Aboriginal Australians, healing and culture are inextricably linked, and the pathway to this is through cultural activity, commitment to community, and connectedness to Country. As we more deeply understand the Aboriginal perspective, people in philanthropy ought to reflect deeply on this healing sensibility. Our collective journey together is a healing one.

### Self-Determination

Aboriginal communities and the people within them must be the drivers of their own futures. In any partnership initiative, they must be the builders and the constructors; philanthropy is the enabler. Through investment in capacity building, leadership, and vision, philanthropic funders provide crucial scaffolding for Aboriginal communities to build upon their dreaming, and create better outcomes. Any initiative or partnership that overlooks the importance of Aboriginal self-determination will not sustain in the long term, if at all.

## Flexibility

Peter Aldenhoven reminded that Aboriginal communities won't always be able to communicate in a way that dominant Australian culture is accustomed to given the collective decision-making and internal communication style of Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal communities have their own ways of communicating to each other, and thus they require flexibility and patience. With that in mind, Peter also highlighted the need for Aboriginal groups not to be forced to contort their real needs just to meet the narrow guidelines and reporting methods of mainstream organisations.

---

### **Spirit**

*“Woor-Dungin ... have been wonderful support for us. We opened two and a half years ago and Woor-Dungin have been side by side with us, in terms of governance, and just a range of supports around operating our organisation, a lot of work to be done ... but more importantly they’ve helped us enter the world of philanthropy, and it’s been absolutely critical for this establishment, moving into a consolidation phase hopefully ... and also, it’s just great for an Aboriginal organisation when we’ve got really helpful, positive support, it gives us great fillup – great for our spirit.”*

**Peter Aldenhoven**

---

## WITHIN NON-ABORIGINAL PARTICIPANTS

### Risk

Genevieve Timmons raised the issue of ‘risk’ amongst the mainstream philanthropic sector: that without deep listening and respectful relationships, money invested can easily be wasted, or worse, do damage to the cause that it’s trying to assist. With the ‘right’ perspective and planning, and a real consideration of the unique needs of groups and peoples in the Aboriginal space, these risks can be mitigated.

Too often, working with Aboriginal-led groups has been considered ‘risky’, or ‘messy’, but much of this comes down to a lack of knowledge and understanding. Aboriginal groups require approaches that might be unique or different to other philanthropic and mainstream spaces. This should be viewed as an opportunity rather than a risk.

### Expectations

While reporting requirements in philanthropy favour a business methodology, Peter Maher reminded how important it was to keep KPIs and hard line expectations in perspective. Working alongside people with Aboriginal lineage and stories brings enrichment and experience that can’t always be encapsulated in conventional outcome measurements, yet this shouldn’t be a deterrent to engagement. Peter Maher suggested a shift in perspective: rather than trying to

analyse the efficacy of your performance, look at what you have to gain, or have gotten out of the engagement: “You’ll get more out of it than what you put in.”

### Knowledge

Genevieve Timmons raised a crucial point about knowledge: that we often don't know we don't know, and we're not always prepared to receive the knowledge that is there. We need to take responsibility to seek out and receive knowledge from Aboriginal peers and colleagues, and apply and use it when it comes to us.

### Reaching Out

Much of the discussion amongst non-Aboriginal participants, as well as a large percentage of the questions asked during the session and webinar Q and A's, revolved around how *exactly* they might go about reaching out. The approaches and perspectives from the Aboriginal speakers were received and embraced strongly, but there was still some conjecture and uncertainty about how to actually move forward with these essential first steps.

## ACROSS BOTH GROUPS

### Enrichment

As both Peter Maher and Belinda Duarte spoke about, working with Aboriginal people is some of the most rewarding work you can do. The benefits are literally life changing. The perspective that comes from the deep learning involved in Aboriginal engagement is a benefit that cannot be replicated.

### Capacity Building and Empowerment

Investment in capacity building, governance, leadership, values and vision remain the most fertile areas for philanthropic dollars in the Aboriginal space – and the areas with the most need. Supporting Aboriginal communities as they galvanise and lead their own advancement is an endeavour well worth supporting, and has the potential to affect real, lasting, generational change.

### Follow Other Successes

As Belinda Duarte suggested, there's no need to re-invent the wheel. Look to previous success stories and positive case studies in the space, and take a leaf out of their book. Follow their processes and models, and seek to achieve similar results. “Walk with the enablers, find the organisations doing it well.” Be informed, and look to the evidence-base when making key decisions.

## Unpack Your Assumptions

We – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples – are a product of our cultural conditioning. As Belinda Duarte suggested, it's crucial that we all unpack this conditioning: the assumptions, thought patterns, habits and perspectives that underpin our world views, in order to understand and recognise each others. What are the assumptions we have about each other? Where do they come from? What worth, or truth, do they carry? This unpacking process is a crucial step towards building strong, respectful relationships, helping all parties better understand each other's unique value, knowledge and expertise.

## First Steps

All parties agreed unanimously that the above considerations ought to come before any other steps to engagement around philanthropic funding. These are crucial first steps that should occur at the start of any planning process, and are critical for creating successful and long lasting outcomes.

---

### ***Celebrating Uniqueness***

*"In working in this space, one of the biggest challenges I've found and been frustrated by is by how people 'do stuff for us', and not do it with us, or allow us to do it for ourselves. Part of that challenge is 'how do you connect with us', and how to you form a relationship with us that enables you to come safely through a door, to sit down around a campfire or a cup of tea, and offer this deep listening and mutual understanding unbiased by assumptions or stereotypes, and seeing me as the Aboriginal person I am ... I think that's one of the most critical gifts ... don't be afraid by our difference: let's celebrate our uniqueness of how we are connected to this country, by whether we live here, or as First Peoples, and forming the relationship that we should have."*

**Daphne Yarram**

---

# Take Home Messages

---

## Relationship

As Tim Goodwin firmly reminded, the importance of building relationship with the people you're funding is essential to a successful partnership. "It is so important to get to know the community that you're funding – unless you do that, there won't be that level of trust that is necessary for Aboriginal peoples to share openly their aspirations for their community, so you can really get to the bottom of what is required, which isn't necessarily written down in the initial grant application."

## Walk Together

The key word here is 'with'. For people to be successful and effective in philanthropy, they need to view relationships with Aboriginal-led groups as a real partnership, rather than with a 'charity' mindset – to share in the journey, rather than want to drive it. Working together means walking together: alongside, in tandem, through reciprocal respect and support. Essentially, it's about 'contribution' – what contribution do you want to make to the shared journey together?

---

*"Walk with us, not over us, and respect our autonomy."*

**Peter Aldenhoven**

*"People usually do things for us, not with us. How can we get people to sit around a campfire and have a yarn with us?"*

**Daphne Yarram**

---

## Respect

Respect is paramount to any and every relationship. Truly and deeply understanding the perspective of the other – sensibilities, culture and worldview – remains the crucial first step to generating a lasting rapport.

## Autonomy

Intrinsic to a respectful relationship is autonomy: Aboriginal communities and their members must be given the autonomy to make their own decisions and determine the course of their own futures. It is essential that initiatives be Aboriginal designed, led or controlled.

## Trust

Trust is a precious and crucial thing. It can't be bought, it can't be built in an instant, and it can't be created out of nowhere. It comes through behaviours, actions and attitudes. By demonstrating

respect, understanding and commitment towards building a strong relationship, trust can be cultivated. The success of any endeavour absolutely relies on it.

---

*"If you don't establish trust you will never learn what's really needed because we won't disclose it to you."*

**Tim Goodwin**

---

*"It takes time to get to know us."*

**Belinda Duarte**

---

## Deep Listening

Historically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have not been listened to by many people in mainstream Australia. While this deafness has become an unfortunate, persistent feature of modern Australian society, all it takes to remedy it is the intention and decision to actually listen, and listen well.

The traditional Aboriginal word for deep listening is *nyernila*, closely aligned with the concept of *dadirri*: a way of listening through the senses, a 'tuning in' that allows us to come to a deeper understanding. Cultivating this **'deep' listening** is an essential tool for building rapport with Aboriginal peoples. *Nyernila* should also be thought of as a gift, as it opens up the individual path to new understanding.

---

*"We've got to spend less time preaching and lecturing to Indigenous people ... it is so important to actually listen – because you listen and you learn. What you learn is invaluable ... it changes your life. It adds to your skill set to appreciate what your life is."*

**Peter Maher**

---

## Decision Making

The collective nature of decision making, and communication, amongst Aboriginal peoples can be a challenge for some people in philanthropy to appreciate. It can be time consuming, and runs on another set of dynamics and priorities. Awareness of these processes and patient acceptance of the differences will help bolster trust and further understanding. Ultimately, being sensitive to both sides of the partnership fence is key.

## Two-Way Learning

Peter Aldenhoven focused on the importance of reciprocity. Buy-in ought to come both ways: Aboriginal groups and philanthropy organisations stand to gain so much from each other in terms of skills and perspective once the trust and willingness is there, and each side should view engagement with each other with this in mind.

## Time

At the end of the day, everyone is busy – but while it sometimes feels the commitment of more time is not always possible, it's always worth it. Investing time means you're investing in the relationship. As Belinda Duarte reminded, getting involved in this space is far from a "sheep dip experience" – the 'journey' is intrinsic to Aboriginal culture, and it's essential to conceptualise engagement with Aboriginal communities as a shared path of reciprocal learning and growth: a long-haul ride in tandem.

---

*"Once you're in it – once you're really in it – you're in it for life."*

**Belinda Duarte**

---

## Busy-ness

Tim Goodwin debunked a somewhat prevalent notion that people in philanthropy are 'too busy' to be involved with Aboriginal groups. In fact, Aboriginal peoples are busy: they are dealing with 200 years of generational trauma, of dispossession, of low socio-economic inequality, of institutional racism, all the while trying to build their communities and maintain their dreaming. Bursting this bubble of 'perceived busy-ness' left an impression on the audiences involved, and remains a crucial hurdle to leap in order to see things from the Aboriginal perspective.

As Tim added, "when an Aboriginal person says 'I want to get to know you and spend that time', that's a massive deal: make the time. If they're willing to do that in the context of their actual busy-ness, they want to develop that relationship because they want to get stuff done in their community."

---

*"We are busy; you are not busy. Make the time."*

**Tim Goodwin**

---

## Understand the Bigger Picture

As well as deep listening and considering different perspectives, a crucial aspect of the planning process comes down to stepping back and understanding the broader picture in play. The advice to funders and grantmakers here is to spend extra time to consider the overall vision and overarching goals of Aboriginal communities and groups they intend to work with. Be mission and purpose oriented, take the time to listen to the visions and aspirations, and let the outcomes occur organically without being too demanding on the 'detail'.

With this perspective, an initiative becomes part of a greater goal, not simply an isolated project in a 'siloed' space. Parties need to be conscious of the connectedness of their relationships and partnerships to the greater journey. In the end, the collective vision for everyone is a united, diverse and beautiful country.



## Go Local

As part of respect and awareness for Country, it's crucial to make sure people connect with Aboriginal peoples in their relevant community. As a first point of contact, find out who is in the community. Invite them for a cuppa, get to know them on the personal and the community level, and go from there. Community, Country, identity and culture go hand in hand, and it begins at the local level.

## Investment, Training and Inclusion

Peter Aldenhoven recommended that businesses should aim to invest in small grants to begin with and upscale from there once a two-way trust relationship is established. He, as well as other panellists, highlighted the importance of investing in the right areas, especially capacity building, where investors support community leaders, fund staff, and visit and advise staff in person as part of the program evaluation.

As an adjunct, Peter suggested that businesses evaluate the experiences from their own perspective, and celebrate and communicate the success stories. He also advised businesses to ensure their own staff – grant managers, board committees and staff across the organisation – be offered cross-cultural training in order to nurture more successful outcomes, as well as to employ more Aboriginal people and appoint them to boards.

## Acknowledging Privilege

As part of 'unpacking' our own unique cultural and personal conditioning, Tim Goodwin highlighted the importance for non-Aboriginal people to become aware of, and accept, their privilege. As unchecked privilege often presents a barrier to understanding other perspectives, this remains a crucial part of the unpacking process, and an invaluable step towards greater healing, understanding and deeper communication.

---

*"So many of us don't admit to that...and it's because it's a struggle to get it right. But the best non-Indigenous people that I've worked with on Indigenous projects are self-aware of that dynamic, and I think that's the key – self-awareness around privilege is really important. Knowing 'these are the skills I have, this is the privilege I have, and that I want to contribute.'"*

**Tim Goodwin**

---

## Language and Tone

The choice of words and way they're constructed are powerful influencers and can either cultivate, or obstruct, positive change and accord. Language and the delivery of it sets the measure and tone of all communication. Whether online, through the written word, in letters, emails, or speeches, creating the right 'tone' in organisational communication is hugely important.

To highlight the issue, Peter Aldenhoven described as “Dickensian” the tone of a significant amount of wording in the public discourse around Aboriginal affairs, positioning Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders as needing to be ‘saved’ by dominant Australian culture. Instead, the language around Aboriginal affairs – across all mediums – should be positive, forward looking and empowering.

---

*“The more enlightened ones have positivist language about being on the journey together with Aboriginal people, talking about capacity building and empowerment ...”*

**Peter Aldenhoven**

---

### **The Barrier of Exceptionalism**

Tim Goodwin highlighted how a perception of ‘Aboriginal exceptionalism’ amongst the philanthropic community perpetuates a barrier to funding engagement. “You might get burned,” said Goodwin: “but a child who goes too close to the fire and gets burnt doesn’t make a decision for the rest of their lives to not build a fire” – Goodwin suggested that this is what happens for some people in philanthropy: they get burnt, and don’t return, under the pretence that “it’s all too hard.”

There is no quick fix to the issues of need in the Aboriginal space, or in the ways to harness opportunities that non-Aboriginal Australians are missing. Given the historical displacement of Aboriginal peoples, engagement should be hard. Nonetheless, take the risk. Have courage. The learning and growth to be gained from working alongside Aboriginal communities are immense – it might be a challenge, but it has the potential to change the lives of all involved.

---

*“It should be hard. We’re dealing with structured violence associated with entrenched inequity. It should be hard. If it’s not, something’s wrong.”*

**Tim Goodwin**

---

# Conclusion

---

## WHAT IS WORKING

In 2018, there is a tremendous amount of goodwill and drive to engage effectively within this space. The intention amongst the philanthropic community – the collective yearning for a fairer and more reconciled Australia – has never been stronger, and the shift in awareness with renewed enthusiasm, shared commitment to a common vision, and the hope and intent surrounding all that is a promising scenario.

There is a stronger recognition of the need to learn how to listen more deeply, while recognising that the urge to ‘help’ and ‘assist’ is taking the small view. The bigger view is to value autonomy for Aboriginal peoples and communities, and to work towards creating cultural respect and safety. The willingness is there to re-position philanthropy as a resource and set of relationships that can be shared with mutual benefit, and can create positive change to last for the long haul.

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED

While some groups have already led the way to establish strong relationships in the space, there is much work to be done, and fresh success stories to be written.

The challenge is for people in philanthropy to fully grasp the reality that work in this space is no ‘short-term’ project – it is a long-term commitment - two to three years as a starting point, but essentially ongoing. If people want to be involved, they must accept this responsibility and shared path of learning.

Additionally, any contribution to this space requires a broader outlook: any initiative or project must be seen as part of a broader set of goals and vision rather than in siloed isolation.

The relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and the philanthropy sector require the nourishment of time, as well as personal, face-to-face, human commitment. Relationships between groups need to be two-way, and mimic the best of personal relationships we cherish in our lives. Above all, people in philanthropy must listen deeply to the voices of Aboriginal peoples, and remember always that impersonal funding practices, onerous reporting requirements and frustrating application processes cannot and will not deliver successful outcomes for anyone.

## WHERE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUCCESS ARE

At the local level, the potential is in abundance. As has been established, the willingness on both sides of the fence is there to engage and create the right conditions for both parties to feel safe and welcome to engage with each other. The opportunities exist at the local level, and philanthropies – using these insights, tools and skills – ought to reach out, seek potential partners in their local community spaces, and build from there.

The empathy, leadership, wisdom and enrichment of involvement with Aboriginal communities is an opportunity and an asset that the business has yet to fully wake up to.

---

### ***The Athenaeum Club***

*“A group of well-meaning Melbourne businessmen sent out an invitation to meet with them at the Athenaeum Club, probably one of the most prestigious clubs in Melbourne. The well-meaning businessmen there also had another particular gentleman there, an Indigenous gentleman, who’s a well-known president of a sporting club in Victoria, and they were there to provide some assistance to him. So, we had dinner, and about halfway through dinner, the general consensus from those present was ‘the easiest thing to do would be to hop in a bus, head out to where this country football club is, we’ll spend a day there and get everything resolved, and that’s all it’s going to take’.*

*And the air of superiority that existed in the room was palpable, it really was. There was no acknowledgement of exactly who the person was that they were talking with, no acknowledgement of the history, and that lopsided history transaction seems to exist today, especially for those people who are non-Indigenous. In the words of someone much smarter than I, ‘it’s impossible to find out where you’re going until you first find out where you’ve been’.*

*That evening was a particular lesson in life about what happens in this country: we know everything about our history in the last 200 years, for the last 65,000 years most of us have no idea at all. And for those of us that have had the experience to walk with Indigenous people and work with Indigenous people, I seriously think it’s a privilege. Because you’re now working and mixing with people that are the real leaders of this country – they understand this country better than anyone else does, simply because of their experience of living here.”*

**Peter Maher**

---

# Essential First Steps: A Recap

---

Though philanthropic trusts and foundations are geared to want to 'do' rather than 'be', before anything can be 'done' in this space, a 'being' approach is paramount.

A 'being' approach requires deep thoughtfulness, reflection, and awareness – a receptive rather than an action-oriented initial approach. Openness, transparency and receptivity begets trust, or at least, helps sow the seeds towards it. With trust comes rapport; with rapport, strong relationships can be grown.

To echo the messages heard in the previous sections, the following offers a recap of some of the essential steps required, as well as some checklist questions to reflect upon in the process of embarking on the journey of engagement in this space.

## 1. Be Aware, Open, and Consider Perspective

Cultivate an attitude of openness, receptivity, and commitment to learning – none of us know it all, and we are all here to learn from each other.

Understand the different cultural stories and perspectives at play: the incredible diversity of Australia's First Nations Peoples, and the importance of Country to the Aboriginal experience.

Be sensitive to the scope, depth, and uniqueness of Aboriginal culture, as well as the historical adversity and institutional inequity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from colonialism onward. Be aware too, of the vast ancestral legacy of Australia's First Nations Peoples: 65,000+ years of knowledge and wisdom.

Understand your own identity, and how your cultural lineage has instilled a set of ingrained beliefs, conditioned thought patterns, and assumptions.

Recognise your own privilege, claim it and be responsible for it.

Discuss this together, and within your organisation.

## 2. Reach Out

Learn about the Aboriginal groups, organisations and communities that exist at your local level – invest in your local Aboriginal peoples.

Reach out with a phone call, or a personal visit, and communicate your willingness to contribute to shared goals. Organise a chat over a cuppa, and with openness, get to know ‘who is in the room’.

### 3. Listen Deeply

Cultivate *nyernila* and *dadirri*: a willingness to listen deeply, not just through the ears, but through the heart, and through all the senses – beyond the stereotypes, the baggage, and the assumptions.

With deeper listening comes the shared gift of two-way learning. So too, trust. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and communities are sensitive to the ‘listeners’ – demonstrating your commitment to listening deeply helps generate more and more trust over time.

### 4. Invest Time

Before material support, before terms and outlines, before detail, build trust further by investing time in the relationship.

There is no quick fix, and no isolated issue in this space – people in philanthropy need to see it as an ongoing, long haul commitment (as any strong relationship ought to be).

### 5. Hold Vision and be Flexible

As the relationship develops, always remember the broader picture at play, and how the journey at the local level is linked to the larger one.

Walk alongside, don’t force outcomes, and stay patient and flexible to the processes and methods of your Aboriginal partners.

---

#### ***Make the Time***

*“When an Aboriginal person says they want to get to know you and spend that time, that’s a massive deal: Make the time. If they’re willing to do that in the context of their actual busy-ness, that is a sign they want to get to know you, they want to develop that relationship, because they want to get stuff done in their community. Make the time.”*

**Tim Goodwin**

---

# Questions to Consider

---

- Are you willing to invest the time to create a strong, reciprocal and ongoing relationship?
- Do you see your engagement as part of a broader journey into Aboriginal Australian culture?
- What is your vision for your engagement experience with Aboriginal Australia?
- How does your organisation hope to contribute?
- What do you hope to get out of the engagement?
- How might you go about listening more deeply? What does that 'feel' like?
- What are your assumptions about philanthropic funding with and for Aboriginal peoples?
- What is your own ancestral lineage and the stories, assumptions and cultural beliefs surrounding it?
- What privilege do you carry with you?
- Do you have the flexibility, transparency and patience to engage in this space for the long term?
- Have you identified who is 'in the room' on the local level?
- How many Aboriginal Australians do you know working in philanthropy?
- Can you establish a peer exchange and shared journey with them?

---

### ***Mutual Learning***

*"From our viewpoint – the Aboriginal viewpoint – we've got a lot to learn ... it's just so critical for us to meet those deadlines and have the governance structures in place, to exercise financial probity ... we know we have real obligations in that direction and we want to achieve them ... we have to learn those skills, and they don't necessarily come naturally to Aboriginal organisations."*

**Peter Aldenhoven**

---



# In Partnership With

---



[www.philanthropy.org.au](http://www.philanthropy.org.au)



[www.woor-dungin.com.au](http://www.woor-dungin.com.au)



[www.probonoaustralia.com.au](http://www.probonoaustralia.com.au)



 Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership

460 City Road

South Melbourne Vic 3205

Telephone: +61 3 9686 4200

Email: [info@indigenousfellowship.net.au](mailto:info@indigenousfellowship.net.au)

Website: [www.indigenousfellowship.net.au](http://www.indigenousfellowship.net.au)