

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leaders Program - Pilot Project summary

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In June 2016, the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation (ARLF) and Australian Government's Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), developed a plan for a pilot program aimed at supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders. The plan was shaped by a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and individuals and a reference group has guided further program development.

Overall development of the NATSILP was directed by leaders and graduates of the Australian Rural Leadership Program. The NATSILP Program Manager and Program Administrator were appointed in 2016.

In 2017 the following pilot sessions were delivered:

1. **Gibbs Program**, held in Dubbo New South Wales, with 11 participants completing the single-session program from 1-11 May 2017.
2. **Nicholls Program**, 15 participants completing the first session held in Shepparton, Victoria, from 21-26 May, and then 13 of the 15 participants completing the second session of the Nicholls program in Canberra from 10-16 September 2017.
3. **O'Shane Program**, 13 participants completing this first session in Cairns, Queensland, from 18-23 June, and then 11 of the 13 participants completed the second session of the O'Shane program in Canberra from 10-16 September 2017.
4. **Lingiari Program**, held in two locations, Kalkarindji and Darwin, Northern Territory, with 17 participants completing the single-session program from 21-31 August 2017.
5. The fifth session was held in **Canberra** and involved participants from O'Shane and Nicholls.

Feedback from 19 participants (34.5% response rate) across all programs, along with feedback from the Program Manager and Program Administrator, provided the basis to:

1. Assess how well the NATSILP pilot has been implemented.
2. Assess whether the NATSILP pilot met its objectives.
3. Assess the outputs/outcomes for participants.

A focus of the evaluation is to compare the different program delivery structures offered: the two sessions with an extended break between both sessions; one session in one location over an extended (11 days) period of time; and one session in two locations over an extended (11 days) period of time.

The following recommendations have been drawn from feedback and resource analysis.

1. The program should continue with its current content and Program Manager and Administrator but with further administrative support to help with program recruitment. This support is also to increase communication and build rapport between the ARLF and the potential program participants prior to, during and following program delivery.
2. The program strongly rests upon the educational talent, leadership and networks of the Program Manager. It is clear from the responses that his approach is personally and educationally challenging for participants yet he has the ability to provide an environment

where participants feel confident, positive, and highly capable. His authenticity, courage, and intuitive abilities associated with people and learning, teamed with his lived-experience and empathy underpin the considerable leadership learning within the NATSILP pilot. All effort should be made to maintain the Program Manager's employment.

3. The program content needs to include local Indigenous leaders, communities and their stories. This was undertaken as part of the pilot, although the extra effort required to do this to a greater degree in the future is recognised. The naming of programs so that they become further embedded and associated with 'place' should be continued beyond the pilot.
4. A mentoring program should be established, utilising graduates from the pilot program and other identified individuals. This is critical to the leadership success of the program as it continues and builds leadership learning and leadership networks across Australia. The mentoring program should be supported by ongoing professional development and should incorporate selected participants from the pilot program who should also help with recruitment ('shoulder-tap') for future programs.
5. All programs should comprise two-sessions with the second session held in Canberra. There should be a break of at least one month between the two sessions and during this time participants should be given a semi-structured task that supports their critical reflection of leadership practice in light of their leadership learning from the first session. This could incorporate the use of a diary of personal and professional leadership reflections.
6. Involvement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous facilitators should be continued as long as the content is appropriate to the leadership learning and consistent with the ARLF's theory of change. Having stated this it should be recognised that much of the content requires experiences that the participants can readily relate to and the knowledge and involvement of indigenous leaders for this purpose is encouraged.
7. The medical form, although re-developed during the program, must address specific questions about the requirements of individuals who might have special needs but with an emphasis on helping to plan for support. If special needs are identified, further clarification should be sought from the participant to detail the support required. Providers such as Mobility Matters and Technical Aid for the Disabled in the ACT provide advice as well as living aids and equipment for hire. These aids and equipment can help to make special needs' participants more comfortable so that they can concentrate on leadership learning by reducing their discomfort. Whatever the disability, it is worth seeking as much advice and understanding about the individual's needs in order to make certain that the participant can fully participate within the learning environment.
8. Participants need to be advised that any changes that they make to their travel and accommodation arrangements after these have been finalised, must be made at their own cost. Under circumstances where unforeseen issues arise, it is up to the Program Manager in consultation with the Program Administrator to ascertain whether the ARLF will cover the costs for any changes to accommodation and/or flights.