

Kids Come First:

FRAMEWORK TO FACILITATE THE CULTURALLY SAFE TRANSITION OF CONNECTED BEGINNINGS LEADERSHIP AND BACKBONE FUNCTIONS FROM NON-INDIGENOUS ORGANISATIONS TO ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTROLLED ORGANISATIONS



An Australian Government Initiative



OVERVIEW

What is the Leadership Transition Framework and who is it for?

SNAICC in partnership with the Commonwealth Department of Education (the Department) has developed the *Connected Beginnings ACCO Leadership Transition Framework* (the Framework). The ACCO Leadership Transition Framework aims to act primarily as a resource to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in Connected Beginnings communities. The framework is intended to inform and guide the transition of the Connected Beginnings backbone role from non-Indigenous organisations to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations where there is agreement and support from the community.

The Connected Beginnings ACCO Leadership Transition Framework intends to:

- Provide guiding principles and scope of responsibilities for ACCOs and non-Indigenous organisations in facilitating the transition of backbone functions to ACCOs
- Provide tools to assist in determining readiness for transition, strengthening partnerships, project handover and evaluation aspects of the backbone role for existing organisations or ACCOs keen to step into the Connected Beginnings backbone function role.

Background

The Connected Beginnings project has been operating since 2016 to support school readiness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged zero to five, by integrating education, health and family support services.

Each Connected Beginnings community has a backbone organisation. The backbone organisation is responsible for key aspects of shaping projects' direction and coordination relating to the response to children in their early years and their families.

Feedback from ongoing conversation about the effectiveness of Connected Beginnings from participating communities, has indicated the need for greater Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in a number of communities to increase the engagement of families and children.

The strongest outcomes for children are achieved when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are supported and resourced as leaders for their children, families, and communities.

The Development Process of the ACCO Leadership Transition Framework

This resource has been developed in partnership with Aboriginal community controlled organisations who have high levels of cultural expertise and non-indigenous backbone organisations who are aware of the implications of transition for self-determination and supportive of the transitioning backbone functions to ACCOs.

The framework has been shaped by:

- SNAICC's existing resources and knowledge on partnership approaches
- Connected Beginnings communities
- Ninti One as previous community partner and SNAICC as current community partner
- Community and stakeholder feedback

- Evidence and research from the transfer of power to ACCOs across other programs in Australia.

Principles outlined in this document were workshopped with participants at the Connected Beginnings National Gathering in 2022, and an initial draft of the framework circulated to Connected Beginnings communities. The revised draft of the framework is being road-tested early in 2023 with Connected Beginnings communities in Port Augusta and Ceduna that are at the point of transitioning backbone functions, and learnings from this process used to inform the final draft.

Alignment with the *Closing the Gap* National Agreement

Priority Reform Two in the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* has committed to building the community controlled sector.¹

“... Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services are better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are often preferred over mainstream services. Priority Reform Two received the strongest support in the 2019 engagements”ⁱ.

In the context of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation is defined as one which is:

- a. “incorporated under relevant legislation and not-for-profit
- b. Controlled and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- c. Connected to the community, or communities in which they deliver the services,
- d. Governed by a majority Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander governing body”²

In addition, the Department of Education will consider on a case by case basis, community feedback, the expertise of each potential backbone organisation, and the criteria above before inviting an organisation(s) to submit an application

Historically, the Connected Beginnings backbone selection process and guidelines have inadvertently favoured larger organisations. These larger organisations have typically had substantial ‘back of house’ administrative capacity and resources to take up space in communities, however do not necessarily have the level of cultural authority or embedded ways of knowing, doing and being that ACCOs hold, unless they have Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in senior leadership roles.

The commitment from the Commonwealth alongside the National Agreement, has been to transition the backbone function to ACCOs to further support equity and self-determination, with the agreement of community.

¹ National Agreement on Closing the Gap

² Source: [Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation \(ACCO\) Strategy 2022 to 2032. Empowering Aboriginal children, families and communities to choose their own futures from secure and sustained foundations provided by ACCOs. \(www.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.wa.gov.au)

Strong Community-Controlled Sector Elements Outlined in the *Closing the Gap* National Agreement

- Sustained capacity building and investment.
- Dedicated and identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.
- Community-controlled organisations are supported by a Peak Body, which has strong governance and policy development and influencing capacity.
- Community-controlled organisations have a dedicated, reliable and consistent funding model designed to suit the types of services required by communities.

'A community-controlled organisation implicitly recognises the strength, the expertise and the right to self-determination by Indigenous communities'

--NSW Participant for Closing The Gap consultations

Government's Commitment Under Priority Reform Two

- Commit to building strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors and organisations in line with the strong sector elements.
- Include in annual reports information on action taken to strengthen the community-controlled sector.
- Implement measures to increase the proportion of services delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

The Department acknowledges it will take significant time to embed the framework across the Connected Beginnings program over the next three to five years and transition will differ in each community. It is a community decision³ whether they want to transition the backbone organisation to an ACCO or another community-led organisation. Noting, any new organisation will be subject to a formal application and assessment process to determine eligibility prior to being funded. The backbone organisation will be selected based on:

- Connection to schools, early years services and health services, or ability to build these connections;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community endorsement to lead the project;
- Relationship and willingness to work with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service or Aboriginal Medical Service (who are likely to be the health partner for the project); and
- Organisational ability and capacity to deliver and manage the project, including cultural appropriateness and responsiveness.

It is a joint responsibility shared by current backbone organisation, the prospective backbone organisation the local leadership and governance group, the Department and SNAICC as the Connected Beginnings Community Partner to support a smooth transfer to minimise disruption to the project.

All Connected Beginnings communities that are led by non-ACCOs are required to apply the framework now that it has been finalised. Even if your contract is not due to expire for some time, you are strongly encouraged to start these conversations early with your leadership and governance groups and the community to share the intent of the framework and initiate discussions of how it could look in your community. The tools in the framework are a guide to help with these discussions.

The current process is that approximately four months prior to a contract expiring the Department will ask the backbone organisation to re-submit their budget and Community Action Plan for up to three years. This includes

³ For additional description of community decision-making in this process, refer to p 7 Frequently asked questions

providing additional information on your partnership with ACCOs, Elders, Community leaders and Traditional Owners and outlining the pathways for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. The Department will consider your application and determine the funding length in negotiation with each community.

The contract variation will resource your organisation and leadership and governance group to focus on the transition as well as to support your existing activities to ensure continuity of the project. The requirement to use the framework is a contractual requirement in the contract variation. Use of the framework means that the community will have the opportunity to decide if they wish to transition the backbone organisation and the incoming backbone organisation and outgoing backbone organisation agree the resources and handover required to support the continuation of the project. The continuity of the project and providing information transparently to Connected Beginnings staff is critical, and the Department will take a flexible and case-by-case approach to provide the resources needed to support the transition.

If your community is able to transition to an ACCO prior to the end of your current contract, please let the Department know so we can support you in the process.

The following flowchart provides a visual representation of the steps leading up to the transition process.

Commonwealth Departments of Education initiates discussion about impending expiry of funding contract & transition process

(Non-Indigenous) Backbone Organisation

Leadership Group - Comprised of community members and service provider representatives

Transition discussed in depth

Information disseminated to community

Many community consultations

Community meeting(s) scheduled with SNAICC as the Independent facilitator

Community members with cultural authority meet to discuss Connected Beginnings Project, what has been achieved, ongoing directions, and which organisation should coordinate project activities (i.e. which organisation will provide backbone functions) There is no 'hard and fast' rule as to what this discussion process looks like. There may be a large community meeting or a number of smaller meetings required to make this decision, depending on the community.

Does the community want transition backbone functions?

New Backbone organisation(s) nominated by community; consultation & nomination process documented by SNAICC

Dept of Education invites nominated organisation(s) to submit a funding application



Work together, decide what resources needed and what ready to transition looks like etc

Current Non Indigenous Backbone retained

Current Non-Indigenous Backbone works to transition

Dept. of Education assesses funding application to ensure new backbone organisation has capacity to continue operating the Connected Beginnings Project

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Our project is running really well. Why should we think about transitioning leadership to an ACCO with a childhood focus?

The Connected Beginnings program has been operating since 2016. Since its inception, communities in a number of Connected Beginnings sites across the country have called for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership to support increased community engagement in the programme. There is substantial evidence to demonstrate that self-determination is integral to positive and lasting change in First Nations communities. This, and commitments made under the National Closing the Gap Agreement, have led the Commonwealth to systematically review allocation of funding for Connected Beginnings backbone functions. Consequently, when funding contracts for non-Indigenous Connected Beginnings backbone organisations are close to expiry, these organisations are being asked to consult their communities on their local Connected Beginning project, progress and directions, and whether they feel that ACCO leadership would be beneficial to community engagement and outcomes for children. This is an exercise in self-determination. It is not compulsory that the backbone role will be transitioned if the community consensus is that the backbone role should stay where it is. In addition, whilst it is anticipated that most transitions will be from a non-Indigenous organisation to an ACCO, it is possible that the community will direct a transition from the current non-Indigenous organisation to another non-Indigenous organisation which provides early childhood services if this organisation has the trust and good will of the community.

2. You say it is a community decision to transition. Who gets to decide which organisation is recommended to take on the Connected Beginnings backbone function?

Community-led decision making is a core principle of Connected Beginnings, and we appreciate 'community' can be defined in a number of ways. The community decision is about which organisation has the most trust from and connection with families who have children aged 0-5 years. We expect the community decision will be informed by:

- The endorsement of Elders, Community Leaders, Traditional Owners and other people that have cultural authority in your community.
- The views of families, including extended families of children aged 0-5 who are best placed to talk about what their children need and which organisation(s) they trust to provide for those needs.

We acknowledge it is a competitive funding environment for services and thus, service organisations can't have the final say on which organisation takes on the backbone role, despite the fact that many members of the Aboriginal community who are employed by service providers (both community controlled and non-Indigenous service providers) will be involved in the decision making because they are a parent or grandparent or carer of young children.

The organisation chosen by community will then be invited by the Department of Education to submit an application that will be reviewed by the Department of Education to ensure that the organisation has the capacity to operate the backbone functions.

3. We have been asked by our community Elders what they should take into account in determining which organisation should provide the backbone function in their community. What should we tell them?

Kids come first. That is why the Connected Beginnings project exists. The backbone organisation in your community must have the trust of families with young children that is, families are willing to engage with them (for example, use the services they currently provide). The backbone organisation should also:

- Be able to demonstrate that they know and understand what young children need to thrive; and
- Have connection to schools, early years services and health services, or ability to build these connections, because they will need to coordinate the activities of a range of other services.

4. What if there isn't an ACCO in our community? Or What if our local ACCO(s) don't want to take on the backbone function?

Connected Beginnings is intended to achieve positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Community engagement and self-determination are necessary to achieve these outcomes, and the focus of discussions with the community about how Connected Beginnings is run should focus on identifying the organisation that has the best connections with families, to be able to coordinate the services their young children need. For the community to nominate this organisation as backbone, is consistent with self-determination, even if this organisation is not an ACCO.

5. What if multiple ACCOs are interested in the backbone function?

Your role as the current backbone organisation is to provide the information required to any interested organisations about Connected Beginnings, such as your project activities, networks, how it works on a day-to-day level and what is involved to fulfil the role of backbone organisation. It is important to remain impartial and share information – such as this framework – in a transparent way.

The community will lead the decision on which organisation, or organisations, they recommend to take on the backbone role (as per question 2). If multiple organisations are endorsed by community, the department will invite these organisations to apply and they will undergo a competitive process.

6. How will the Department decide which organisation will be backbone?

Kids come first. The Department will keep this in mind when they review any application. The backbone organisation will be selected based on:

- Connection to schools, early years services and health services, or ability to build these connections;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community endorsement to lead the project;
- Relationship and willingness to work with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service or Aboriginal Medical Service (who are likely to be the health partner for the project); and
- Organisational ability and capacity to deliver and manage the project, including cultural appropriateness and responsiveness.

7. This transition process sounds like a hard ask. Where do we even start?

The first step must be a conversation(s) with your leadership group (some Connected Beginnings sites call this group their 'leadership table' or 'champions group') so that they understand what is happening and why. This group is likely to have connections to many sections of the community as well as to ACCOs that might be interested to nominate themselves as a potential backbone. The leadership group and the conversations they are able to have with other community members will support engagement activity leading up to a further community discussions or gatherings.

8. Who should participate in the community meeting(s)?

Community members with cultural authority should be asked to participate. Ask the Elders in your community and take their advice as to which other community stakeholders could/should be involved. Every community is different, protocols differ between communities. The people who participate in your community discussion(s) and how you run these are likely to be different from those of other Connected Beginnings communities. What is clear, is a discussion(s) with service providers only is insufficient, even if the people representing the service providers and their perspectives are members of your local Aboriginal community.

9. The outgoing backbone has to assist transitioning the Connected Beginnings programme to the incoming backbone, what has that got to do with 'capacity building'?

The role of the 'outgoing' backbone involves working with the 'incoming' backbone to minimise disruptions in project processes such as the way communication happens and the way that data is collected to enable ongoing monitoring and evaluation. This requires full and frank discussion of the backbone role, what it involves, what skills are needed and what enables the program to run. The 'incoming' backbone will need to examine their current skills and resources and identify the nature and scope of any support they need to run the program sustainably. Their application to the department will outline these resource needs and if successful, negotiation will occur about how those needs can be met. The outgoing backbone is expected to provide information on the program, introductions and warm referral to other organisations or individuals who are integral to the way the program runs. There is the expectation that the outgoing backbone will hand over any data, resources and intellectual property developed for the program, and provide clear information on systems or technology that have been used to collect or manage data. This is the level of 'capacity building' that is expected. The incoming and outgoing backbones need to discuss and document this handover process and whether the 'outgoing' backbone also needs additional resources to enable effective handover. The 'outgoing' backbone can also discuss the nature and scope of additional resources they might need, with the Department of Education.

10. How much time have we got to complete the transition process, once the Department of Education approves the application of the ACCO(s) chosen to take on the backbone function?

One of the principles underpinning the transition process is "resourcing ACCOs to get the job done". This principle focuses on setting up incoming backbones for success and requires the outgoing and incoming backbone to work in partnership to identify what information needs to be transferred and whether there is a need for capacity building. The timeframe for transition will be developed based on this background work, and will be site specific. Each community's transition timeframe will factor in the time needed for the incoming ACCO

backbone to identify and build any additional capacity and capability they need to carry out backbone functions effectively. There is no specified time limit for this process.

HOW TO USE THE FRAMEWORK

Every Connected Beginnings community is unique and there is no one size fits all approach to leadership transition. Through consultation, communities requested principles to guide the process as well as a suite of tools, resources and conversation starters that intersect across all areas of transition planning and implementation for both the incoming (ACCO) and outgoing (non-Indigenous) backbone organisations. The principles and suite of tools are designed to be contextualised to Connected Beginnings communities.

The framework aims to spark thought and conversation which can lead to the generation and planning of activities, both theoretical and practical to inform transition such as:

- Working together in culturally safe ways
- Developing culturally safe oversight and governance for the transition process
- Informing the resources required and mapping capacity and capability
- Understanding of investment or additional funding that may be needed
- Highlighting what systems and process changes/adaptations may be required for organisations who are involved.

From an overarching perspective, it is hoped this framework will support the leadership change process to occur in effective and sustained ways whilst running parallel to the continuation of the Connected Beginnings function in the least disruptive way possible. This is to ensure outcomes for children are not impacted.

What is included in the Framework

Guiding principles and suggestions on how to embed these in practice including a range of tools developed for this process. The tools are:

- 1. Transition Questions for discussion*
- 2. Community Stakeholder transition communication map*
- 3. Risk Management Planning*
- 4. Focus on Aboriginal Community Self-determination and Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing and being in Governance: where is the balance of control in the Governance of your Connected Beginnings project?*
- 5. Capacity Review and Strengthening Plan*
- 6. Resource supports: Contributions to assist capacity building*
- 7. Connected Beginnings: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled (ACCO) Leadership Transition Steering Group Terms of Reference*

- National research on previous transition programs and what has worked and what hasn't.

Engagement and decision-making

Connected Beginnings is a journey towards cooperation between different groups and organisations in your community, with shared goal of creating integrated services that benefit children and families.

Part of this journey towards sustained benefits for children and their families is self-determination and transition of leadership and the backbone function is a core element of this. Ultimately, it is the community's decision whether transition occurs, and if so, which organisation will take on the role of backbone. The outgoing backbone must remain impartial whilst the community considers their readiness for transition and determines which organisation

will take on the role of backbone. Nonetheless, the outgoing backbone organisation has a role to play in supporting the leadership table and the community to consider their options. This could include, but is not limited to, providing information on backbone role and functions for potential incoming backbones to consider, and alerting other key stakeholders (e.g. Connected Beginnings Health Partner) that transition of the backbone function may occur. but must remain impartial throughout the process

The starting point of the backbone transition is a shared understanding of both Connected Beginnings goal and the transition process, which are embedded in the Guiding Principles outlined in this document.

The process of transition may look different in each community, but it is strongly suggested that the following elements are included:

1. A meeting of the leadership table and the outgoing backbone to discuss the question: *Is our Connected Beginnings project ready for a transition of backbone functions?*
2. Meeting(s) of the leadership table and community members. Key questions to discuss are:
 - *Is our Connected Beginnings project ready for a transition of backbone functions?*
 - *Which (ACCO) should take on the backbone role and is there agreement from the community on the key elements the new backbone organisation needs to demonstrate (e.g. cultural responsiveness, links and trust within community)?*
 - *Where is our Connected Beginnings project up to? Is it time to refresh the Community Action Plan and review priorities?*
3. *Discussion of ongoing project activities and ways to ensure that these activities continue with as little disruption as possible.*
4. *A working group is set up to provide oversight over the transition process with representation from the outgoing backbone, the potential incoming backbone and the leadership table. The working group will monitor the transition process and ensure that information on the progress of transition is shared with the leadership table and the community.*
5. *Ongoing discussion/meetings between the potential incoming backbone and outgoing backbone on transition issues including, but not limited to:*
 - *Resources needed to progress transition and how to obtain these*
 - *Resources needed for sustainable operation of Connected Beginning backbone functions in the long term*
 - *Project risk management*
 - *The development of a formal application to the Department of Education by the potential incoming backbone organisation, to conclude the transition process.*
 - *Transfer of project resources: This includes Intellectual property, project data, materials developed by the local Connected Beginnings program and warm referrals to collaborating organisations. Funding for Connected Beginnings Backbones do not extend to major capital expenditure (e.g. a backbone organisation can lease an office or mini-bus, but not buy one). For this reason, there should be no significant assets to transfer.*

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF TRANSITION

The principles in the ACCO Leadership Transition Framework are drawn from existing bodies of SNAICC work in conjunction with consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Connected Beginnings communities.

Why Are Principles Important for Leadership Transition?

Principles offer a shared language, they provide scaffolding for ways of working together and when adopted, can ensure accountability, support relationships and guide behaviour.

1. Kids Come First

The rights and needs of children are the core focus of Connected Beginnings. This principle needs to be upheld always, including in the transition of the leadership process. Kids Come First acknowledges that even with transition and change, the commitments and activities must continue as smoothly as possible to realise outcomes for children.

2. Centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ways of Knowing, Doing & Being

This principle focuses on the need to place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, doing and being at the centre of the way Connected Beginnings is designed, implemented and measured. This principle places the knowledge, cultural authority and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at the core of Connected Beginnings operations. This acknowledges that the transfer of power from non-Indigenous organisations to Aboriginal communities is a key driver of self-determination.

3. Accountability to Community & Governance Groups

This principle acknowledges that whoever holds the Connected Beginning backbone function ultimately has accountability to the community and Connected Beginnings leadership and governance groups. This principle acknowledges the accountability and cultural authority ACCOs hold in their communities regardless of what they are funded to deliver and implies the need for transparency in the operation of all aspects of Connected Beginnings projects, including the transition of backbone functions.

4. Cultural Safety

Mainstream approaches can counter culturally safe ways of working in partnership. This principle acknowledges that cultural safety requires a genuine commitment and responsibility from non ACCOs transferring the back bone function throughout all levels of the organisation. This commitment ensures an environment is safe enough for two way learning, Cultural responsiveness and responsivity to occur which is reflected also in structures and systems of the non ACCO in all its dealings with the community, and the incoming backbone. This commitment includes the understanding that cultural safety is not a place to arrive at but an ongoing journey in learning and unlearning.

5. Commitment to respectful, reciprocal partnerships

Organisational partners commit to an ongoing relationship, one that benefits and supports outcomes for children, families, and communities. This includes transparency through the handover of all relevant information and collaboration to obtain or transfer necessary resources and willingness of both parties to participate in two way learning.

6. Restorative Partnerships

This principle acknowledges the history of 60 000 years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people caring for children, each other and Country. This principle acknowledges the sophisticated systems and the impact colonisation and ongoing forms of structural racism have had on self-determination and leadership in communities and the strength and power in community control and leadership. Non-Indigenous organisations have an opportunity to transfer power and control back to community as a commitment to closing the gap and providing

opportunities for self- determination by stepping back from programs that should be held by communities, for communities.

7. Resourcing ACCOs to get the job done

This principle focuses on setting up incoming backbones for success. ACCOs already have ample cultural capital and resources. This principle acknowledges that ACCOs may require resourcing to effectively address barriers to sustainability such as adequate long term funding, access to a skilled workforce, ongoing structural barriers caused by racism, discrimination, power and control. From the outset, transition planning requires, sustainability measures to be built in to ensure financial, physical and human resources are in place for ACCO leadership handover.

A clear and transparent understanding of the resources and capital is integral in the partnership process. This may include:

- Agreements that clarify commitments, roles and accountability ensuring there is a level playing field between the two partners
- An understanding of the time and resources allocated to joint planning, review, and partnership development for each organisation and sharing other resources partnerships and linkages to colleagues, program areas and leadership in early years programs
- Reallocating resources in fair, equitable and culturally safe ways
- Advocating with Department of Education for additional resourcing of the ACCO and streamlined funding processes, acknowledging the fact that funding application processes can drain staff resources and time.

Bringing the Principles to Life

- Could the principles support conversation with the incoming/outgoing backbone to build on shared language and understanding?
- Could the principles be used when discussing what needs to be done to move forward with the transition?
- Are there any other principles that may need to be added that are unique to your transition process?

Enablers and Barriers Experienced in the Transfer of Power

The research and evidence documenting the successful transition of power and leadership from non-Indigenous organisations to ACCOs is a relatively small body of work in Australia. Although there has been an increase in investment in ensuring ACCOs are leading funded services in communities, especially in the area of Aboriginal community controlled Health Organisations, there are few examples of program and leadership transitions from non-Indigenous organisations to full Aboriginal community control in literature. It is hoped that through commitments such as the National Agreement, the historical and current systemic structures that have prevented community control from being realised will start to rapidly change.

The table below draws from the existing body of work to offer the key enablers, barriers and recommendations that have been evidenced from transitioning programs and functions from non-Indigenous organisations to ACCOS.

Enablers to Support the Transfer of Power

- A shared commitment to foster an effective partnership/partnership based on mutual trust and respect.
- Community mandate – community are supportive of a transition to an ACCO. ⁴
- Performance frameworks work to keep transition progress on track.⁵
- Recognition by government that the dominant governance arrangements require institutional change.⁶
- Continuity and strength of leadership and governance.⁷
- Explicit measures to address systemic racism.⁸
- ACCO relationships and collaborations with partner organisations.⁹
- A clear transition date resulted in rapid progress
- Access to appropriate information and technical support

Barriers that impact on the transfer of power

- Systemic racism – often manifesting as resistance, negative reactions, lack of support from staff, risk aversion processes, inherent power imbalance, lack of cultural competency.
- Lack of transparency and information sharing – issues around data ownership, access, management, sharing, protection, and storage.
- Inappropriate funding – insufficient, unstable, short-term and unrealistic timing¹⁰
- Organisations that are not well-aligned to work with communities – hierarchical with top-down approaches, focused on deficits, single issue-focused, risk-averse. ¹¹
- Lack of trust and certainty.
- Difficulties obtaining and maintaining the necessary workforce – concerns that people would lose their jobs in the transition, resistance or concern around different organisational culture and processes in the change including values, models of care and service delivery and different pay rates between organisations.
- Excessive 'red tape' and inflexible administrative processes.– disempowers ACCOs but also diminishes capacity for decision making and creativity in implementing solutions. ¹²
- Poor coordination and role clarity between providers and between funding agencies and the ACCOs.
- Inflexible contractual obligations (e.g. excessive reporting requirements which are disproportionate to the amount of funding provided).
- Burden on unpaid community leaders – expectations that their expertise would be provided without payment.

⁴ McCalman et al (2021) The barriers and enablers of primary healthcare service transition from Government to community control in Yarrabah: A grounded theory study.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ McCalman, J., Jongen, C. S., Campbell S., Fagan, R., Pearson, K., & Andrews, S. (2021) The barriers and enablers of primary healthcare service transition from Government to community control in Yarrabah: A grounded theory study. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9, 616742. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.616742>

⁷ Deloitte & Social Research Centre. (2022). *Our Way Changing Tracks – Final report*; McCalman, J., et al (2021) ; M

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Tilton, R., Martini, A., Brown, C., & Strout, K. (2015). *Towards a history of Apunipima Cape York Health Council, 1994–2006*. The Lowitja Institute. <https://www.lowitja.org.au/content/Document/Lowitja-Publishing/FAR-Apunipima.pdf>

¹¹ Dwyer, J., Martini, A., Brown, C., Tilton, E., Devitt, J., Myott, P., & Pekarsky, B. (2015).

¹² Ibid.

Suggestions for Transition – Recommendations

- Remove bureaucratic barriers where possible– for example, compliance demands, funding arrangements, and government regulations
- Capacity building at the community level through infrastructure, training, mentoring, technical support and workforce development where requested by the ACCO
- Negotiate long-term, adaptable funding so initiatives can be developed properly and have time to work
- Examine power relations and address systemic racism- Projects were enhanced when the power dynamics influencing the relationships between stakeholders were acknowledged and addressed throughout the course of the project.
- Create a supportive policy context – such as changes to funding guidelines which support building ACCOs' organisational capacity or decrease in administrative burden
- Have realistic timeframes regarding how long a transition takes and be clear about expectations and requirements early on
- Be flexible in timelines, program guidelines, funding, and operations
- Ensure transparency through timely sharing of information

CULTURAL AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING AND CONNECTION

The information in this section will be most relevant to non-Indigenous organisations and professionals to build on their understanding and practice of working respectfully with and appropriately with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These resources do not replace the need for developing strong local relationships and cross-cultural understanding through relationships.¹³

The resources can help build on existing cultural awareness and provide support and information on how to communicate to organisational staff, members and organisational audience about the process of transition in culturally safe and appropriate ways.

Suggested Resources for Working in Partnership:

- SNAICC's Creating Change through Partnerships: An introductory guide to partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations in child and family services. Accessed [here](#)
- Share our Pride- Access [here](#)
- Building Respectful Relationships (VACCA)- Access [here](#)
- Developing Capacity through Partnerships – Access [here](#)
- SNAICC's Partnership Training Manual – Access [here](#)

¹³ Stronger Safer Together, SNAICC, 2015

TOOLS TO SUPPORT TRANSITION

Transition Questions for Discussion

These questions are separated into six key topic areas to support both organisations with what they might need to consider as they approach the transition of backbone function. Some of these questions are directed to “incoming” backbones and some are directed to “outgoing” backbones. Some are relevant to both parties.

Clearly this is not an exhaustive list, it is intended to spark discussions within and between organisations as they decide when and how to transition the backbone role.

Topic Area	Relevant to both Incoming & Outgoing Backbone Organisations	Particular Relevance to Incoming Backbones	Particular Relevance to Outgoing Backbones
Community Action Plan	What is being done to ensure that the interests of children and their families always come first in the transition process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the community action plan transferrable across organisations? Do you have the resources (including staff resources) that you need to implement, build on and/or to re-develop the existing community action plan as required? What has been committed to and can this be carried out during the transition and after the transition? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will you ensure that the new backbone is linked in to all the relationships that you have already built in progressing the Connected Beginnings action that your community wants to progress? (the 'Intellectual Property' (IP) of relationships')
People <i>i.e. the collective capabilities, skills, experiences, potential and commitment of the organisation's board, management team, staff, and volunteers. This includes performance measurement and</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some staff in the backbone team may want to transition their employment: Is this an option? do you need to develop a process to transfer the employment of backbone staff from the outgoing to incoming backbone? (what industrial relations framework applies to this? Is legal advice needed?) If key project staff employed by the outgoing backbone do not transition to the incoming backbone, what process will be put in place to ensure that the new backbone has ongoing access to the information and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you have access to the community IP that has been developed through the Connected Beginnings process thus far? Intellectual Property encompasses cultural knowledge, language, cultural artefacts and relationships Do you have a clear idea of what human resources that you need to operate sustainably in the backbone role (both number of staff and skill levels of staff)? How will you obtain these resources if you don't already have them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you considered how to undertake the introduction and facilitated handover of networks and relationships that may support the ongoing sustainability of funding for the Connected Beginnings program at your community? (philanthropy, funding opportunities, key stakeholders)

<i>external relationship building</i>	relationships that have been developed by these staff? (e.g the capacity to provide introductions and make connections with key community members and organisations)		
Topic Area	Relevant to both Incoming & Outgoing Backbone Organisations	Particular Relevance to Incoming Backbones	Particular Relevance to Outgoing Backbones
Organisational Culture <i>i.e. the connections that unite an organisation, including shared values and practices and behaviour norms</i>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you see your role in the community beyond transition? • What frameworks and resources may need to be adapted and changed to further align with the principles and ways of working of the emerging backbone, specifically approaches to cultural safety? • What has been done to build cultural safety into <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the transition process - ongoing operations of non-Indigenous organisations participating in our Connected Beginnings project after transition is complete? • What has been done to eliminate structural racism from organisations' policies and procedures? Is there a need for additional action? • How do the leaders of the organisation demonstrate ongoing commitment to embedding cultural safety in the way the organisation operates? • To what extent do the staff of your organisation demonstrate cultural safety? • What needs to happen to ensure that your organisation's staff continue to progress

Topic Area	Relevant to both Incoming & Outgoing Backbone Organisations	Particular Relevance to Incoming Backbones	Particular Relevance to Outgoing Backbones
<p>Structure i.e. the combination of governance, organisational design, resource coordination, and individual job descriptions that shape the organisation's legal and management structure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is in your leadership structure and board of governance? Does your governance structure privilege the rights and the voice of Aboriginal community? Does the governance include cross-sector senior organisational leaders (local and/or territory based), local staff, clan leaders and community members including those with lived experience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Specific for Emerging ACCOs) Do you have an existing staff structure (general manager, centre coordinator, project officer) that would demonstrate capacity for employment and staffing? E.g. contracts for staff, templates for letters of offer Are there staff that want to stay with Connected Beginnings throughout the transition process? Are you aware of industrial relation frameworks to guide this? Do you have access to industrial relations advice if you need it? Is your organisation incorporated? If 'no' do you have the information and other resources you need to incorporate? Does your organisation's constitution specify that your organisation must have an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander majority board of management? What mechanisms have been set up to share data between partner organisations and also, between partners and the community? How have the community been involved in deciding what outcomes will be tracked and what data will be used to track these? To what extent does community 	<p>cultural safety in the way they interact with Aboriginal community members?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What evidence exists to show that capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership has been built into the leadership group working on the transition? (e.g. Aboriginal co-chair and sharing the secretariat duties)

		involvement need to be increased in this (data sovereignty) area during the transition process and beyond?	
Topic Area	Relevant to both Incoming & Outgoing Backbone Organisations	Particular Relevance to Incoming Backbones	Particular Relevance to Outgoing Backbones
Systems <i>i.e. the organisation's planning, decision-making, knowledge/data management, and administrative systems, as well as its physical and technological assets, tools and facilities needed to implement all programmatic, organisational and community strategies.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition of backbone functions to an ACCO is based on the assumption that Aboriginal staff are in leadership roles: How is employment and support of Aboriginal staff integrated into your employment practices? • What systems /practices /protocols are in place to ensure regular and transparent communications between incoming and outgoing backbone organisations? • are any additional measures needed to ensure that there are no gaps or bottlenecks in communications? • Have organisations been data sharing using the Connected Beginnings aggregated dashboard? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (specific for Emerging ACCOs) • Link to Department of Finance- Do you have the support mechanisms (IT or financial management) in order to submit to the department? • Does your organisation have audited financial statements for at least 12 months? • Do you have evidence of source of income? Federal, State based, fee for service, philanthropic? • Have you maintained documentation and contracts in this process (i.e. do you have document management system to demonstrate evidence of contract and contract management) • Do you have the financial systems in place to have an audit? Do you have an auditor? If you don't have an auditor do you understand the process around what an audit is? • Do you have the resources you need to collect and manage evaluation data? • Are you familiar and confident using existing sources of Connected beginnings data (e.g community dashboard)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have you assisted the incoming backbone to become familiar with Connected Beginnings data (e.g. community dashboard)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have the hardware and software and skills you need to collect store and use the data you need (e.g. evaluation data, data for meeting reporting requirements, financial management data)? • Do you have the physical and financial resources you need to operate sustainably in the backbone role? Do you have a clear idea of how you will address any gaps that you may have? 	
Topic Area	Relevant to both Incoming & Outgoing Backbone Organisations	Particular Relevance to Incoming Backbones	Particular Relevance to Outgoing Backbones
Leadership i.e.the ability to inspire, model, prioritise, make decisions, provide direction, and innovate, in an effort to achieve the organisation's purpose.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has your leadership evolved over the course of the Connected Beginnings project? • What progress has been made towards achieving the objectives of the community action plan during the time your organisation has provided the backbone function? What would you change to increase progress towards the objectives of the community action plan? • What action has been taken to amplify the voice of community over the life of the project? How well has this worked? What would you change to increase the impact of these actions? • What have you done to build the leadership capacity of Aboriginal people in this Connected Beginnings community?

			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you have a timeline on funding and transition handover?• How have you involved the 'incoming' backbone in the development of this timeline?)
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Connected Beginnings ACCO Leadership Transition Framework – Community Stakeholder Transition Communication Map

This tool is intended to support the application of #3 - Accountability to Community & Governance Groups

Community stakeholders (individuals and groups)	How will we connect with them? (Formal meeting, community barbecue, Facebook post, etc.)	How often will we connect?	Who is responsible for making this happen?	Additional notes

Risk Management Planning*

Risk Cause – This is why something could go wrong. It is here that we consider what needs to be done to prevent it.

Risk Event – This is what could go wrong. This is where the uncertainty lies—the existence of the cause does not mean the event will happen. But if it does, there will most likely be an impact.

Consequence – This is the potential outcome of the event. It is the impact on the Critical Success Factors and highlights why we must pay attention to the risk.

Cause	Event	Consequence
Lack of engagement and community engagement planning	Missed consultations/engagements with certain groups	Potential harm to reputation Risk to project continuing Potential risks to future finding
Risk Reduction Strategies		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community engagement plan • Stakeholder mapping exercise 		

(*Deloitte 2022)

Focus on Aboriginal Community Self-determination and Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing and being in Governance: where is the balance of control in the Governance of your Connected Beginnings project?

This tool has been developed to support the application of Principle 4: Cultural Safety and Principle 6: Restorative Partnerships

Issues	Current situation (As of date:../../...)	What needs to change?	What will a successful change look like? / what are we aiming for?	Resources (what resources if any are needed to support the change)	Who is responsible for making the change?	Timeframe: when will the change be complete?
Representation Eg Composition of Governance group						
Chairing Eg Who chairs? What supports does the chair have?						
Naming/agenda setting Eg Who drives this?						
Decision making Eg What is the decision-making process? How are disagreements and disputes managed and by whom?						
Venue Eg How has cultural safety been addressed						

<p>Meetings: time length & frequency</p> <p>Eg Does this take into account the staff and other resources available to participating ACCOs?</p>						
<p>Payment of expenses</p> <p>Eg Does this take into account the staff and other resources available to participating ACCOs?</p>						

Capacity Review and Strengthening Plan¹⁴

This tool is intended to support application of Guiding Principle 7 - Resourcing ACCOs to get the job done

Capacity area	Skills or knowledge (What additional skills or knowledge do you want/need to perform the backbone role in the way that works for your community?)	Method (How will you build this skill or knowledge?)	Resources (What is needed to enable this activity?)	Evidence (How will you measure the increase in knowledge/skills)	Timeframe (When and how long will it take to obtain this knowledge or skill?)
People i.e. the collective capabilities, skills, experiences, potential and commitment of the organisation's board, management team, staff, and volunteers. This includes performance measurement and external relationship building					
Organisational culture i.e. the connections that unite an organisation, including shared values and practices and behaviour norms,					
Structure					

¹⁴ Adapted from: SNAICC (June 2014) *PARTNERSHIP Creating change through partnerships Supporting and sustaining genuine inter-agency partnerships in service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families* SNAICC, Melbourne p 27]

<p>i.e. the combination of governance, organisational design, resource coordination, and individual job descriptions that shape the organisation's legal and management structure</p>					
<p>Systems i.e. the organisation's planning, decision-making, knowledge/data management, and administrative systems, as well as its physical and technological assets, tools and facilities needed to implement all programmatic, organisational and community strategies.</p>					
<p>Leadership i.e. the ability to inspire, model, prioritise, make decisions, provide direction, and innovate, in an effort to achieve the organisation's purpose.</p>					

Resource supports: Contributions to assist capacity building¹⁵

This tool is intended to support application of Guiding Principle 7 - Resourcing ACCOs to get the job done, and provides a non-exhaustive list of resources to stimulate discussion within and between organisations.



¹⁵ Adapted from: SNAICC (June 2014) *PARTNERSHIP Creating change through partnerships Supporting and sustaining genuine inter-agency partnerships in service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families* SNAICC, Melbourne p 35]

Connected Beginnings: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled (ACCO) Leadership Transition Steering Group Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference were developed to support principle 1: Kids Come First and principle 3: Accountability to Community & Governance Groups. This acknowledges the fact that the work of Connected Beginnings in support of children and families must continue with as little disruption as possible throughout the backbone transition process

Background

The strongest outcomes for children are achieved when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are supported and resourced as leaders for their children, families, and communities. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) play critical leadership and service delivery roles across the country to support the safety, wellbeing, health and development of children in their early years.

In the Commonwealth's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, the Australian Government has committed to building the capability of ACCOs so that they continue to deliver quality services. This encompasses a commitment to ensure that ACCOs lead and perform the backbone role in Connected Beginnings (CB) communities and support for transition of the 'backbone' function from non-Indigenous organisations to ACCOs wherever possible.

It is evident that changes to the backbone organisation and potential changes to personnel will impact CB projects. Consequently, the Commonwealth Department of Education has funded SNAICC, the peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, to develop an ACCO Leadership Transition Framework (ALT framework) to assist the transition of backbone functions from non-Indigenous organisations to ACCOs. The framework is intended to identify ways to reduce disruptions to program delivery as the backbone role is transitioned.

The ALT Framework includes tools and recommended processes intended to strengthen and support the involvement of ACCOs taking on the role of 'backbone' and make the transition of backbone functions between organisations smoother and more transparent.

A key ALT Framework recommendation is that the leadership group in backbone transition communities, convene a working group to monitor progress of transition and ensure that Community is consulted and/or informed as appropriate.

Purpose and Scope

The ALT working group will:

- Oversee the development and delivery of community communication activities
- Support discussions with community, Elders, community leaders, Traditional Owners, ACCOs, and mainstream organisations to agree how a decision will be made on transitioning backbone organisations,.
- Monitor potential impacts of the backbone transition process on CB activity and oversee implementation of risk mitigation activities
- Monitor the development of ALTF transition and skills transfer plans by the current and proposed backbone organisations
- Monitor procurement of ATLF transition resources by the current and nominated incoming backbone organisations
- Monitor progress towards transition readiness

Membership (NB selected in accordance with the individual Connected Beginning community's governance framework)

(Co-chair)	Representative of nominated incoming backbone organisation
(Co-chair)	Representative of outgoing backbone organisation
	Community member
	Community member
	Community member
Secretariat	(incoming or outgoing backbone; SNAICC as community partner can also perform this role)

Meetings and Decisions

The working group will meet (?? Frequency/ monthly ?) for the duration of the project to oversee progress against transition milestones

Matters and items for consideration may also, as required, be discussed out of session.

Any member of the steering group can raise issues for discussion, and advise the Secretariat following a call for agenda items.

A quorum is required for each meeting and will consist of the co-chairs and a majority of standing members, noting there must be representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island standing members for quorum to be achieved. A proxy is able to attend, where required on behalf of a member and advised to the co-chairs.

Decisions will be made by consensus. If consensus agreement is not reached on an issue or matter, the record of the meeting and any related reporting will reflect dissenting views.

Reporting and Relationships

Findings and recommendations resulting from discussion of the steering group will be provided to the broader (Community name) CB leadership table for noting, endorsement and/or decision as appropriate. This will include information tailored for Elders, community leaders families and other community stakeholders such as Traditional Owners.

Secretariat

(Co-chair organisation? SNAICC?) will provide secretariat support for the Steering Group. A record of the meeting will be taken by the Secretariat and will include:

- date and location of meeting
- attendees and apologies
- overview of discussion
- action items.



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