



Factors for successful youth engagement in native title

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Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are vitally important to the succession planning for our communities. Young people are a growing demographic with diverse skills, experience and interests which can support and advocate for our communities now and into the future. Increasingly though, young people face challenges in being involved in native title including: reduced capacity to be on Country and commitments to work and education. Understanding effective pathways to involve young people in conversations and planning about native title, has the potential to strengthen communities and bolster Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

The *Indigenous Youth in Governance and Political Processes* project is a collaboration between AIATSIS, Macquarie University and the Australian National University, which began in 2018. It examines how young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are participating in governance and policy-making. The project sought to explore and identify established examples of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations have successfully engaged young people. AIATSIS completed three case studies with Bigambul Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (BNTAC), Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC) and the First Peoples' Assembly

of Victoria (the Assembly). Each case study revealed a different model for youth involvement in governance.

The case studies, though varied, shared clear commonalities. Three areas emerged as factors contributing to the success of youth engagement in governance and political involvement:

1. locally and culturally responsive programs;
2. intra-familial mentorship; and
3. tailored training and educational programs.

Locally and Culturally Responsive Programs

The success of programs to support youth engagement in native title is contingent on the understanding and application of locally grounded and culturally appropriate protocols and strategies. First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria focused their efforts on sporting, cultural, music and arts events to recruit young people to participate in the Victorian treaty negotiations. BNTAC held a youth summit to bring together Bigambul young people as a forum to learn about the native title system and be mentored by Elders in order to later participate in native title governance. On Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island), the QYAC ranger program harnesses cultural motivators, like connection to Country, as well as paid employment to engage young people and, strengthen culture and customary practice.

Though each approach for getting young people involved is vastly different across the

case studies, they all respond to their local contexts and are underpinned by culturally appropriate strategies. The outcome of this strategy is effective and efficient youth engagement, wherein young people are appropriately supported and prepared for governance on their Country and in their community.

Intra-familial Mentorship

Intra-familial mentorship is a clear contributing factor to increased youth engagement with the native title sector. It was found that those participants who had prior knowledge of native title from senior family members or parents were very engaged. This also illuminates the challenges that young people without intra-familial involvement in native title face. Two strategies may help address this for young people with an interest in native title and community governance. First, actively engaging parents and carers in native title to reinforce intergenerational participation, and second, developing alternate pathways to train and provide opportunities for young people who do not have access to strong intra-familial mentorship.

Tailored Training and Education Programs

Supporting youth engagement in native title requires a tailored educational program that will provide the skills, knowledge and strategies to successfully manage challenges that may arise. For example, through careful consideration by BNTAC, the Bigambul youth summit presented an opportunity for their young people to understand the native title sector and participate in governance

through tailored training. Through the forum, a Bigambul Youth Advisory Council was established so that the young people attending could have formal ongoing influence in the governance of BNTAC. Following the summit, 90% of attendees indicated they would like to participate in future education and training opportunities held by BNTAC. Likewise in Victoria, the development of a one-day 'Aboriginal youth in treaty-making workshop' was essential in fostering a capable and informed cohort of young people to work on the Victorian treaty process. The workshop provided information on treaty process both in Australia and internationally, principles in Indigenous community governance, negotiation skills, and trauma-informed approaches to community engagement. QYAC similarly, provided numerous training and education opportunities for their Ranger program, to support their ongoing employment and understanding of Country.

The *Indigenous Youth in Governance and Political Processes* project shows that locally grounded and culturally appropriate engagement, intra-familial mentoring, and training and education that is tailored to the needs of participants, builds young people's confidence to participate in this space. Having a confident and capable young work force, with the requisite skills and knowledge to participate in native title, community governance and political processes, is highly desirable to ensure positive outcomes across communities, corporations and organisations into the future.



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Photo: Dora Bowles