



Community Development Program: Phase 1 Trials

Synthesis of Early Learnings from 'Trialling Pathways to Real Jobs'

The Government is delivering on its election commitment to replace CDP with a new program with real jobs, proper wages and decent conditions – developed in partnership with First Nations people. Between November 2022 and June 2023, CDP providers were able to re-direct around 25 per cent of their funding to work with remote communities and trial new approaches to securing real jobs for participants. Fifty-eight trial approaches were undertaken in this phase, with a total of \$31 million in expenditure. The trials were then extended and expanded into a second phase, taking place between July 2023 and October 2024.

This report synthesises the NIAA's early learnings from the first phase under the CDP Trial – *'Trialling Pathways to Real Jobs'*. It includes analysis of self-reported data from CDP providers, as well as insights from site visits made by NIAA regional office staff and the NIAA's Monitoring, Evidence and Learning partner, Keogh Bay.

Overall learnings

Trialling Pathways to Real Jobs proved an excellent opportunity to better understand how people receiving unemployment benefits in remote parts of Australia can be supported into work. Two-thirds of participating providers reported that their approaches received a greater level of community support than usual CDP activities.

Over 5,500 CDP participants benefitted in some way from the trial approaches (at an average cost of around \$4,700 per beneficiary). Of these, over 1,300 participants attained paid work opportunities. Compared with the same period twelve months prior (that is, November 2021 – June 2022), there were 4.3 per cent more job placements during the Trialling Pathways to Real Jobs initiative. Higher placements were driven by increases in services industries and in non-routine manual occupations. The largest increases in individual occupations were for community workers, builder's labourers, garden labourers and handypersons.

The majority of paid work opportunities were casual and short term, with a focus on providing participants with work experience. Yet despite the focus on shorter-term placements, overall the initiative was still successful in creating longer-term employment outcomes. Around a quarter (24



per cent) of placements resulted in a 13-week outcome and around 11 per cent resulted in a 26-week outcome during the initiative.

There were, however, some significant challenges associated with a quick, large-scale shift in the delivery of CDP. Many trial approaches only commenced in earnest in February or March 2023 due to cultural events, natural disasters and the effects of the wet season. Others experienced administrative delays and difficulty in accessing materials, contractors and equipment. Many trial approaches were delayed by challenges in procuring training organisations in a timely manner.

These challenges, along with the relatively short period, limited the benefits of Phase 1. Around \$20 million of the \$51 million in funding was unspent during the initiative. Five providers spent less than 20 per cent of their budget. This broadly highlights the importance of generous lead-in times to mobilise new programs in remote areas, rather than issues with the design of the approaches. Fifty-two of the approved trial approaches in Phase 2 of the trial (from July 2023 to October 2024) continue on from Phase 1 in some form, building on their successes and learning from the shortcomings.

Specific learnings

As is the nature of place-based approaches, contextual factors have often been the key determinants of the success or shortfall of specific trial approaches. However, there are some specific learnings for each of the overarching themes of the Trialling Pathways to Real Jobs initiative:

Remove barriers to employment and improve job outcomes

Key learning: Enhanced case management, including mentoring, is a key driver of participant employment success.

A key role of CDP providers is to help participants overcome the range of factors that make it hard for them to be job ready. Under normal CDP delivery, providers generally meet monthly with participants to discuss their pathway to employment. To assist with training or employment, providers may offer participants work clothing, safety equipment and occasionally assistance with transport, as well as post-placement support as appropriate. Many participants are also offered accredited and non-accredited training, as well as assistance with obtaining licences, working with vulnerable people cards or other identification documents to apply for work.

However, the vast majority of trial approaches sought to offer some form of 'enhanced' case management services as part of the initiative. This may be increasing the level and regularity of support or by offering new services beyond normal CDP delivery. For example, some providers placed mentors in the workplace to provide daily support to participants, while others employed a dedicated mentor to meet regularly one-on-one with youth on their caseload. Providers reported providing enhanced support for nearly 2,400 participants, at an average cost of around \$2,100 per beneficiary. Several providers emphasised though that CDP is unable to fill all the local services gaps – such as education, mental or physical health services – necessary to address participants' barriers.



Keogh Bay identified some key drivers of success for enhanced case management: well-trained and supported case managers with a manageable caseload, strong personal connections and an emphasis on cultural safety. Mentors – some meeting daily with participants and others even placed in host organisations – were significant in helping overcome family and social pressures to not attend work and helping to resolve workplace issues.

Eleven trial approaches offered some form of stepped approach, with different opportunities offered to participants who are work-ready relative to those who are not. A number of stakeholders highlighted that re-engaging participants and building confidence is a success in and of itself, rather than only focusing on work placements. Others argued for the reintroduction of mutual obligations for training, given concerns that trainers do not come to community as a result of inconsistent participant attendance.

“My family is really proud of me and has noticed my personal growth since starting this journey”

– CDP Participant, Cooktown QLD

Provide support to access existing job opportunities, and increase the number of jobs filled by local job seekers, in remote communities

Key learning: Employers can be wary about taking on participants, and prefer their workload and risk to be minimised when employing participants rather than additional financial compensation.

Fifty-one trial approaches offered incentives to employers to offer paid opportunities for CDP participants, with three-quarters of these being casual positions. The cost of incentives depended on the level of support, but averaged around \$9,200 per beneficiary across the initiative. 28 trial approaches paid wage subsidies to employers, another 8 trial approaches employed participants themselves and placed them with employers at no cost, while 30 trial approaches employed participants directly.

A common theme from provider feedback was that incentives helped employers to reduce the risks in taking on participants. Several noted that subsidies were much quicker and simpler for employers than the former NIAA 1000 Jobs program. Yet Keogh Bay found, despite incentives and support, that many employers were still reluctant to engage participants, especially in smaller communities with limited employer opportunities beyond the local council or CDP provider. Employers reported fatigue in engaging new participants, with some choosing to close their doors rather than take on CDP participants if they had staff shortages. This deep-seated wariness, often born of poor prior experiences over many years, would understandably take more than a few months of the initiative to reverse.

The more successful employer incentives were therefore those that gave employers confidence that participants would not create additional impost. Some providers offered administration, training or performance management support, while others compensated employers for these costs. Several trial approaches also emphasised the importance of mentoring for employers. These sought to build



local cultural competency, and help them adjust their expectations of participants' skills and abilities. The employers that did adjust their expectations were then able to get the most from participants, who could undertake a large range of activities with the right supports.

Twenty-nine trial approaches (50 per cent) saw providers employing participants casually as part of work crews. These crews then worked on projects proposed by local communities, often with large flexibility in hours and attendance. This approach is similar to some former CDP activities, except that participants are employed and are paid real wages. These projects provided valuable work experience for those who are not ready for a placement with an external employer, built their skills and confidence, and also helped build strong community support for the program.

"As an employer it is handy to be offered a subsidized wage to spend the extra time training and encouraging and supporting an Indigenous worker with work experience. Hopefully the work experience will lead to full time employment in the future. There is a shortage of workers in Kununurra and this model may prepare someone to be 'work ready' and acquire skills they may not be able to acquire otherwise."

– Host employer, Kununurra WA

Grow local industry, enterprises or self-employment

Key learning: Establishing a new community enterprise requires significant support from providers, staff with genuine experience and acumen, as well as time for 'proof of concept'.

Providers sought to establish 28 community enterprises during the trial, including cafes and kitchens, maintenance and cleaning for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants, art sales, and laundries. Due to the short period of the trial, all were set up as part of the CDP provider, rather than as standalone organisations. More than half did not have sufficient time during the trials to begin ongoing operations, and those that did tended to be smaller endeavours. Nonetheless, 17 of the 28 enterprises are continuing into Phase 2, indicating providers' confidence in community support and the potential for deep and far-reaching benefits within community.

Keogh Bay noted that while enterprise is an important tool for change, the two organisations they reviewed were not operating optimally and were unlikely to be financially sustainable in their current form. They recommended that, in general, providers could build more successful organisations through better provision of business support services to help develop feasibility studies and business plans, more time, and key staff having better business acumen. We note that sustained capacity building and investment in First Nations community-controlled organisations is one of the Priority Reform elements of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

"CDP should develop businesses and create partnerships so that work is available locally. I have a family and it is now hard for me to travel to Main Road or mining jobs where I am expected to be away all the time"



Re-engage job seekers with the program

Key learning: Award wages and vouchers are effective drivers of participant engagement, but participants are nervous about increased income risking much-needed social security benefits.

Fifty-two trial approaches used some form of participant incentive to re-engage participants with the program. Fifty trial approaches sought to employ CDP participants on award or minimum wages. Keogh Bay found that wages (particularly award wages) was a strong driver of participation. Several providers originally offered participants volunteer work experience, but quickly changed to pay all hours worked to boost engagement. Thirty trial approaches offered food, voucher or cash incentives to attend work experience, activities or training, with these participants receiving an average of nearly \$800 during the initiative. Many providers noted the challenge of actual and perceived interactions between higher income and other social supports, including housing and social security benefits.

Non-monetary benefits were also important for driving participation. Many trial approaches that employed participants also offered them transport or food to ensure participants remained engaged. A number of trial approaches saw in-kind contributions (for example, dividing a fish catch between a portion for sale at remote community stores, and a portion for employees and their families) as a key element for building community support. Others reported that some participants, particularly men or youth, were better engaged through on-Country work or sports-related activities.

“I feel that I am more confident and prouder of myself for getting the job. I was surprised at my commitment to going to work each day and I find it hard to stay at home now...I feel it is good for my kids to see mum out working and I want to be a good role model for them...”

– CDP Participant, Hermannsburg NT

Other learnings

Key learning: A new employment model will need to be flexible, developed in close partnership with strong community stakeholders.

Feedback on the initiative has reiterated the difficulties of the current CDP provider payment model, which favours ongoing, full-time work opportunities. Almost all employment-focused trial approaches prioritised short-term positions, part-time and/or casual work, to help participants gain confidence and experience in the workplace. Twenty-three trial approaches utilised casual pools or community work crews, which aligns with consultation feedback of many remote employers' operating model.

The most successful trial approaches tended to be run by providers with pre-existing strong relationships with community stakeholders, who could then quickly respond to community needs.



However, Keogh Bay reported feedback from communities that the capacity and capability of community leadership has broadly declined, particularly in smaller communities. They highlighted that, without clear community direction, providers are less able to develop robust community plans and ensure that service delivery meets the needs and priorities of local people.

Twelve trial approaches sought to participate in some way in the care sector. Eight scoped becoming unregistered NDIS providers or provided targeted services to NDIS clients, while four sought to train and place participants as care workers with existing NDIS providers. Outcomes from the initial efforts in this area were relatively limited in scope. However, a number of providers noted delays in procuring training organisations during the initiative, and indicated that further benefits will likely be realised in coming months.

Next steps

The Government is moving deliberately towards a new program, with a combination of trying practical solutions through trials and consulting on new ideas to help build the best new jobs program in remote Australia. In July 2023, the second phase of the CDP trials commenced – ‘Community Projects’ – and will run until 31 October 2024. Community Projects in Phase 2 of the Trials have been informed by further community consultation, and learnings from Phase 1. A summary of approaches in each region is available on the [NIAA website](#).

Meanwhile, the Government’s New Jobs Program Trial is providing funding for up to 200 jobs with local community organisations and local government, allowing more community organisations to be involved in testing new approaches. Further, in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands Trials, tailored approaches to remote employment are being tested, including a co-design process and an incentive for eligible participants to build skills, find and maintain employment, and contribute to their community. More information on the remote job trials is available on the [NIAA website](#).

