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**Many Rivers  
2nd Annual CED Program  
Monitoring and Evaluation Report  
2022**

**Deloitte**  
Access **Economics**

From 2015 to 2021, Many Rivers CED program has supported **41 Indigenous organisations** across Australia, representing **7,200 community members**.

In FY21, CED program community organisations managed a combined **\$56M in assets, \$30M in revenue**, and employed over **200 individuals**.

In addition to continuing operations, the supported community organisations reported in FY21 establishing<sup>1</sup> :

- **10 new businesses**
- **13 economic projects**
- **9 economic activities**.

## Executive Summary

Many Rivers' Community Economic Development (CED) program was created to assist in reducing structural disadvantage in regional and remote Australia. Established in late 2015, Many Rivers works with Indigenous community organisations, typically over a five-year period, supporting them to develop and implement multi-year, long term goals via yearly action plans. A significant [16 organisations joined](#) the CED program in 2021, while six communities ceased their partnership.

This report represents the second standalone evaluation of the CED program. As well as providing an update on the analysis of financial and economic outcomes conducted previously, this evaluation utilises more qualitative data to capture community outcomes that cannot be easily measured. This includes additional insights from the analysis of community strengths and needs as determined by CED Managers, triangulated with community self-determined goals, and reflections from six consultations with community leaders.

This evaluation provides an initial assessment of the program logic developed in the first evaluation, reflecting on the link between program activities and outcomes. The CED model appears to align with what communities want, likely a reflection of the readiness assessment used to selected communities with strengths and needs that can be supported well by the program. For example, consultations with community organisation leaders affirmed the importance of the CED program in developing [Strong Foundations](#), such as a trusting relationship with CED managers and governance fundamentals. Consultation with community leaders also revealed [common aspirations](#) for communities, such as enhanced organisation sustainability, long-term employment for locals, and reduced intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

Financial and economic data shed light on the [medium-term outcomes](#) realised through the program, with data available for seven communities that have partnered with Many Rivers for three years or more. As well as the new [economic initiatives](#) introduced in 2021 (presented on the left), community organisations continued to operate 39 businesses, 26 economic projects and 4 economic activities. While these indicators are helpful, this evaluation does not seek to use them as benchmarks of long-term success that organisations can be compared against, but rather recognise that success is a function of each community's unique aspirations and context.

Future evaluations will strive to reflect these individual journeys, and the moments that matter to each community in the ways that Many Rivers supports organisations to navigate positive and negative events. The [ongoing evaluation](#) will also:

- improve quantity and quality of data collection, including more standardised measures of readiness, needs and outcomes
- continue refining and testing the program logic, to better reflect community definitions of success
- explore the pre-existing conditions required to organisations to benefit from Many Rivers.

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# 1 | Context and CED Program

This section introduces the purpose of the annual monitoring and evaluation process in the context of the long-term partnership between Many Rivers and Deloitte Access Economics. It also introduces the CED Program.

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# Evaluation context

This is the second (standalone) annual evaluation of the CED program.

## Context

Deloitte Access Economics has been working with Many Rivers since 2012, starting with the creation of the Microenterprise Development Program Evaluation Framework. Since then, Deloitte has undertaken nine annual outcomes monitoring and evaluation reports, drawing on information of increasing quality and breadth in each subsequent year.

Deloitte Access Economics previously completed a combined evaluation of both the Microenterprise Development Program (MED) and Community Economic Development (CED) program. With the CED program maturing, Many Rivers identified the need for a separate and more in-depth evaluation of CED. In 2021, Deloitte Access Economics conducted the first standalone evaluation of the CED program, which set out the foundations on which future evaluations would be built.

## This evaluation

The purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to assist Many Rivers and its stakeholders with better understanding:

- the nature of the cumulative and year-on-year impact of the CED program; and
- areas for the continuous improvement of the program; and
- any observations that can be made for wider public value where Many Rivers is working at the frontier of practice.

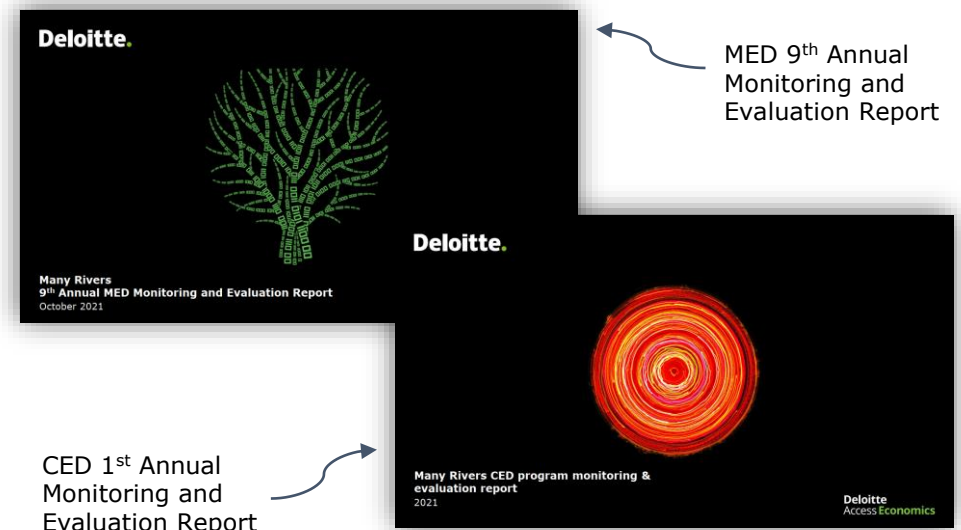
This report represents the second standalone evaluation of the CED program. Apart from providing an update on the quantitative analysis conducted previously, it also introduces qualitative data in the form of reflections from community leaders who agreed to speak to Deloitte Access Economics as part of this evaluation.

## Consultation approach

To better understand the perspectives of community organisations, six community leaders were consulted through in-depth unstructured conversations. Open questions allowed leaders to identify the main impacts of the CED program in their own words. CED managers were present, and organisations were selected with tenure of three years or more, and stratified by revenue and remoteness.

## Role of Deloitte Access Economics

In this context, Deloitte Access Economics does not fulfil the role of an auditor. Assessment of the quality and completeness of the data that Many Rivers collects is beyond the scope of this work. Rather, Deloitte Access Economics provides an updated analysis of, and information on, the progress of the community organisations.



# The Community Economic Development program

Many Rivers' CED program provides long term support to community groups motivated to develop businesses and employment opportunities for their communities.

Many Rivers established and piloted its CED work in late 2015 in response to increasing requests to offer microenterprise development support to community groups with economic aspirations and opportunities.

The purpose of Many Rivers CED Program is to support **regional and remote Indigenous community organisations** that want to establish economic activity on their land and sea. As needed, this support includes:

- Strengthening governance and management resources, capacity and functions;
- Understanding financial concepts, decisions and management;
- Establishing operational strategies and plans that can be managed by the communities; and
- Establishing or expanding enterprise and employment opportunities for communities.

Many Rivers works with community organisations **over a five-year period** (on average), supporting them to develop and implement multi-year, long term goals via action plans – the end of which management and staff of the community group are expected to function and succeed more independently.

Many Rivers' collaboration with CED communities can be divided into two domains (Figure 1):

1. The initial years of the partnership focus on developing the **Strong Foundations** necessary for future economic ownership and management. This involves ensuring that an organisation's compliance requirements (as stipulated by its incorporation type) are met, building consensus on community goals, developing effective governance and management practices, financial and digital literacy, and confidence in leadership and decision making.
2. The subsequent years of the partnership have an **Economic Outcomes** focus. During this stage, Many Rivers aims to empower the community to develop and implement economic initiatives aligned to the economic and social outcome goals expressed by the community.

Figure 1: Indicative illustration of CED Program focus over time

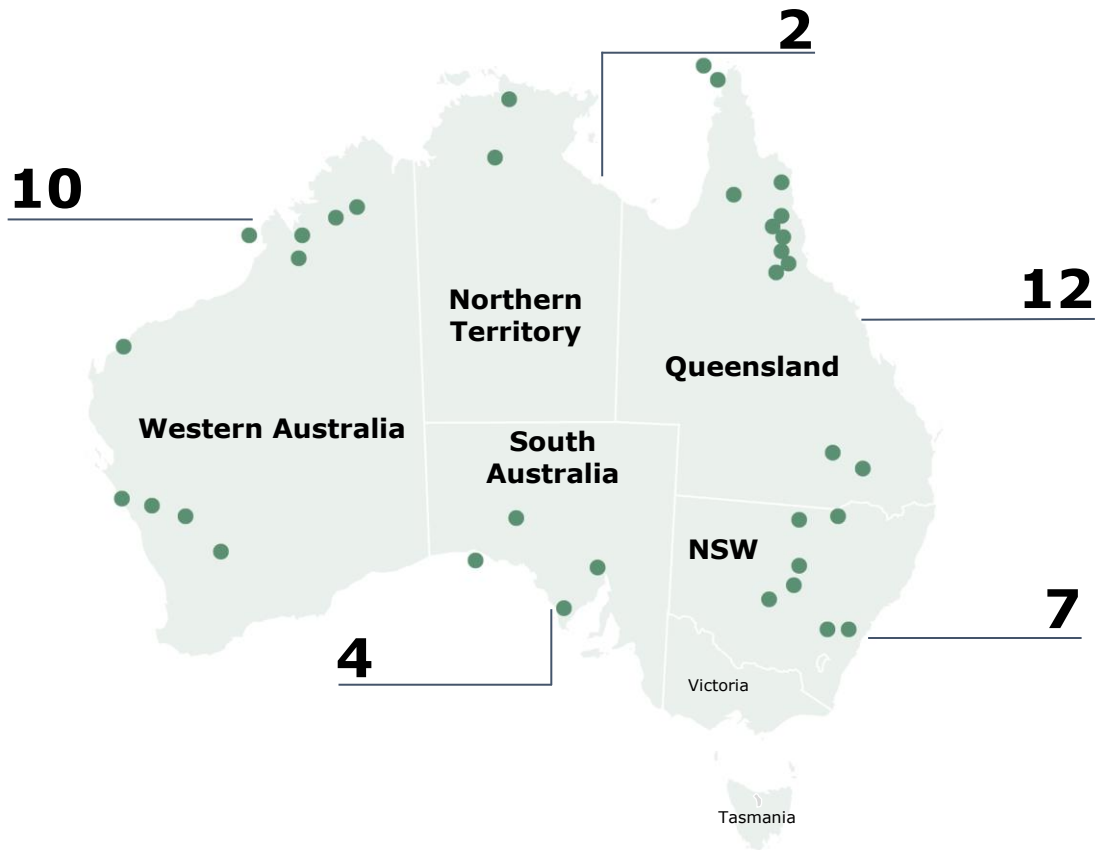


Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2020) based on Many Rivers.

# The Community Economic Development program

From 2015 to 2021, Many Rivers has worked with 41 communities across Australia, representing just under 7,200 community members in FY21.

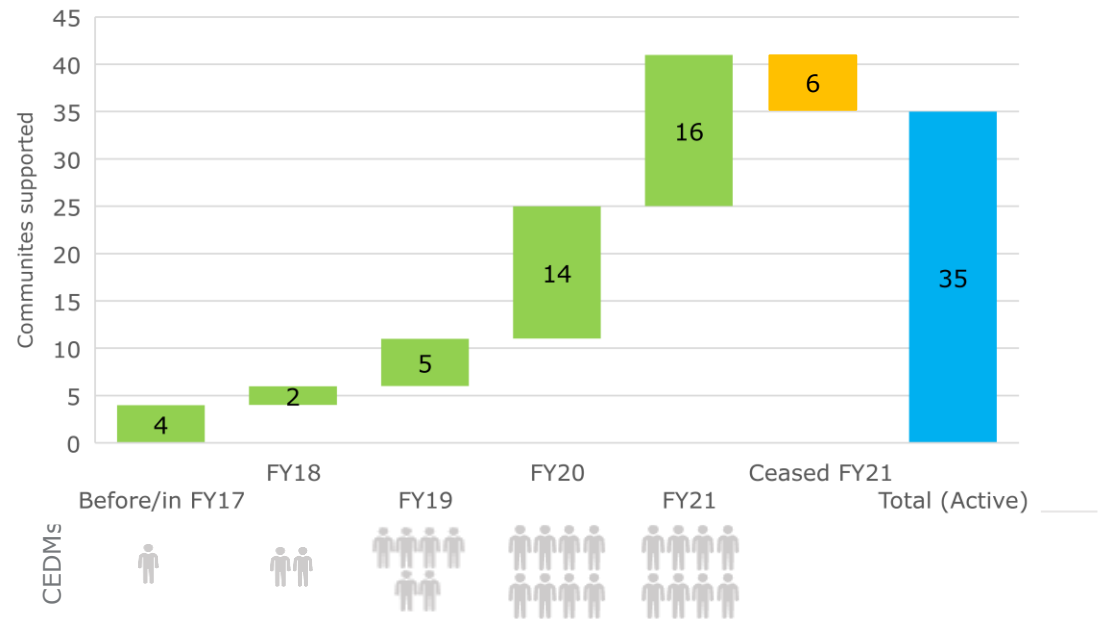
Figure 2: CED communities supported as at 30 June 2021, by location



Since 2015, Many Rivers has worked with 41 communities across Queensland, New South Wales, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia (Figure 2). In FY21, 16 new communities joined the CED program while 6 communities ceased their involvement, resulting in 35 active communities at the end of the period. In total eight CED managers (CEDMs) oversaw the active communities.

Of the 41 communities, most are community organisations registered with the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (78%) or as state-based associations or councils (WA Associations 7%, SA Associations 5%, and NSW Aboriginal Land Council 5%). The remaining organisations are registered with ASIC (5%).

Chart 1: Number of CED communities supported, by support start date



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This section describes the evaluation framework used to understand the impact of the CED program, starting with guiding principles of the evaluation. The literature review of the potential benefits of community economic development informs the theory of change in the program logic, which has been assessed where feasible using consultation data.





# Guiding principles

A set of principles guide the approach of this evaluation.

KEY PRINCIPLES	IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EVALUATION
 Context matters	➔ Each community has different history, context, strengths and goals. Indigenous community goals are not pre-defined and it is not productive or appropriate to draw direct comparisons between communities. The evaluation (like the CED program itself) operates in the context of a journey towards what community leaders strive to achieve for their community.
 Community voice	➔ Voice of community leaders who participate in the CED Program is critical to this evaluation, as it informs whether the CED Program Logic reflects their experiences and aspirations, and how they express their own development process and priorities. This annual evaluation consulted with <b>six</b> community leaders representing communities of different size, location and tenure with Many Rivers.
 Contribution, rather than causality	➔ Progress and success for community organisations depends on a myriad of complex factors that are interrelated. Impact is always influenced by multiple actors and is characterised by non-linear relationships. Capturing contribution is preferred over false precision in causality. The evaluation will, over time, unpack how Many Rivers contributes to the journey that each community is on.
 Strive to measure and capture what matters	➔ While program data and audited financial statements are helpful in understanding aspects of the program, many outcomes that matter to the communities cannot be easily quantified. As such, this evaluation triangulates evidence from different sources to reach an on-balance view of progress at a point in time. It is recognised that quantitative data may not always reflect community perspectives; where this is the case, the evaluation will explicitly acknowledge that. For example, this evaluation qualitatively summarises consultation responses to better understand outcomes that are difficult to measure, such as Strong Foundations outcomes.
 Evolution	➔ The evaluation exists within a dynamic program environment and will influence/be influenced through ongoing learning. As such, the program logic developed as part of the 1 <sup>st</sup> annual evaluation serves both as an anchor the program will be assessed against, as well as a tool that will be refined over time as quantitative data expands and deepens, and as qualitative data such as “community voice” offers new or further insights about the program.
 Data sovereignty	➔ This evaluation recognises that any information collected about communities is owned by the communities. To ensure that communities’ stories are reflected accurately, evaluation insights will be regularly shared with those leading (Many Rivers staff and partners) and participating (community leaders) in the program to promote opportunities to contribute to continual refinements in evaluation approaches.

# Potential benefits of community economic development

The literature indicates that successful community empowerment programs have the capacity to drive far-reaching change and deliver a wide range of positive outcomes.

## Cultural connection

- Empowering Indigenous leaders can revitalise culture and bring Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of working to leadership and management, embedding a greater sense of purpose into community initiatives.<sup>1</sup>
- Research suggests that Indigenous leadership and role modelling can improve outcomes surrounding employment, wellbeing, feelings of belonging and passion for culture.<sup>2</sup>

## Access to meaningful employment

- There is evidence to suggest that Indigenous Australians are more likely to remain in employment when engaging in Indigenous-specific and culturally relevant work.<sup>3</sup>

## Drive intergenerational change

- Engaging in employment has the capacity to drive transformational change, that can influence other family and community members and lead to a 'multiplier' effect.<sup>4</sup>
- This can break an inter-generational cycle of welfare dependence, joblessness and trauma.<sup>5,6</sup>



## Health and wellbeing

- Employment and economic advancement are associated with social, psychological and financial benefits that can enhance wellbeing.<sup>7</sup>
- Enabling Indigenous peoples to express cultural identity can have positive health and wellbeing effects.<sup>8</sup>

## Improved community safety

- Evidence suggests that economic development and community empowerment can improve community safety by reducing incidents of crime.<sup>9</sup>

## Autonomy

- In this context, autonomy can be understood to include ownership and control over economic, political and social factors which govern the lives of those within a community.<sup>10,11</sup>
- Enhancing the self determination and autonomy of Indigenous communities and peoples has the capacity to improve community engagement, lead to more sustainable outcomes and overcome historical policies that disempowered Indigenous peoples as lived and expressed by each community.<sup>12,13,14</sup>

# CED program logic

The evaluation informs, and is informed by, the program logic of the CED program.

A program logic describes a program’s expected value creation chain clearly articulating any assumptions and logical links that a program is based on.

Although the diagrammatic representation of the program logic is of linear structure, it should be acknowledged that **the CED program value creation chain is not linear** (Figure 3). Rather, it operates in a complex system where links between cause and effect are multi-directional, and much more so than they would be for any individual member of the community (i.e. more so than under the MED Program).

## Updates to the program logic

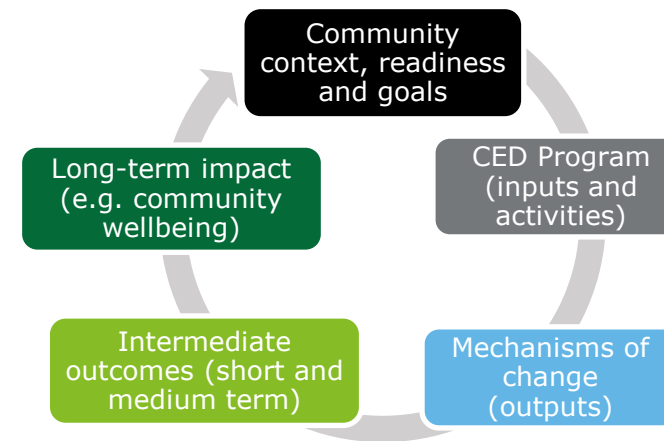
The Program Logic is a dynamic document that will be validated and/or refined in each evaluation as new information and insights about the program are uncovered.

The program logic has not been modified in this evaluation of the CED program. This is because the **assumptions, and short-term and medium-term outcomes, were largely validated based on the evidence collected this time around.**

The assessment of the validity of the program logic in identifying short-term outcomes is in *Section 3 – Strong Foundations Outcomes supported*, and uses the approach outlined in Table 1. This is not a complete assessment due to the quantity and quality of data, and will be updated as more evidence emerges. Further, it should be used to compare outcomes against other outcomes, rather than assess each individual outcome against a specific concept of success.

Medium-term outcomes are assessed in *Section 4 – Economic outcomes supported*, using financial data in particular to identify the extent to which economic outcomes have been realised.

Figure 3: Continuous value creation chain of the CED Program



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2021) based on Many Rivers.

Table 1: Approach to short-term (foundational) outcomes assessment

Domain	Question	Minimal	To some extent	To a large extent
<b>Availability of evidence</b>	How much evidence is available on this outcome so far?			
<b>Frequency and strength of citation</b>	How frequently and strongly was this outcome discussed in consultation?			
<b>Future evaluations</b>	How can the strength of evidence be improved in the future?			

Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2022).

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This section assesses the Strong Foundations outcomes supported by the CED program, reflecting on how activities and outputs are translated into short-term outcomes. This includes:

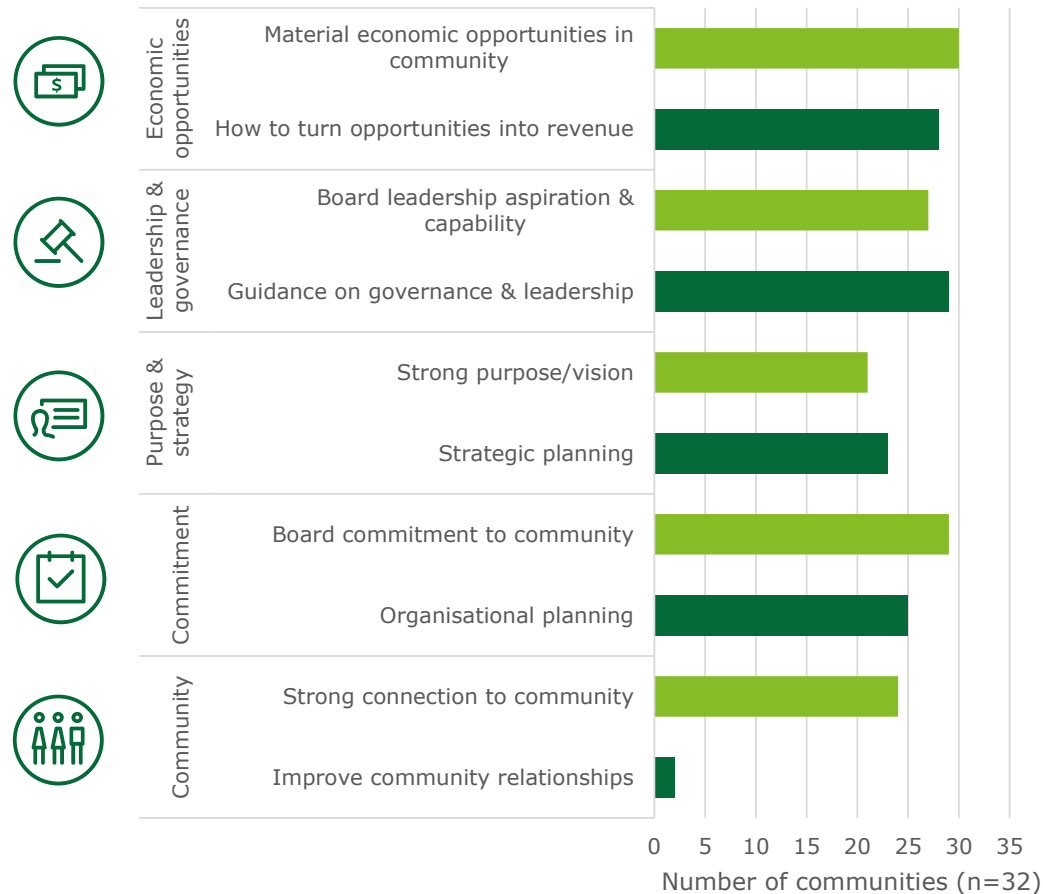
- community strengths and needs
- governance and leadership outcomes
- access and relationship outcomes



# Community strengths and needs

While each community is unique, there are commonalities in their strengths and needs when first connecting with Many Rivers.

Chart 2: Strengths and needs of communities at baseline



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2022) based on Many Rivers’ recommendation summaries, compiled by CEDMs. Note: Communities were allocated multiple strengths and needs.

Chart 2 presents the number of communities identified as having specified strengths and needs when they first connected with Many Rivers, as determined by their CED managers. These strengths and needs are discussed between the managers and community leaders when determining the suitability of CED support to the community’s economic development goals. Identified strengths are consistent with the conditions Many Rivers uses to assess community readiness, including community identity and access to resources.

Among the 32 organisations analysed, **economic opportunities was the most commonly identified strength (94%)**. However, a common need for many communities was turning their economic opportunities into revenue (88%), for example how to capitalise their assets to generate a steady stream of income, typifying a key reason for Many Rivers support.

**Strong board leadership was a common strength (84%), but communities require support in directing this into strong governance (81%),** organisational planning (78%) and financial management (69%). Similarly, a strong purpose/vision (66%) and board commitment (91%) were common strengths among organisations, but many were identified as needing strategic planning (72%) and organisational planning (78%) to turn this vision into reality.

Finally, the importance of community is highlighted in the **high number of communities identified as having a strong connection to community (75%) and strong social cohesion (75%), and the low need to improve community relationships (6%)**.

To consider whether recommendation summaries by CEDMs aligned with community members’ perspectives, the **summaries were compared against agendas developed with the leaders of community organisations**. This comparison found a similar identification of needs across the two assessments. For example, for most organisations where the manager had identified a need for improved governance, community leaders agreed on initial goals focused on strengthening board governance, through activities such as updating their Rule Book, holding AGMs regularly and starting meetings on time.

# Governance and leadership outcomes

Consulted organisation leaders frequently discussed the role of Many Rivers in building strong foundations in governance and leadership.



## Improved governance foundations

According to consultations, Many Rivers plays an important role in building strong governance foundations in Indigenous community organisations:

- **Legal structure** – community leaders noted the important referral role of Many Rivers in directing them to lawyers and generally supporting them with legal issues where feasible.
- **Compliance with legislation** – some community leaders identified helpful legislative and regulatory support from Many Rivers, for example providing assistance in meeting reporting requirements.
- **Financial literacy** – a key support that Many Rivers provides consultees is upskilling members of an organisation in financial literacy to ensure that financial statements and systems are well understood. This is essential for setting up an organisation that can maintain its own assets and grow its wealth. For example, one CEO described “[thanks to Many Rivers], directors can go through financial statements, ask financial questions etc. Their knowledge went from zero to really high.”
- **Roles and responsibilities** – Many Rivers has helped board members better understand their role in supporting the community, and responsibilities in attending meetings, and contributing to discussions.
- **Policies and procedures** – many consultees discussed improvements to organisational procedures following Many Rivers’ support, for example with regular, minuted board meetings.



## Improved capability of community organisation leadership, management and operations

A key pillar of Many Rivers’ support as identified by organisation leaders was improved capability among the leadership and management teams, and overall operations:

- **Leadership and management** – consistent support from CED managers has enabled organisation leaders, particularly board managers, to better understand how to build and run an organisation. Many Rivers has been instrumental in improving the capability and capacity of community organisations, and being one phone call away as a sounding board for organisational decisions.
- **Operations** – Key operational supports mentioned in consultation included resourcing, business planning and prioritising. For example, one consultee described Many Rivers’ help in identifying the number and value of assets they had, and advice on targeting certain assets to drive future wealth. Another noted “Across the board they are a one stop shop for an Indigenous organisation getting their first runs on the board.”

	Availability of evidence	Frequency and strength of citation	Future evaluations
Governance foundations			More systematic approach to understanding progress against governance foundations
Capability			More systematic approach to understanding progress in capability

# Access and relationship outcomes

Strong relationships are well recognised to be key to the success of the CED program.



## Established strong, trusting relationship with CEDM

In every consultation, the importance of trust and relationships to the partnership between organisations and Many Rivers was strongly apparent. Every community leader identified the support, trust, and consistency from CEDMs as a key impact of Many Rivers, with leaders able to call managers at any time over many years of continual partnership. The years' long support provided by the program was similarly praised as unique and critical to trust and a strong relationship.

One organisation noted initial hesitancy in engaging with Many Rivers, that was overcome through consistency and genuine interest in building trust. Another organisation leader mentioned that "the key here is the relationship. My ideas on business are important but the relationship is what drives it forward."



## Access to new funding opportunities

Many Rivers has assisted communities with grant funding applications, for example by helping leaders articulate organisational governance. A key support has also been improving organisations' financial independence, with support transitioning from reliance on government funding to majority business-revenue funded. In focusing more on generating their own funding, organisations have further benefitted from Many Rivers' support in prioritising projects and actions.



## Increased presence and recognition in the community

This evaluation has consulted only with community leaders, and not with individuals in the broader community. As such, it is too early to validate whether the CED program has contributed to the organisations' presence and recognition in the community.



## Increased access to relevant additional support services

Some consultees discussed the important link that CEDMs can make between organisations and government, which is particularly important for regional and rural communities that need to connect to government and other services in urban areas.

	Availability of evidence	Frequency and strength of citation	Future evaluations
Trusting relationship			More systematic approach to understanding relationship with CEDM
Recognition in community			Consider who is being consulted to understand community perspectives
Funding opportunities			Data collection on grants won through Many Rivers support, and other funding opportunities
Access to services			More targeted data collection related to access to support services (noting this topic was not specifically asked in consultation)

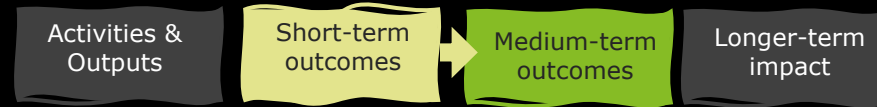
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This section assesses economic outcomes supported by the CED program, reflecting on how short-term outcomes support medium-term, and documents examples of emerging long-term impacts. This includes:

- CED program in FY21
- case studies
- economic activities
- variation in economic indicators
- journey over time





## CED Program in FY21

In FY21, CED program community organisations managed a combined \$56m in assets, \$29 million in revenue, and employed over 200 employees.

Many Rivers collects financial and economic information about the supported Indigenous community organisations. This includes data from audited financial reports and information about economic undertakings (e.g. individuals employed, businesses established).

Of the 35 Indigenous community organisations active in the program, financial reports were available for 17 organisations in FY21. This represents a decrease on the previous financial year, when data was available for 19 out of 33 organisations. Combined, the 17 community organisations reported on still represent a substantial portfolio of economic activity. Table 2 presents some of the key economic metrics for the CED community organisations and Chart 3 depicts the tenure of active communities in the program, showing the strong growth in participation in recent years, with 83% of active communities starting their journeys with Many Rivers in FY21 or FY20.

Year on year profit has seen the largest increase from \$1.1M in FY2020 to \$5.0 million in FY21 (355% increase). This was largely driven by an additional \$2.5M in land value and building assets received by one organisation. Revenue also grew by \$8.5 million from FY20 to FY21, with most of this growth due to new organisations joining the program. These figures are likely to continue grow over time as more communities join the program and are able to provide financial reports, and existing communities grow through Many Rivers support.

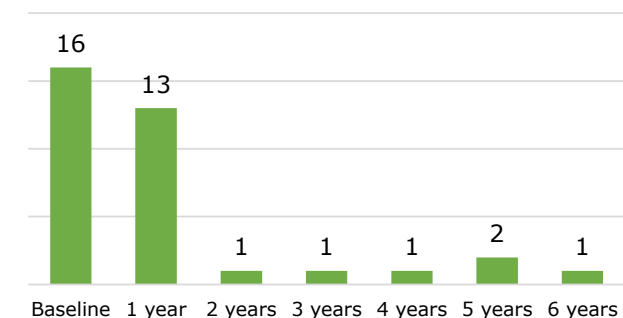
Six communities ceased their operations with the Many Rivers CED program in FY21. The communities were in their second, third or fourth years with Many Rivers. No clear trend was identified for ceased communities as member numbers and revenue varied across these communities. While this evaluation did not involve direct consultation with ceased community organisations, Many Rivers notes that COVID-19 and leadership changes were key reasons for communities ceasing.

Table 2: Aggregate economic indicators for communities participating in the CED Program

Financial Year	Revenue	Profit	Assets	Employment expenses	Employment
<b>FY20</b>	\$20.9M n=18	\$1.1M n=17	\$49.2M n=18	\$9.5M n=16	181 n=18
<b>FY21</b>	\$29.4M n=17	\$5.0M n=17	\$55.9M n=17	\$10.1M n=15	207 n=24

Note: "Employment" refers to the total headcount of part-time and full-time employees. FY20 data differs from reported figures in FY20 evaluation as historical data was updated.

Chart 3: Tenure of active communities in the CED Program



Note: Baseline refers to communities that began with Many Rivers in FY21, 1 year to communities that began in FY20, etc.

# Case Study: The value of a long-term partnership with Many Rivers in achieving sustainable employment

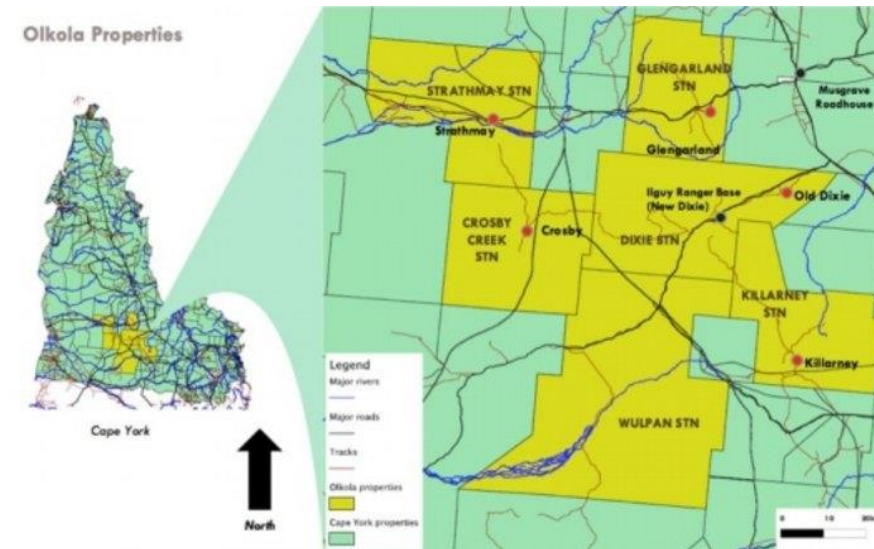
## Olkola Aboriginal Corporation

Olkola Aboriginal Corporation has been in partnership with Many Rivers since 2015. Located in Cape York, Far North Queensland, they are a well-established corporation with diversified sources of income and desirable social outcomes. Their successful business ventures vary from tourism, carbon credits and cattle to land management, ranger programs and operating a roadhouse.

Initially, Many Rivers helped the corporation with business and strategic plans, “upskilled [their] board on financial literacy and governance processes” and adhere to regulations for Aboriginal Corporations. With time, Olkola plans to shift their future focus onto further economic development, employing more Indigenous workers and improving sustainability of country through reinvesting their profits into vegetable gardens. Growing their own food in the future will not only improve community health outcomes but also reduce cost of living.

The community leader consulted as part of this evaluation reflected that the biggest achievement for the Corporation has been improving Indigenous employment. They have a 98% Indigenous workforce and 97% retention rate within the community. This is a total of 25 full-time employees and 4 casual employees in FY21. Olkola also managed to navigate COVID despite tourism shutdowns and no government funding by relying on diverse sources of income to ensure their workers were retained and paid.

*“Our [CED Manager] was fundamental in achieving this. Helping us with forecasting and budgeting, and business plans and strategic direction. (...) She has been right with us throughout the journey.”*



Source: Brisbane Times (2014), Australian Conservation Foundation (2019)

# Economic Initiatives

The range of different economic activities that CED communities engage in reflects the variety of communities themselves.

In FY21, supported Indigenous community organisations reported establishing:

- **10 new businesses** – focused on the production of goods and/or services with a commercial intention
- **13 economic projects** – focused on the benefit of the community members through employment and/or community services, usually funded through ongoing grant funding
- **8 economic activities** – similar to economic projects, but established as one-off activities, rather than an ongoing venture.

Table 3 shows how these additional economic initiatives established in FY21 contributed to a strong base of initiatives that were operational across communities at the start of FY21. Given each organisation’s journey and aspirations are different, the number of new initiatives expected to be established should only be assessed against organisation's goals.

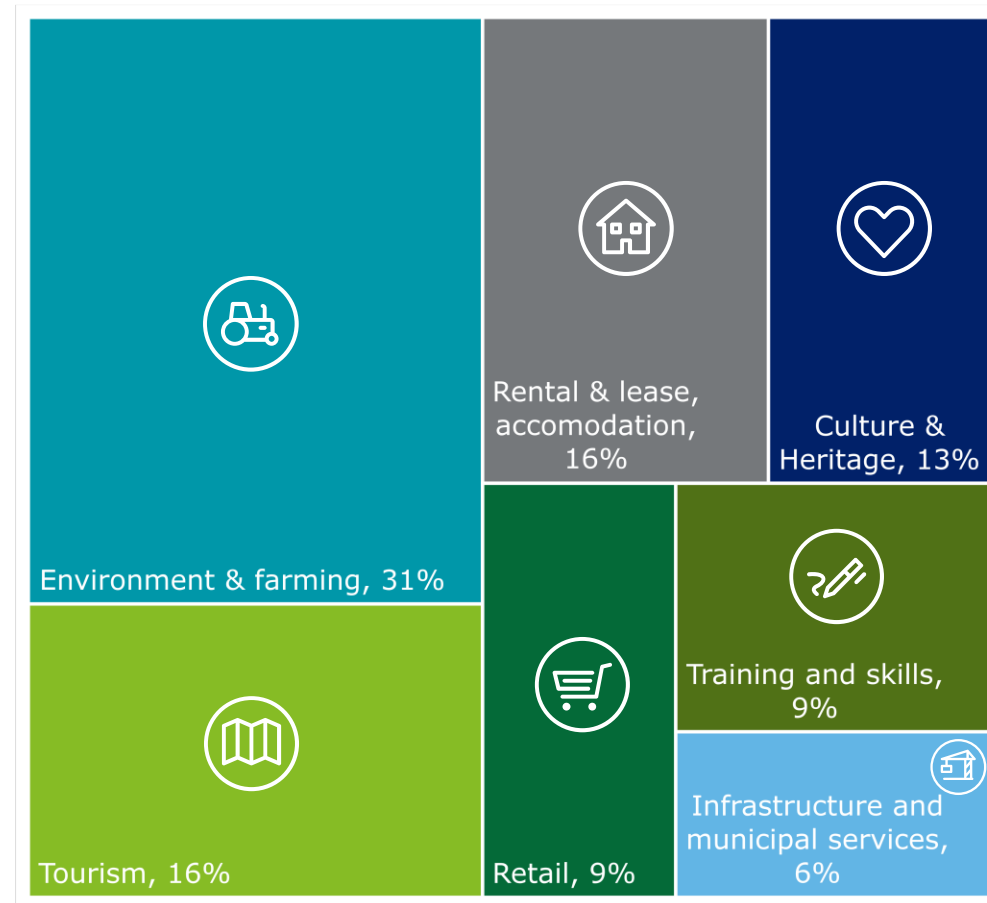
Chart 4 depicts the shares by sector of all business and economic activity in FY21, reflecting a vast range of operations. Business and economic activity in FY21 was concentrated in environment and farming, such as carbon credit schemes and land management, tourism, such as caravan parks and festivals, and rental and lease accommodation, such as roadhouse leases and housing contracts.

Table 3: Number of businesses, economic projects and economic activities ongoing at the start of FY21, and established in FY21

	Businesses	Economic projects	Economic activities	Total
<b>Ongoing at start of FY21</b>	39	26	4	69
<b>Additional in FY21</b>	10	13	8	31

Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2022).

Chart 4: Share of economic work by sector in FY21, including businesses, economic projects and economic activities



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2022).

Note: Economic initiatives were allocated to multiple categories where relevant.

# Case Study: Growing economic opportunities in a sustainable way through business planning and strategic support by Many Rivers

## Buda Dji Aboriginal Corporation

Buda Dji Aboriginal Corporation is located in Kuranda, Far North Queensland. They have been working with Many Rivers and their CED Manager for the past two years. Located in the tourism hotspot of Cairns, Buda Dji's business ventures are centred around tourism. They are also involved in ranger programs, coffee roastings and native food production.

Buda Dji has many business ideas stemming from their wealth of economic opportunities. As such, Many Rivers helps with prioritising their efforts on viable, profitable ideas which can help to improve financial, social and employment outcomes.

The corporation appreciates Many Rivers' step-by-step approach to business planning, which involves a business plan, where to find investment and where to start taking action. They also act as a sounding board for senior leaders to talk through the concerns, realities and considerations of their business ideas.

Turning these economic opportunities into revenue and wealth can help to "build the workforce that merges within the culture and those individuals then can affect change within their families". Improving employment outcomes through these business ventures is a key social goal for Buda Dji.



Source: Djabugay Aboriginal Corporation (2020).

# Variation in communities by revenue, assets and number of members

Community organisations vary in size and the intensity of their economic activities, with no clear trend apparent across key indicators.

**There is no such thing as a 'typical' community, with organisations ranging in size, aspiration and values.**

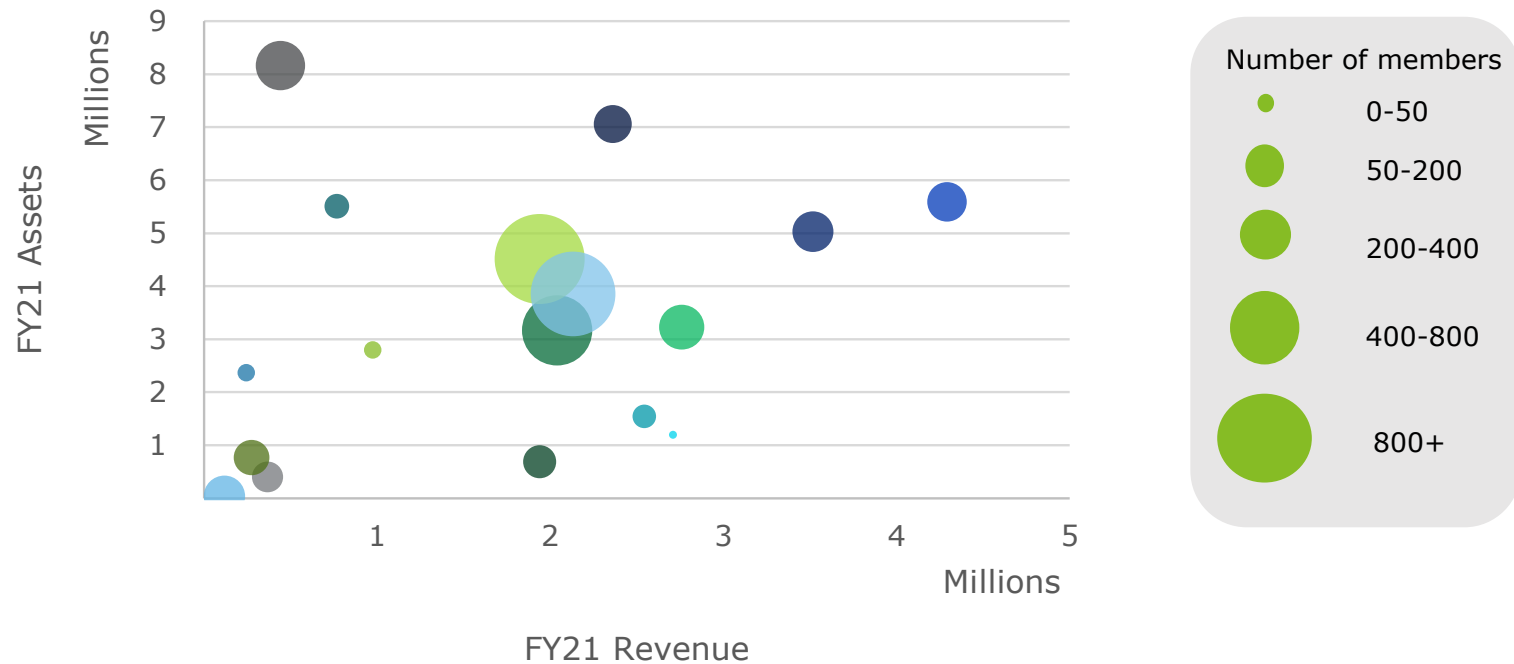
Chart 5 plots community organisations based on their revenue in FY21 and assets in FY21, with each bubble (and colour) representing a different community organisation, and the size of the bubble reflecting member numbers.

The differences in organisation is clear in the Chart X, with no clear correlation between any of the indicators. There is a large range in assets across different levels of revenue, for example some organisations with low revenue have a high level of assets. There is also significant variability in member numbers for organisations with similar assets or revenue.

Small sample size continues to pose challenges to statistical analysis, with financial data only available for 17 of 41 organisations that have participated in the program so far. Over time, as the program reach expands, it is anticipated that this limitation will lessen and clearer trends may emerge.

More detailed graphs summarising revenue, assets, profit, and employment expenses over financial years are included in the Appendix ([p.31](#)).

Chart 5: Comparison of Revenue and Assets in FY21 overlayed with number of members in each community



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2022).

Note: Each coloured bubble represents a different community that reported revenue in FY21 (n=17).

# Journey over time

Examining financial statements provides an indication of growth in economic activity over time, however sample sizes remain small.

When analysing financial and economic indicators for community organisations, it is important to recognise how long each organisation has participated in the CED program. Rather than considering financial years, comparing communities that have remained with the CED program for the same period of time allows for a more accurate understanding of the impact of Many Rivers. It is important to still note differences in organisations when interpreting trends.

Charts 6 and 7 compare average annual revenue and employment expenses at the baseline and after a number of years of CED program participation. Over time, average annual revenue and annual employment expenses increased for all waves. One exception is the decrease in average employment expenses for communities that started with Many Rivers in FY20, likely reflecting the impact of the pandemic. Given the small sample sizes for later years, the results are to be interpreted with caution.

Chart 6: Average community annual revenue at baseline and after number of years with Many Rivers.

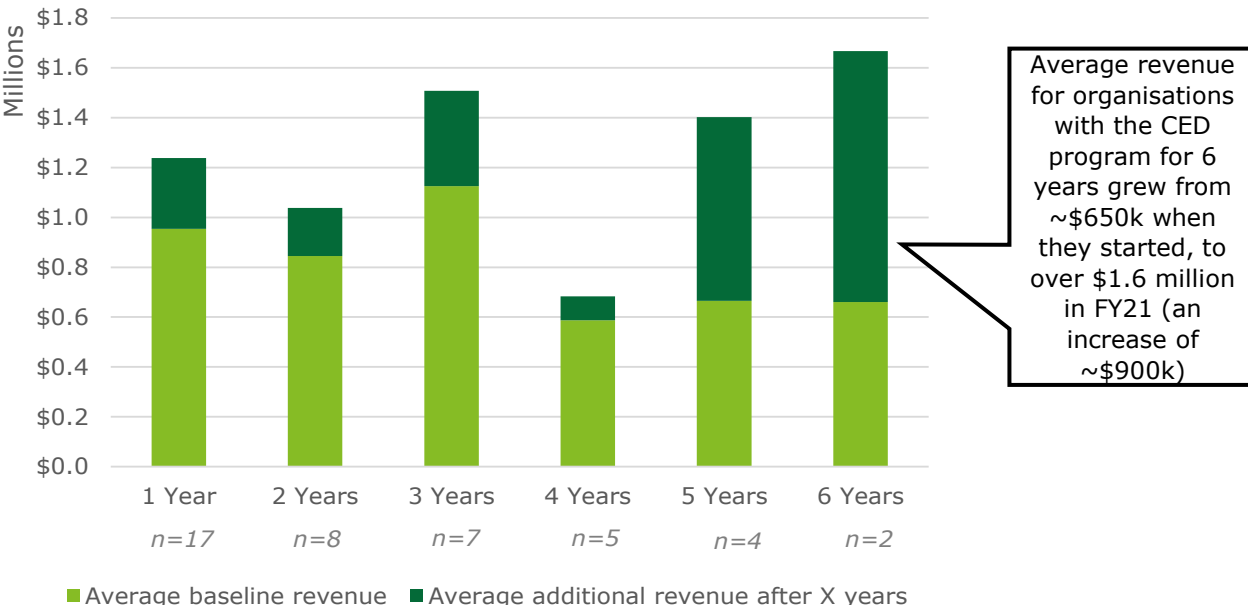
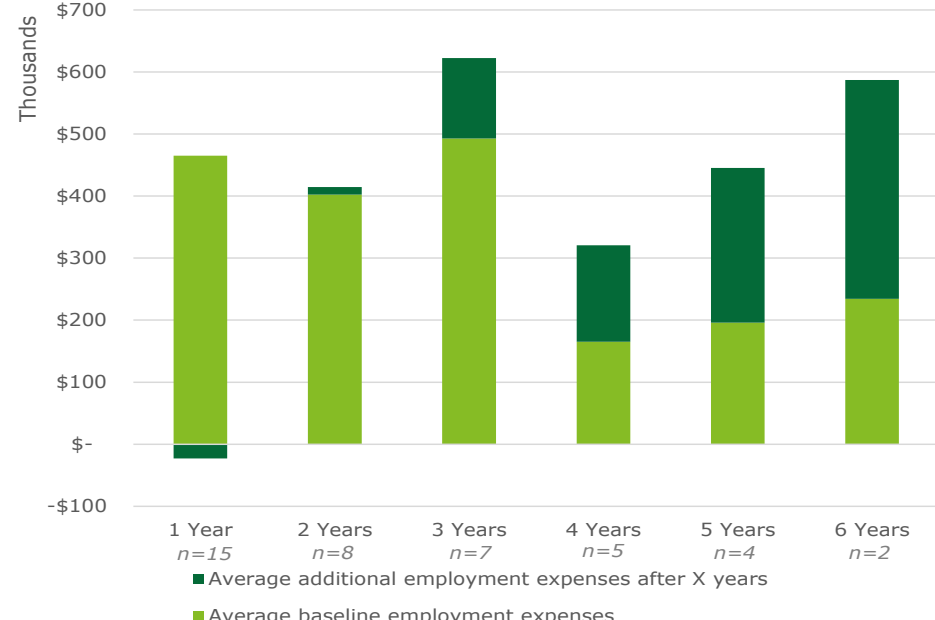


Chart 7: Average community annual employment expenses at baseline and after number of years with Many Rivers.



Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2022). Note: this includes data from communities that ceased in FY21.

Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2022). Note: this includes data from communities that ceased in FY21.

## Long-term vision

While most organisation leaders are focused on Strong Foundations outcomes, there are a range of economic, social and cultural aspirations for community.

Many community leaders in consultation specified their vision for the future based on establishing a strong foundation.

### Economic and organisational goals

A positive future for community means strong economic development for most communities, with diversified business opportunities and economic projects. Reduced reliance on government funding for economic opportunities was mentioned by a few consultees as important for the financial sustainability of organisations, as well as growing and maintaining the asset base and wealth.

Many consultees noted concerns about the sustainability of organisations if young people do not take over from current leaders and elders. In some regional or rural areas, workers leave when they have upskilled, exacerbating the problem. Addressing this issue is central to organisation succession and the realisation of long-term goals for the community.

Community leaders also noted the high unemployment rates in their community and that many of their employees were previously long-term unemployed. The main benefit of higher economic activity according to organisation leaders is providing sustainable and meaningful employment for local Indigenous people.

### Social and cultural goals

Breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage and improving the lives of the next generation were consistent themes from consultation, hinging on higher employment and its role model effect within families.

Consultees noted that by driving economic activity in their local areas they also have the opportunity to take ownership of identity and culture. This might mean providing culturally safe workplaces as well as cultural and educational experiences for young people. A few organisation leaders also mentioned flow-on effects of economic development such as health, education and housing.

Some long-term outcomes identified in the program logic were not explicitly discussed or asked in consultation, and so are not referenced on this page. This is partly because consultations were deliberately open to allow leaders to identify the impact of Many Rivers in their own words, but also, for some outcomes, due to organisational maturity with the program. The ongoing evaluation of the CED program will continue to be curious about these impacts, and consider differences in the language of outcomes between communities and government/academics (see [p.26](#) for further discussion).

Identified long-term outcomes in Program Logic as aspirations for communities:

Enhanced sustainability of community organisation

Created sustainable and meaningful employment opportunities

Improved employment and market incentives for individuals

Increased connection to land and culture

Increased self-determination and autonomy

Improved community health, education and housing outcomes

# Case Study: Enabling long-term growth and community impact through a focus on strong governance and a solid organisational structure

## Ang Gnarra Organisation

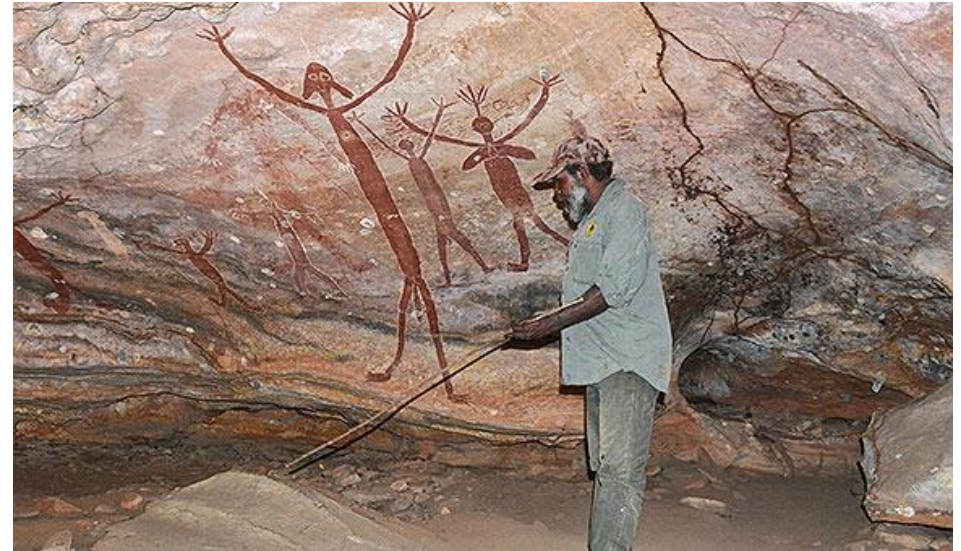
Ang Gnarra Organisation is located in Laura, Queensland. They have been working with Many Rivers for nearly 7 years. Since entering this partnership, the corporation has formalised their board positions, established stronger board governance, narrowed down their vision, improved their financial standing and set future goals and plans.

Ang Gnarra's economic opportunities are centred around tourism. Many Rivers has supported them with running the cultural centre, developing their caravan park and creating their newer tourism ventures, such as the Rock Art Tours and Laura Dance Festival.

*"A lot of the work we did with Many Rivers since the start was around building a structure that the corporation could work within (...) things like what does it mean to be a corporation, what governance is required in the Act, what is good governance, what is the financial system like (...) They are now assisting with developing the tourism program, to build it up to make it a first-class product."*

So far, they have created six new jobs in relation to the acquisition of the cultural centre, tourism and the Rock Art activities. They strongly believe in being *"inclusive of who you're doing this [work] for"* as a corporation, as businesses should belong to the locals. They want Indigenous people to run businesses and strive to coach and guide young people to follow in their footsteps. For the corporation's longevity, it is vital for young people to be involved in either running the tourism business or tours or sitting on the board.

Ang Gnarra also visits local schools to teach them about country and foster school leaders. "We don't want to see our young people having to leave the country. The dream is to provide jobs for the future of our young people", says their CEO.



Source: Ang Gnarra Corporation (2022).





- 1 | Context and CED Program
- 2 | Evaluation approach
- 3 | Strong Foundations outcomes supported
- 4 | Economic outcomes supported
- 5 | Future evaluations

This section considers how future evaluations can continue to build on the learnings that emerge through annual monitoring and evaluation process.

These future considerations for the evaluation are directed at improving the understanding of how the CED program contributes to realising communities' goals.

# Future considerations

Ongoing evaluation will reveal more about CED community organisations, their successes and challenges, and the associated drivers.

This second evaluation provides further learnings for enhancing future evaluations of the CED program. The key areas identified in the first evaluation for future consideration were partially addressed in this report:

## 1. Expanding on the measures of community organisation outcomes:

through consultation, it was possible to start to consider non-financial measures of success and gain a better understanding of how well the program logic reflects the CED program.

- Some of the *assumptions* underlying the program logic were assessed, depending on whether sufficient time had passed for evidence to be collected. Future evaluations will be better able to test these assumptions as more data is collected, and may consider consulting with communities that decided to withdraw from the program to further validate these assumptions.
- *Short-term outcomes* such as governance were assessed using a simple measurement system, that could be enhanced through wider consultation and a more systematic measurement approach, for example standardised metrics for each outcome that are measured in readiness assessments.
- Understanding non-economic *medium and long-term outcomes* will require more organisations to reach maturity in their partnership with Many Rivers.

**2. Positioning the CED program in the broader context of Indigenous community organisations in Australia:** consideration of how the CED program fits into the broader context of Indigenous community organisations was also not possible in this evaluation due to lack of available data.

**3. Growing sample size:** while some more trends and patterns were able to be identified in this year's evaluation, more data will be required to robustly understand patterns and allow for further disaggregation of data.













Some additional considerations for future evaluations include:

1. **Continue refining and testing the program logic** to reflect the language and/or specific visions of communities, in their own words, noting the difference in the theoretical concepts explored in the program logic and how community leaders describe their organisations and communities. This includes validating the assumptions underpinning the program logic, with [p.27](#) providing an early indication of how available evidence supports these assumptions. This may also entail updating the literature review from the first evaluation as useful and relevant research emerges to inform the program logic.
2. **Exploring the pre-existing conditions** in community organisations that allow for the organisation to benefit from Many Rivers. This was discussed in consultations, where some leaders noted that organisations' context (e.g., leadership buy-in, existing governance) can influence the journey with Many Rivers significantly. As the program continues, assessment of ceased and ongoing communities will assist in understanding how these contextual factors contribute to the journeys. Updates to how community strengths and needs are defined and discussed ([p.13](#)) will also assist in this exploration, including better incorporation of community voice.
3. **Greater quality and quantity of data collection, including more standardised data collection,** will improve the strength of evidence of future evaluations, including on whether organisations are tracking well against goals set with Many Rivers, for example through readiness assessments and agendas. Longer baseline data for communities, in the years prior to engaging with Many Rivers, would also improve the analysis of journeys over time.

# Program logic assumptions

This early assessment of assumptions will be refined over time with more evidence.

To test whether CED program outputs and activities can be reasonably expected to contribute to short-term outcomes, the evaluation examined select assumptions that underpin the program logic, based on consultations and assessments of recommendation summaries and agendas. This table reflects a commencement of an assessment process rather than a conclusion, and will be updated as more evidence emerges. Further, the assessments reflect comparisons across assumptions, rather than progress towards an absolute standard that is expected to be met over time.

#	Assumption	Availability of evidence	Realisation of assumption	Future evaluations
1	CED support is community leadership driven and therefore a reflection of community priorities and values.			Consult members of the community in which organisations operate, not just organisation leaders, to assess alignment of values
2	CED support builds on community organisation /community existing strengths, knowledge and assets.			More systematic approach to understanding strengths (e.g. readiness assessments)
3	CEDMs are able to allocate sufficient time to work with each community, and the CEDMs possess the required skills to effectively support communities.			Consider consulting CEDMs and community leaders separately
4	Community leaders acquire new skills and capabilities as a result of working closely with CEDMs to improve their governance, compliance, strategy and operating plans.			More systematic approach to understanding acquisition of new skills and capabilities
5	The provision of formal and informal supports leads community members to build trusting relationships with CEDMs.			More systematic approach to understanding relationships with CEDMs
8	Increased community organisation effort with CED support improves connection to external markets and opportunities.			More systematic approach to understanding connections to external markets

Note: Assumptions 6, 7, 9, and 10 (refer to [p.29](#)) were not assessed in this evaluation as more time is needed for a strong evidence base to be collected on these areas. Future evaluation may consider consulting with communities that decided to withdraw from the program to further validate these assumptions, and separately consider how this assessment process may be applied to the counterfactual of each assumption.

# Appendix

# Variation in economic indicators by financial year

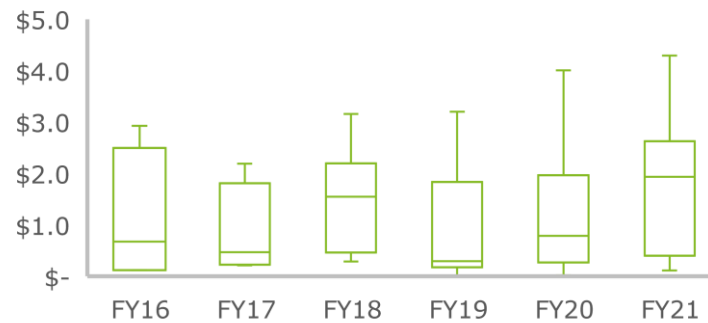
An additional year of data further emphasises the variability in economic indicators across communities and over time.

These charts provide an update to the financial year analysis of economic indicators included in the FY20 evaluation. The charts in the body of the report are considered to be more accurate representations of the CED program as they present the journey over time for organisations.

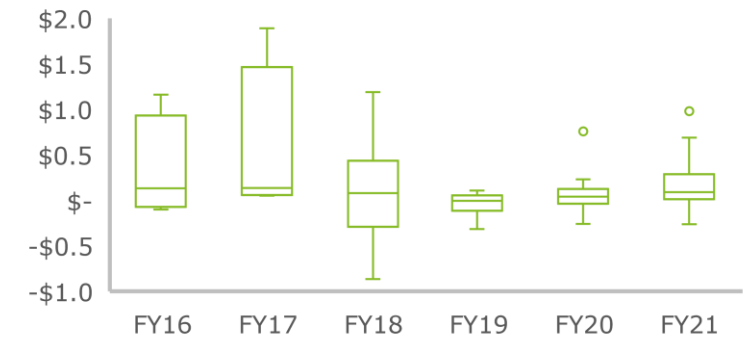
Similar to last year, the charts show high variability in the average level of revenue, profit, assets and employment expenses per community. The FY21 data reveal a rise in the average level of all indicators from FY20, but continue to also depict a substantial range between maximum and minimum values.

Chart 8: Distribution of community organisation (a) revenue; (b) profit; (c) assets; (d) employment expenses over financial years (\$m)

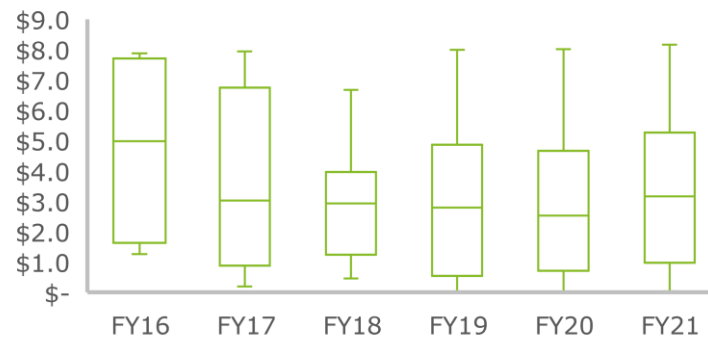
(a) Revenue (\$m)



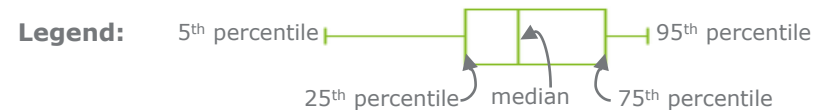
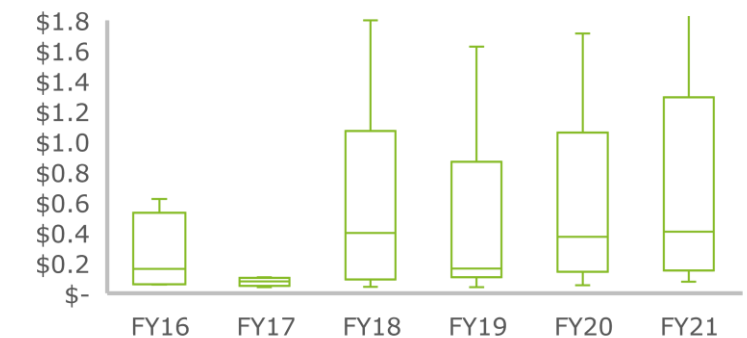
(b) Profit (\$m)



(c) Assets (\$m)



(d) Employment expenses (\$m)<sup>1</sup>



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- <sup>14</sup> Morley (2015)



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