

TRADITIONAL OWNER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations is proud to work with Traditional Owner groups all across Country now known as Victoria. We pay our deep respects to Ancestors past and Elders present, and to everyone working to heal and care for Country today. This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNER CORPORATIONS

The Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations (the Federation) acknowledges the time and energy given by Traditional Owner Corporation staff members to provide the foundational knowledge and experience on which this Traditional Owner Workforce Development Framework (the Framework) is based. This Framework engaged with the Traditional Owner Corporations that have legal recognition. The Framework does not represent a unified Traditional Owner Corporation view and does not represent the full complexity of each Corporation’s experience or goals: each will self-determine how it engages with the Framework.

Traditional Owner Corporations

- BGLC

Bunurong Land Council
- BLCAC

Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
- DJAARA

Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation
- EMAC

Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation
- FPMMAC

First People of the Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation
- GLaWAC

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
- GMTOAC

Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation
- TLaWC

Taungurung Land and Waters Council
- WWAC

Wamba Wemba Aboriginal Corporation
- WTOAC

Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation
- WWCHAC

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
- YYNAC

Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Corporation

THIS FRAMEWORK WAS DEVELOPED BY THE
FEDERATION OF VICTORIAN TRADITIONAL OWNER
CORPORATIONS

The Federation is the Victorian state-wide body that convenes and advocates for the rights of Traditional Owners while progressing wider social, economic, environmental and cultural objectives. It was established in 2013 by Traditional Owner Corporations – inclusive and representative family group-governed organisations with cultural authority to speak for Country and community – who recognised they could be stronger together in advancing shared interests in policy, economic opportunity and caring for Country.

With support from Victorian Government’s Department of Premier and Cabinet, through the Closing the Gap Partnership Forum



Author: Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations

Illustration: Natasha Carter

Design: Mazart Communications

CONTENTS

Foreword	03
Vision, Purpose and Traditional Owner Focus	04
Introduction	05
The Workforce Development Landscape in Victoria	06
Self-determination in the Framework	08
Traditional Owner Nations, Corporations, Country, Languages and Culture	10
Framework on a Page	14
Foundations	14
Focus Areas	15
Foundations and Focus Areas Recommendations	16
Methodology	48
Endnotes	50



Statement on cover illustration

The design focuses on message sticks lined up in the centre, which are an important form of communication between Communities across Country. Intertwined are symbols of gathering places and journey lines which also tie into the use of message sticks, and the transferring of information. In the background are three layers, through the centre are the diamonds used for identification of my mob, in warm tones like flames of a campfire, the top layer shows the night sky, from which we tell our stories and history, songlines in the background support this (as well as support the journey of message sticks), then there are the adults (the TOCs and Elder Traditional Owners) that protect the future generations and pass on the knowledge of Country, Culture and language. The bottom layer is Country, lush and healthy green, with a flowing river, flood plain and frog ponds. It is the future hope for all Traditional Owners, with songlines connected the people of the top layer to the bottom. – Natasha Carter





FOREWORD

Traditional Owner Corporations have the critical role of supporting their Traditional Owner communities to rebuild their Nations and assert their sovereign rights to Country, language and culture. Doing this in a colonial system requires them to work across two cultures; upholding, reviving and protecting their rights and obligations under Traditional Owner lore and law, and navigating the Western regulatory, political and cultural systems. To strengthen and build the Traditional Owner workforce that has the skills, cultural authority and support to do this complex work, Traditional Owner Corporations need approaches to employment that are grounded in Traditional Owner cultural and social values, guided by cultural governance, and which have Country, community, language and culture at their core. This Framework highlights two **Foundations** and five **Focus Areas** that, when addressed as an interconnected system, will help Traditional Owner Corporations and their partner organisations build a skilled and sustainable Traditional Owner workforce.

“Working on Country, that connection and living up to that cultural responsibility. In my family history our grandparents were removed and weren’t able to make change and be loud and proud. I’m so lucky that I’m part of that generation that gets to make up for the lack. So, what working for a Traditional Owner Corporation is, it makes you feel like you’re working towards that cultural responsibility.”

– WTOAC

VISION

Traditional Owner Corporations have the economic means, internal structures and respectful partnerships to attract, train, retain and progress Traditional Owners in long-term, competitively paid, culturally grounded roles that support and strengthen Country, community, language and culture.

PURPOSE

The Traditional Owner Workforce Development Framework brings together the perspectives of 12 Traditional Owner Corporations¹ on what limits their capacity to grow their workforce and the innovative solutions they are developing. The Framework makes recommendations for how Traditional Owner Corporations, along with partner organisations, can develop a Traditional Owner-specific approach to employment.

TRADITIONAL OWNER FOCUS

The Framework uses the term **Traditional Owner** to describe First Nations People with a recognised connection to, and responsibility to care for, specific areas of Country in what is now called Victoria. The term **First Nations People** is used to describe all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. The term **Traditional Owner Corporation** (TOC) refers to the organisations that hold Traditional Owners' collective legal rights and interests.

The primary goal of this Framework is to build a workforce of Traditional Owners who have the cultural authority to care for their Country, languages and culture. For this reason, the Framework focuses on Traditional Owners, rather than all First Nations People. The Framework recognises that First Nations People and non-Indigenous people play critical roles within Traditional Owner Corporations. It respects each Corporation's right to decide how it prioritises employment of Traditional Owners, other First Nations People and non-Indigenous people.

“When I listen to the boys sit around the fire here and speak language, it brings a tear to my eye. We need our language, it’s so powerful. It speaks volumes. It is absolutely our power, it is our custom, it is our culture and it tells everyone that yes, we may have lost it, but yes, it is back.”

– YYNAC

INTRODUCTION

Many approaches to addressing First Nations Peoples' employment focus on fitting First Nations People into Western industries and workplaces that operate according to Western employment structures and cultural values. Between 2024 and 2025, both the *Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Review* and the *Productivity Commission's Review of Closing the Gap* found that these approaches have not addressed First Nations Peoples' employment.²

As part of Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap – which focuses on strengthening the Aboriginal Community Controlled (ACCO) sector – the Victorian Government committed \$3.3 million for sector strengthening initiatives, including several ACCO- and Traditional Owner Corporation-led sector strengthening projects, working in five priority sectors of health, housing, disability, children and families, and languages and culture. Funding for the Framework was provided under the priority sector of languages and culture, recognising that both language and culture are held by Country and are Traditional Owner business.

“Thinking about culture as an evolving process... culture from the past, culture in the present and what’s culture going to look like in the future? Because what we do now is going to be our culture in the future.”
– WWCHAC

THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT LANDSCAPE IN VICTORIA

Workforce development is a significant focus for Traditional Owner Corporations, ACCOS, the private sector and the Victorian Government. Disparities between employment outcomes for First Nations People and non-Indigenous people was a key focus of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, which found First Nations People earn approximately 75 per cent of the wage of their non-Indigenous counterparts, face higher unemployment rates, and – for more than one in three – face direct racism in the workplace.³ There are multiple workforce strategies in operation in Victoria aiming to address this. The Framework shares some elements with these, and suggests working in partnership to bring their shared goals to life. However, it also focuses on the unique challenges faced by Traditional Owner Corporations and, in these instances, requires Traditional Owner-specific approaches.

“Working in a Traditional Owner Corporation is about enjoying what I’m doing and using all my skills and experience. It’s about seeing people, seeing the potential that is there. It just takes time and training and giving people those opportunities. So, as we build people up, they build people up and the organisation keeps growing.” – GLaWAC



Traditional Owner Corporations	ACCO	Yuma Yirramboi	Victorian Government
<i>Traditional Owner Workforce Development Framework</i> focuses on both internal and external factors required for TOCs to provide long-term, competitive and culturally supported employment to Traditional Owners and First Nations People.	For example, the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation’s (VACCHO) <i>Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy</i> ⁴ focuses on both internal and external factors required for growing and sustaining the ACCO health sector workforce.	<i>Aboriginal Employment Action Research</i> ⁵ focuses on four regions with the aim of developing a culturally safe training and employment model for all businesses and organisations in the region	For example, the Department of Health and Department of Family, Fairness and Housing’s (DFFH) <i>Aboriginal Workforce Strategy</i> ⁶ focuses on growing the percentage, and improving the experience, of Aboriginal employees within the public service.

SELF-DETERMINATION IN THE FRAMEWORK

Every Traditional Owner Corporation is distinct, with its own history, priorities, capacity and context. The Framework overall is designed to give Traditional Owner Corporations a shared picture of the challenges at a systemic level. Each recommendation in the Framework gives ideas about how to address these challenges. The Framework does not prescribe any actions or timeframes. It does not suggest the recommendations are the only way to create the needed change. What each Traditional Owner Corporation takes from the Framework is to be determined by that Corporation and the Nation they represent.

The Workforce Development Framework does four things:

- 1. describes the way things are now to show **WHY** change is needed
- 2. gives recommendations about **WHAT** could be done to create this change
- 3. suggests **WHO** could be involved in making these changes, and
- 4. outlines **WHAT ELSE** is being done that Traditional Owner Corporations may want to connect with.

The practical plans for **HOW** this work is done need to be designed and implemented by Traditional Owner Corporations, if they choose to, with the relevant partner organisations.

The Framework can assist Traditional Owner Corporations by:

- creating a shared picture of what the issues are
- providing guidance for what individual actions Traditional Owner Corporations could focus on
- giving examples and sharing knowledge of other Traditional Owner Corporations' experiences
- identifying areas for statewide advocacy and action, and
- being used as an advocacy tool to demonstrate need and gain funding.

The Framework for Partners

The Framework highlights the need for a range of partners to work with Traditional Owner Corporations to support their self-determined workforce goals. These partners include, but are not limited to:

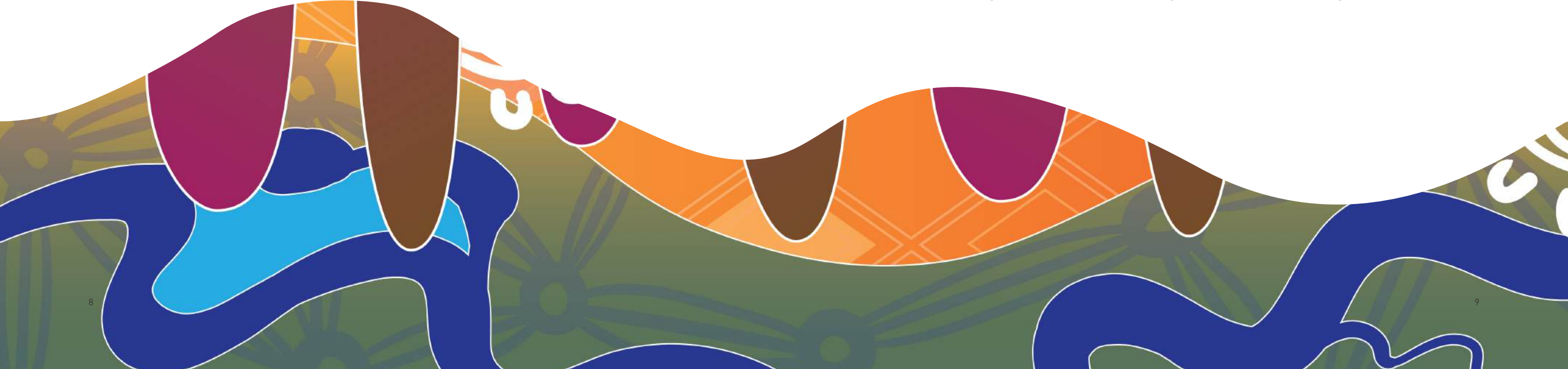
- the ACCO sector
- education providers
- Commonwealth, state and local governments, and
- the private sector.

Partners can use the Framework to:

- identify opportunities for partnerships with Traditional Owner Corporations
- educate and inform themselves on Traditional Owner approaches, and
- inform government strategy development and funding allocation.

“Our families and elders are saying that we need to teach our language to ourselves and focus our thinking on intellectual property. We need to do it respectfully, how we maintain and revitalise the language.” – GLaWAC

“Bunurong is doing a good job of strengthening and reviving culture and that does wonders for our Elders, the Elders Council get really energised when our linguist is presenting.” – BLCAC



TRADITIONAL OWNER NATIONS, CORPORATIONS, COUNTRY,
LANGUAGES AND CULTURE



This illustration represents the relationships between Traditional Owner Nations, their representative Traditional Owner Corporations and their Country, languages and culture. The foundation of the image is Country, lush and healthy green, with flowing rivers, flood plains and frog ponds. Country is the foundation that holds all language and culture.

Language and culture themselves are represented by the message sticks, important means to communicate languages and culture. Intertwined through the message sticks are gathering places, symbolising each Nation and the journey lines showing the connections between them. The top layer shows the night sky with songlines throughout, which tells Traditional Owners' stories and history and supports the journey of the message sticks.

Through the centre are diamonds and hatching, used to identify south-eastern Nations, in warm tones like flames of a campfire. The painted-up figures represent the Elders and Traditional Owner Corporations that support and protect community and Country, and ensure languages and culture are protected and passed on to future generations.

“Working for our Traditional Owner Corporation, I love the cultural reward and sense of purpose, the fact of making my ancestors happy and they let me know all the time.” – BGLC

CASE STUDY

Traditional Owner Kylie Harradine leads Eastern Maar's language revitalisation

Eastern Maar Traditional Owner Kylie Harradine is leading work researching and restoring Eastern Maar languages. Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC) has seen a big rise in external requests for naming, cultural input into buildings and schools, and non-Traditional Owners interested in learning language. But the focus for Kylie and the Corporation is to reawaken languages in community first and establish cultural protocols around language use that protect Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property and respect the complex history around stolen languages.

Through Kylie's dedicated work, EMAC now has a language subcommittee that will be responsible for place-naming, managing permissions to learn language, signage, research, recordings, and establishing a fee-for-service language enterprise. Kylie is also working on a style guide, investigating accredited language teaching courses to ensure consistency in pronunciation, and creating a spelling and pronunciation guide of Keeray Woorroong greetings and basic words. EMAC's Jo McBain says, "language is central to everything we do at Eastern Maar. Without Kylie in this role, things wouldn't have grown. Everyone goes to Kylie when they have a question. She's the person holding that strong continuation of language for the Corporation."

"We're lucky to have access to historical records for language because our ancestors were brave enough to record language even when they were badly punished or killed. Now it's up to Traditional Owners to decide how we share our language publicly". – Kylie Harradine



Kylie Harradine led a cultural approval process to apply the Keeray Woorroong name Poombeeyt Koontapool ('breath of the whale') to the lookout at the blowhole Loch Ard Gorge in Port Campbell National Park.

Photo credit: EMAC

CASE STUDY

Bunurong brings employment and cultural governance of Country together through Eastern Balirt Biik Team

Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC)'s Balirt Biik (Strong Country) Team is a key part of bringing Bunurong culture back into everyday practice. In 2023, the Balirt Biik team was expanded to include an Eastern team, located in, and caring for the broad eastern area of Bunurong Country from Pakenham through West Gippsland and the Bass Coast.

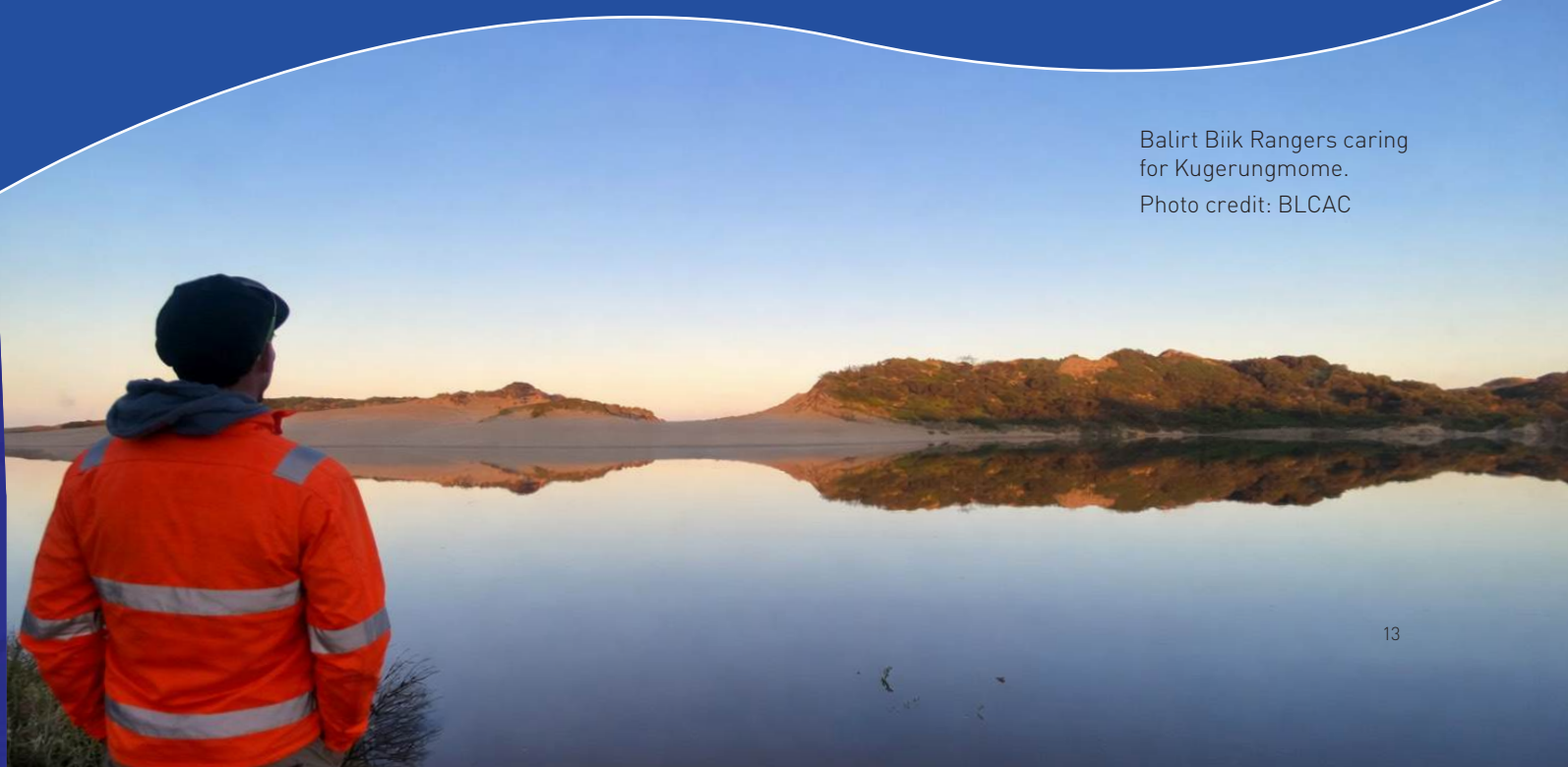
A major focus for the Eastern Balirt Biik team is building community engagement into their caring for Country work. This ensures Bunurong community members and knowledge-holders can provide cultural guidance on how areas of Country and different species of plants and animals should be managed.

"Building our Eastern Team has laid a strong foundation for future growth. It supports the employment of Bunurong people and has deepened [BLCAC] member engagement in the cultural governance of Country". – Shani Blyth, Balirt Biik manager

There's no better example of how caring for Country strengthens culture than the team's work at Kugerungmome (also known as the Powlett River). With support from the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, BLCAC brought Traditional Owners together on-Country to identify cultural values and priorities for Kugerungmome and collate this information in a Cultural Values Assessment (CVA). This now guides how the Eastern Balirt biik team to care for the area.

Kugerungmome has always been a living cultural landscape where people, water and Country are deeply connected. Looking after Kugerungmome properly means that Country is healthy, respected and protected for current and future generations. It creates a place where community can come together, spend time on Country, share knowledge, heal, and maintain cultural practices.

Balirt Biik Rangers caring for Kugerungmome.
Photo credit: BLCAC



FRAMEWORK ON A PAGE



FOUNDATIONS



Economic Independence

is represented by Traditional Owner trade routes and connections to neighbours across the state and beyond. Rebuilding Traditional Owner Nations' economic independence is the foundation of a strong and sustainable Traditional Owner workforce.



Collaboration

is represented by the orange burning patterns. Cultural burning is a practice of rejuvenating Country that requires clear communication and teamwork. It requires everyone be aware and work together to keep each other safe and accountable. The recommendations in the Framework need strong partnership from ACCOs, government and the private sector.

FOCUS AREAS



Supporting Strong Governance

is represented by a healthy stable tree with a wide canopy. These trees are directional guides, sources for materials like coolamons, and give shade for tubers, flowers and grasses to grow. TOCs need time and resources to build strong governance processes so they can provide cultural authority, stability and sustainable employment.



Growing Knowledge and Skills

is represented by possum skin cloak panels. Creating the cloak is a practice and skill passed on through generations. Each cloak is specific to its person and Country, demonstrating their unique journey into knowledge. Growing the Traditional Owner workforce needs to focus on knowledge and training grounded in Country and culture and taught according to Traditional Owner ways of knowing, being and doing.



Keeping Mob Safe and Strong

is represented by the concentric rings of a gathering place and campfire, surrounded by mob with their faces painted up. The outer ring of people with their arms outstretched, protect and support the inner circle but are not blocking them. TOCs need strong, caring structures to support employees with the complexity and colonial load of Traditional Owner work.



Building Tailored Human Resources Structures

is represented by the ant colony. Ant society is complex and relies on having strong internal structures to give ants the strength to carry heavy loads. TOCs are complex organisations, no two are the same, and each needs strong human resources structures to support its employees.

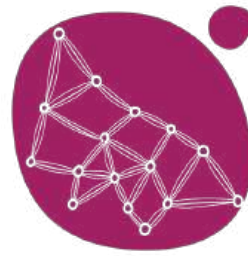


Addressing Systemic Barriers

is represented by the side by side of the grid system of city structures, and the natural flow of nature, a river and creek. It represents the barrier created from the colonial construct between city and Country and the difference in access and opportunity. Attracting and retaining Traditional Owners and other staff, means TOCs need partnership from governments, and ACCOs to bring down these systemic barriers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOUNDATIONS



Economic Independence

- Develop a thriving First Nations, rights-based economy.
- Implement adequate core funding for Traditional Owner Corporations.



Collaboration

- Collaborate and partner with other TOCs, ACCOs, governments, education institutions and the private sector.

FOCUS AREAS



Supporting Strong Governance

- 1a. Increase opportunities, funding and time for TOCs to engage in governance training that addresses both cultural and Western regulatory elements with distinct programs for TOC boards, executives, staff and community members.
- 1b. Develop and implement cultural governance programs that recognise and reward the critical role of Elders and knowledge-holders.



Growing Knowledge and Skills

- 2a. Develop partnerships and run events/programs between TOCs and secondary and tertiary education to build pathways into TOCs.
- 2b. Develop employment incubator programs that provide paid, in-house mentorship and trainee programs.
- 2c. Develop a Learning and Skills Framework that identifies the key knowledge and competencies required for TOCs to fulfill their obligations to Country and community.
- 2d. Create and increase culturally informed and accessible vocational, tertiary and adult education programs for Traditional Owners to develop the skills and experience they need to work in TOCs.
- 2e. Develop and expand secondment, exchange and mentor programs between TOCs, government and the private sector.
- 2f. Provide TOCs' employees access to Victorian Government departments' and the private sector's internal training.



Keeping Mob Safe and Strong

- 3a. Develop specialist wellbeing roles, teams and/or external providers to deliver First Nations-specific and culturally informed wellbeing support.
- 3b. Develop ongoing Nation-rebuilding and cultural strengthening programs with long-term, flexible funding.
- 3c. Advocate for inclusion of Victorian Traditional Owner Nation-specific cultural competence training to be embedded into non-Indigenous community through primary, secondary, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and tertiary education, sporting codes, the private sector and government.



Building Tailored Human Resources Structures

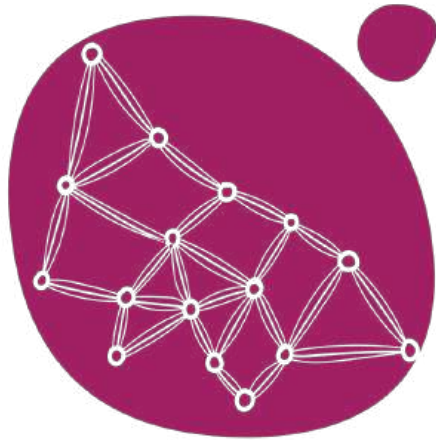
- 4a. Implement an appropriate award system and salary banding that creates wage parity, compensates for colonial and cultural load, captures the complexity of roles within TOCs and provides appropriate leave entitlements.
- 4b. Develop tailored recruitment processes that are founded on Traditional Owner ways of knowing, being and doing.
- 4c. Develop a TOC-specific Employment Lifecycle and Succession Planning Framework.
- 4d. Advocate for a Victorian Government commitment to standardised processes for government-funded roles and efficient, standardised grant administration.



Addressing Systemic Barriers

- 5a. Improve access to culturally safe services to provide wrap around support for employees including education, childcare and health, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- 5b. Address transport challenges, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- 5c. Develop and expand programs to deliver culturally appropriate housing on-Country.
- 5d. Increase TOCs' access to office and depot spaces in multiple locations on their Country.

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE



Rebuilding Traditional Owner Nations’ economic independence is the foundation of a strong and sustainable Traditional Owner workforce. To attract, train, retain and progress staff, Traditional Owner Corporations must have the independent economic resources to offer competitive salaries, provide long-term positions not tied to government grants, deliver professional development and career progression opportunities, and provide comprehensive employee assistance programs.

Economic Independence Through a Thriving First Nations Rights-based Economy

The First Nations rights-based economy relies on the recognition and enactment of Traditional Owners’ communally held property, economic, procedural and cultural rights. When properly recognised Traditional Owners can use these rights to generate economic benefit for the Nation as a whole.

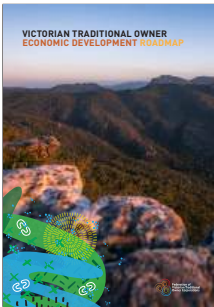
Steps to a Thriving First Nations Rights-based Economy

- 1. Formally recognise Traditional Owner rights
- 2. Remove barriers that stop Traditional Owners being able to enact their rights
- 3. Support Traditional Owners to implement their individual economic development priorities
- 4. Implement Traditional Owner-led strategies below.

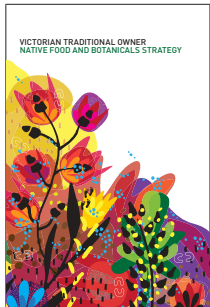
Core Funding

Traditional Owner Corporations have statutory obligations under Victorian legislation. This requires the Corporations to engage in consultation, negotiation, consent and on-Country work across cultural heritage, land, water, natural resources and development approvals. Over 80 per cent of Traditional Owner Corporation funding for this work is short-term, creating instability, burnout, staff loss and an inability to plan or engage properly in major reform processes. Traditional Owner Corporations need an ongoing, indexed core funding model to ensure certainty and capability.

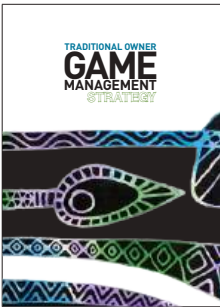
With economic independence founded on a thriving First Nations rights-based economy, and core funding to fund statutory obligations, Traditional Owner Corporations will have the resources to develop skilled, competitively paid and well-supported Traditional Owner workforces.



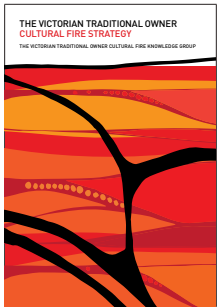
Traditional Owner Economic Development Roadmap



Traditional Owner Native Foods and Botanical Strategy



Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy



Traditional Owner Cultural Fire Strategy



Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy

EXAMPLE | Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property

In a functioning First Nations Rights-based economy, Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) would be protected by legislation so that Indigenous knowledge and cultural expression could not be used by anyone other than the relevant Traditional Owner Nation unless they have permission. Just as Western intellectual property laws mean individuals and companies who own intellectual property rights can profit from their use or sale, ICIP legislation would allow Traditional Owners to generate wealth through culturally appropriate commercialisation of their cultural and intellectual property.

CASE STUDY

Wadawurrung-led economic development combines commercial opportunities with caring for Country

In 2022-23, the Wadawurrung Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) launched a significant expansion of its Karringangitj Baleert Native Nursery, funded by Bushbank – a Victorian Government initiative aimed at assisting Traditional Owners to heal Country, revegetate cultural landscapes and reduce carbon emissions. This project marks a substantial growth in the nursery's capacity, increasing production from 10,000 to over 50,000 native plants annually, primarily using Wadawurrung provenance seeds.

WTOAC's expanded nursery is now a critical part of the Corporation's economic growth strategy and generates an independent revenue stream while also providing culturally grounded jobs for Traditional Owner and First Nations community members.

Most importantly, this economic development aligns with WTOAC's Country Plan, 'Paleert Tjaara Dja' (Let's Make Country Good Together), demonstrating how Traditional Owner-led economic development can combine commercial opportunities with caring for Country. The benefits of WTOAC's work are enjoyed not only by Wadawurrung Traditional Owners, but also by the whole Victorian community – now, and for generations to come.

Wadawurrung community gathers for the opening of Karringangitj Baleert Native Nursery.
Photo credit: WTOAC



CASE STUDY

DJAARA's food and fibre enterprise sets the foundation for Dja Dja Wurrung Nation's economic independence

In May 2023, the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (DJAARA) launched DJAKITJ, a food and fibre enterprise that signifies a bold step toward economic self-determination. Central to this venture is the establishment of what could become the largest yabby farm in the southern hemisphere, located near Bendigo. The farm will feature over 50 yabby ponds, a broodstock and hatchery facility, and dedicated research areas for aquaculture, native plants, and bush foods.

The DJAKITJ yabby farm exemplifies a blend of traditional knowledge and modern agricultural practices that demonstrate DJAARA's commitment to sustainable economic growth, cultural preservation, and community empowerment. The farm aims to produce 15 tonnes of yabbies annually, creating culturally grounded jobs, fostering business partnerships and building diverse revenue streams.

With its focus on sustainably farming native species, DJAKITJ also plans to develop related ventures, including kangaroo grass crops and bush foods. This initiative not only supports DJAARA's economic independence but also strengthens its members' cultural connection to Djandak (Country), offering a model of how Indigenous knowledge can address contemporary challenges.

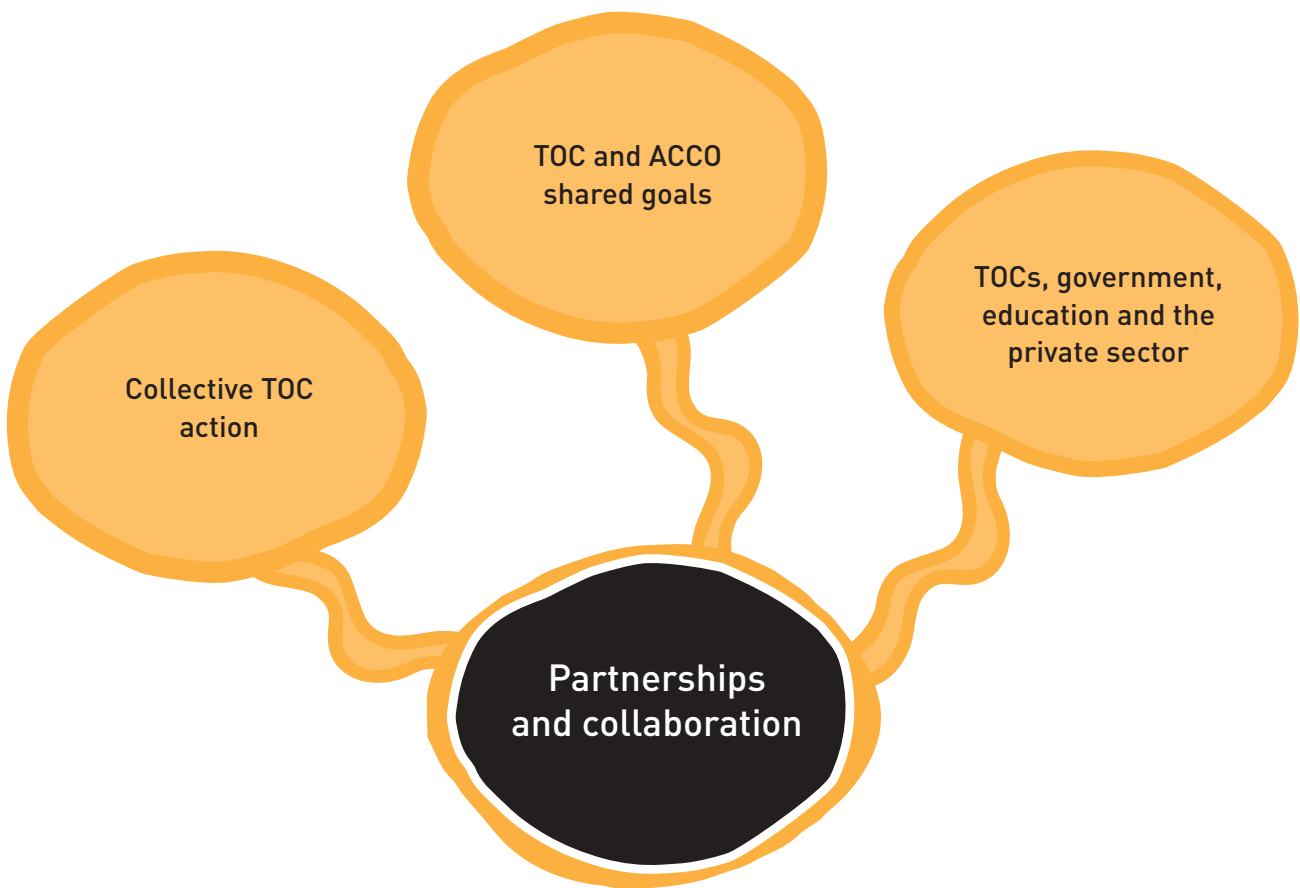
DJAARA's team with yabbies at the DJAKITJ launch.
Photo credit: DJAARA



COLLABORATION



Partnerships and collaboration between Traditional Owner Corporations, ACCOs, governments, education institutions and the private sector are critical to bringing the Foundations and Focus Areas of this Framework into reality. These partnerships will enable Traditional Owner Corporations to bring their own context, knowledge and expertise to the table, while also tapping into the existing knowledge, experience and activities of other organisations.



Collective Traditional Owner Corporation action	Traditional Owner Corporation and ACCO shared goals	Traditional Owner Corporations, government, education and the private sector
While each Traditional Owner Corporation is distinct, with its own goals and priorities, there is strength in a statewide approach to many recommendations in the Framework.	Traditional Owner Corporations and ACCOs have many shared workforce challenges. These present opportunities to co-create solutions that leverage diverse knowledge and skillsets and increase financial and practical viability. ACCOs will also be essential partners in addressing many of the systemic barriers identified in this Framework including increasing housing and culturally safe services in the regions.	Many of the recommendations in this Framework ask for committed partnership from governments, education institutions and the private sector to contribute training, expertise and resources. These partnerships provide opportunities for mutual benefit as partners grow their understanding of Traditional Owner perspectives and strong Traditional Owner Corporations, staffed by knowledgeable and empowered Traditional Owners, create value for all sectors of Victoria's society and economy.

SUPPORT STRONG GOVERNANCE



Traditional Owner Corporations are accountable to and governed by their communities, while additionally having unique obligations under Western regulatory systems. Keeping Traditional Owner Corporation governance strong requires ongoing training for Traditional Owners and education for non-Indigenous people to understand and respect Traditional Owner governance processes. Corporations with strong governance can provide cultural authority, stability and sustainable employment.

“TOCs are complex entities; the role of the CEO is to support the community and that’s delicate, sensitive work.” – WWCHAC

RECOMMENDATION	POTENTIAL ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ALIGNMENT
1a. Increase opportunities, funding and time for TOCs to engage in governance training that addresses both cultural and Western regulatory elements with distinct programs for TOC boards, executives, staff and community members.	• Source funding to assist TOCs to engage in governance training. • Develop a competency framework that identifies the governance skills and knowledge required by TOC boards, executives, staff and members. • Competency framework must include both Western corporation and business management skills and culturally appropriate governance, decision-making, and dispute resolution training. • Conduct an audit of current training providers and offerings to identify best practice, gaps and opportunities for increasing/improving training. • Assess potential to provide training to partners, including government and private sector, to improve understanding of cultural governance and decision-making in TOCs.	• Current governance training providers including Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, (ORIC), National Native Title Council (NNTC) and Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research. • Philanthropic funders. • Whole of Victorian Government. • Commonwealth.	• Nation-building programs. • Current governance training offerings.
1b. Develop and implement cultural governance programs that recognise and reward the critical role of Elders and knowledge-holders.	• Source funding to assist TOCs to develop their self-determined cultural governance structures. • Share knowledge between TOCs of useful approaches.		• Current TOC approaches.

“When the organisation is stable and settled and under the control of the members and the board, that’s when mob are ready to come and work for us.” – FPMMAC

“The cultural load on Elders is massive. We always lean on our Elders and ask for their knowledge, but we don’t always take care of them in between. I’d love to get a program for Elders to come and identify the roles they would like and then that role would take care of them into retirement.” – WWCHAC

“The community needs the skills and knowledge to have input into how the TOCs make decisions.” – GLaWAC

CASE STUDY

Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Corporation demonstrates self-governance through UNESCO World Heritage Listing

Gunditjmara Traditional Owners, through the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC), have prioritised Nation-building work for over a decade, collaborating with Nation-building researchers and practitioners. This work has strengthened GMTOAC's knowledge about Indigenous Nation-building principles, embedded its governance structures, and continues to enhance its collective decision-making processes. Over the past five years, GMTOAC has continued this work by building Gunditjmara's Treaty and Nation-building.

In 2019 these achievements included UNESCO World Heritage listing of the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape. Successfully rebuilding their Ancestors' weir to re-flood Tae Rak (Lake Condah) and maintaining the comprehensive requirements of UNESCO World Heritage Listing relies on GMTOAC's stable and effective governance structures. Attaining UNESCO World Heritage listing status is perhaps the most high-profile demonstration of the Gunditjmara's deep commitment to self-governance.

"There's some good governance training out there, but what we need is the time and space to do the work." – GMTOAC

The Budj Bim Cultural Landscape is the first World Heritage-listed site in Australia inscribed purely for its Indigenous cultural values – a wetland landscape shaped by ancient lava flows from the Budj Bim volcano, formerly known as Mount Eccles, which Gunditjmara have used for aquaculture and habitation for thousands of years. Photo credit: Dhx1 from Wikimedia Commons.



CASE STUDY

Wurundjeri Elders guide the Corporation at all levels and in all team

Recognising that Wurundjeri Elders, key holders of cultural authority and knowledge, were doing essential work for the Corporation but were not properly recognised for their expertise, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (WWCHAC) have developed dedicated Elder roles within their teams and on sub-committees.

Deputy CEO and Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Sean Hunter is on the ground working with staff to create an environment of cultural and psycho-social safety, so that WWCHAC can navigate the difficult conversations that are inherent for Traditional Owners working and living in a colonial system.

'It's made such a difference having someone with that life experience of culture and community guiding us' says Interim CEO Mark Harper.

Elders hold roles across the Corporation. They guide how Wurundjeri cultural heritage is protected in one of the most densely populated areas in Australia, manage the cultural workplace, and ensure everyone takes accountability. They vet potential partners and projects to ensure they are culturally safe and aligned with the Wurundjeri Nation's goals, and help the Corporation hold its position of cultural authority and stand firm against being co-opted into mainstream values and ways of working. Elders are now embedded throughout all parts of the Corporation; their cultural authority, knowledge and day-to-day work lead the organisation, and are formally recognised and compensated.



Uncle Sean Hunter provides cultural guidance as WWCHAC's Deputy CEO. Photo credit: WWCHAC

GROW KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS



Growing the Traditional Owner workforce needs to focus on teaching Traditional Owners knowledge grounded in Country and culture as well as knowledge for working within the Western system. These knowledges and skills need to be taught according to Traditional Owner ways of knowing, being and doing.

“Training and education courses don’t get to this area, so people don’t have the opportunities to upskill. There’s also a lack of culturally safe education spaces. Courses that aren’t designed with input from us don’t hit the mark.” – BGLC

RECOMMENDATION	POTENTIAL ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ALIGNMENT
2a. Develop partnerships and run events/programs between TOCs and secondary and tertiary education to raise the profile of TOCs as future employers.	- Build and systematise partnerships between TOCs and local high schools, VET and tertiary institutions. - Co-design junior programs for high school students to experience working in the TOC and gain certificates/ qualifications. - Ensure partners undertake continuing cultural competence training and are culturally safe.	- High schools, VET and tertiary institutions. - VAEAI. - Koorie Youth Council. - Toorong Marnong. - Victorian Government Department of Education.	- Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendations 50, 63. - Koorie Big Day Out. - Yuma Yirramboi Aboriginal Employment Action Research.
2b. Develop employment incubator programs that provide paid in-house mentorship and trainee programs.	- Collaborate between TOCs to develop a knowledge-base of effective training and mentorship models including required personnel, skills, timeframes and award rates for both mentor/trainer and mentee/trainee positions. - Develop a generalised framework that can be adapted to each TOC’s context and priorities. - Develop a map of funding opportunities; for example, Commonwealth wage subsidies.	- ACCOs. - DJSIR, including Apprenticeships Victoria. - Commonwealth Government.	Yuma Yirramboi Aboriginal Employment Action Research.
2c. Develop a learning and skills framework that identifies the key knowledge and competencies required for TOCs to fulfill their obligations to care for Country community, languages and culture.	- Conduct an assessment of all TOCs to identify the key knowledge and competencies required to fulfil cultural obligations, responsibilities to care for Country and community, and meet statutory obligations operating in the modern Western regulatory system. - Develop the statewide framework to guide development of training and education programs.	- Victorian Government Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR), including Victorian Skills Authority. - Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) - Koorie Skills Working Group.	- National Skills Agreement and Plan. - Victorian Skills Plan.

RECOMMENDATION	POTENTIAL ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ALIGNMENT
2d. Create and increase culturally informed and accessible vocational, tertiary and adult education programs for Traditional Owners to develop the skills and experience they need to work in TOCs.	- Map existing courses and support programs to assess for gaps, avoid duplication and identify best practice examples. - Develop partnerships with vocational, tertiary and adult education institutions for development and delivery of programs and courses according to each TOC's goals, priorities and capacity. - Programs should: 1. be culturally informed. 2. be delivered by Traditional Owner, First People and/or culturally competent teachers and staff. 3. be accessible (including transport, accommodation and all-abilities access). 4. be capable of being delivered on-Country. 5. include culturally appropriate assessments. 6. include comprehensive student support services. - Develop and implement a framework to pay Traditional Owners a wage while they study. - Continually improve education institutions' capacity and competency to partner with TOCs.	- ACCOs and Aboriginal-controlled Registered Training Organisations (RTO). - VET sector. - Victorian Universities. - DJSIR, including Victorian Skills Authority and Apprenticeships Victoria. - VAEAI. - Koorie Skills Working Group.	- Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendations 48, 64, 65, 66, 92b. - Cultural Fire Strategy Objectives 2 and 4. - Wurreker Program. - Indigenous Loading (TAFE funding). - Yuma Yirramboi Aboriginal Employment Action Research.

CASE STUDY

Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and Southwest TAFE co-design and deliver Traditional Owner-specific courses

In partnership with EMAC and GMTOAC, Southwest TAFE co-designed and delivered a Certificate III in Conservation and Ecosystem Management specifically for Traditional Owner and First Nations Guardians/Rangers. The course is delivered at campuses local to the Corporations and largely taught on-Country.

A big part of what makes this course successful is the respectful partnership between the Corporations and the TAFE. This collaboration means EMAC can guide the TAFE to provide a culturally safe, accessible and relevant course. Actions the corporations and the TAFE took to improve Traditional Owners' experiences included proactively reaching out to assist students with enrolment and other aspects of administration, building relationships between participants and Koorie Education Support Officers, and making sure there was a collaborative process between students, educators and the corporations to integrate Traditional Owner and Western knowledge systems. Both the corporations and the TAFE see opportunities for further improvement; for example, through introducing more culturally relevant assessments.

Emma Peace, EMAC's Healthy Country Manager, says part of making these courses accessible is paying participants a wage while they study. She says, "when Eastern Maar Citizens need to choose between paid work to support their families and unpaid education opportunities, the programs have shown much lower attendance rates." During the pilot program of the Certificate III, EMAC compensated Eastern Maar students' time for the days spent studying. Soon-to-be graduates from that program now make up over 50 per cent of EMAC's On-Country Guardian team.

EMAC's On-Country Guardian team is rehabilitating Country at Framlingham Streamside Reserve.
Photo courtesy of EMAC.

We need to look at examples where universities have come to the table, like Deakin's 's Land and Sea post-grad course. We need more offerings like that in other areas of TOCs' business, like business administration and managing relationships with government." – EMAC

"I find that I learn when it has relevance to my work and my culture; that's when I really take it in and have the motivation. An internal mentoring program would be fantastic, especially out on Country. That's cleansing and healing for us." – WTOAC



CASE STUDY

Building a Traditional Owner workforce from the inside out with mentoring and traineeships at BGLC’s Dalki Garringa Native Nursery

For Elizabeth Mace, Operations Manager of Barengi Gadjin Land Council’s (BGLC)’s Dalki Garringa Native Nursery, providing culturally safe mentorship and training for Traditional Owners and First Nations People is a passion. Under her guidance, the nursery is a place where community can come and get work-ready, learning practical skills, growing their confidence, and building a picture of where their passions and interests lie.

Elizabeth’s approach to mentoring is about ongoing commitment, from finding opportunities for staff to try out all types of work, to supporting them as they choose and move into new roles, and to being there to catch them if things get tough. As Elizabeth says, “for me it’s the pride of seeing a young one getting over a hurdle and grabbing that next rung on the ladder”.

To expand on Elizabeth’s work, the nursery needs more First Nations trainers and assessors who can provide on the job training and enable staff to gain certifications while working in a culturally safe, supportive space. For Elizabeth, this kind of support, mentoring and right-way learning is how you build a strong Traditional Owner workforce from the inside out.

Elizabeth Mace (right) with staff members and thriving plants at the Dalki Garringa Native Nursery. Photo credit: BGLC



RECOMMENDATION	POTENTIAL ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ALIGNMENT
2e. Develop and expand secondment, exchange and mentorship programs between TOCs, government and the private sector.	• Pool TOC knowledge and experience of current programs and relationships with government and private sector to develop an audit of current partners, skillsets and opportunities. • Build on current partnerships and expand to other appropriate organisations. • Develop and maintain a list of partner organisations and their skills and offerings. • Pool TOC knowledge and experience to develop a secondment, exchange and mentorship structure that can be adapted by each TOC.	• Private sector partners. • Whole of Victorian Government. • Supporting organisations.	• Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendation 92e.
2f. Provide TOC employees access to Victorian Government department and private sector’s internal training.	• Conduct an audit of government and private sector training programs to assess for areas of value to TOCs. • Build on existing partnerships to increase consistency and expand offerings. • Build new partnerships that have training relevant to TOCs but are not yet being used. • Systematise training relationships so they are not dependent on individuals. • Ensure all partners engage in ongoing cultural competency training.	• Whole of Victorian Government. • Private sector partners.	• Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendation 92b. • Victorian Government Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) fire training.

“Governments have some staff who are already certified to provide culturally safe training. But offering it to TOCs can’t be an afterthought. It needs to have a good system and be consistent.” – TLaWC

“We want to work with local schools in the senior years so our kids can see what the benefits are. Don’t drop out at year 10. If they can have a crack at year 11, they know there will be opportunities down the track for them here.” – FPMMAC

KEEP MOB SAFE AND STRONG



To maintain strength and cultural authority, Traditional Owners need time and space to connect with Country, community, languages and culture. The mental and emotional load of operating in a colonial system requires ongoing, wraparound support. Having strong connections to culture and wraparound support are foundational for a strong Traditional Owner workforce.

“Everyone is always asking for something from us and our Country. There’s often not time to heal, so our mob get into roles and there’s a lot of cultural load and expectations on them straight away. We need time and space to practice culture together, to keep us strong and connected to Dja (Country) and each other.” – WTOAC

RECOMMENDATION	POTENTIAL ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ALIGNMENT
3a. Develop specialist wellbeing roles, teams and/or external providers to deliver First Nations-specific and culturally informed wellbeing support.	• Assess potential to develop a state-wide First Nations-specific Employee Assistance Program. • Both internal and external wellbeing support could include: - culturally appropriate, trauma-informed psychological support. - culturally informed confidentiality protocols. - culturally appropriate dispute resolution. • Develop a generalised position description and wellbeing team structure that can be adapted by each TOC. • Provide ongoing First Nations wellbeing training and development for wellbeing staff.	• VACCHO – Balit Balit Durn Centre. • ACCOs. • Victorian Government Department of Health. • Victorian Government Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. • VAEAI. • Vocational, tertiary and adult education institutions.	• Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendation 92a. • Balit Murrup. • Yuma Yirramboi Aboriginal Employment Action Research.

“Typical HR probably well qualified in whitefella HR but when you come to a TOC it’s a whole different situation. Working with your family comes with a whole different array of things because you have so much culturally that comes into play, rather than just workplace considerations.” – WTOAC

“A culturally specific [Employee Assistance Program] provider would be very valuable. It could be developed by TOs, for TOs.” – BGLC

CASE STUDY

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation develops Aboriginal Cultural Advisory Committee to support employees

For the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), the key to keeping its community and workforce strong is making sure staff feel supported and heard. Recognising there is always room for improvement, in mid-2024, GLaWAC launched a cultural competency project, that began with talking with all levels of staff to understand what the corporation could do better.

These conversations led GLaWAC to set up a dedicated team; the Aboriginal Cultural Advisory Committee. The Committee is made up of nine Indigenous staff members from all levels of the organisation. One of its key goals is to create a culture of transparency, trust and openness so that the Corporation can address the complex issues that are an everyday reality for Traditional Owners working in a colonial system. Committee member Russell Dow says, “it’s about knowing that there are going to be difficult conversations but that we, as an organisation, need to treat them as learning opportunities and know that having those conversations is where change comes from.”

Cathy Thomas and Russell Dow are members of GLaWAC’s Aboriginal Cultural Advisory Committee. Photo credit: GLaWAC

For Russell, there are some key elements that need to come together to create that environment of trust. The first is opening the communication lines between staff, their managers, and the executive team. This ensures everyone can have input, and when something needs to change, the executive knows.

The second is building individual relationships between staff, managers and the Committee. This means having regular check-ins to understand what’s happening in everyone’s lives, both at work and outside it, following up when someone can’t make it into work, and helping people access GLaWAC’s external counselling provider.

Finally, it’s about creating the right settings for all staff, both First Nations and non-Indigenous, to ask questions and learn, so the organisation becomes a genuinely culturally safe space for everyone.



RECOMMENDATION	POTENTIAL ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ALIGNMENT
3b. Develop an ongoing nation rebuilding and cultural strengthening program with long-term, flexible funding.	- Based on the success of the Nation Building Resource Pool program, develop an ongoing Nation-Rebuilding and Cultural Strengthening program with long-term, flexible funding. - Build partnerships with philanthropic funders to access diverse funding opportunities.	- Philanthropic organisations. - Jumbunna.	Nation Building Resource Pool Program.
3c. Advocate for inclusion of Victorian Traditional Owner Nation-specific cultural competence training in non-Indigenous community through primary, secondary school curriculum, VET and tertiary education, sporting codes, the private sector and all levels of government.	- Build relationships with potential partners to facilitate the embedding of Traditional Owner cultural competence across Victoria. - Assess potential to implement a Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Competence certification for local businesses, private sector partners, sporting codes etc.	- Gellung Warl - Cultural competence training providers. - Whole of Victorian Government. - Local governments. - Victorian Government Department of Education. - DJSIR. - Victorian Vice Chancellors Committee. - Sporting codes. - Private sector peak bodies.	- Yoorook Justice Commission recommendations 12, 68. - Yoorook Justice Commission - Truth Be Told Report. - Existing TOC cultural competence Training. - Yuma Yirramboi Aboriginal Employment Action Research.

“Most of our mob who come through [the] workforce... haven’t come through strong cultural foundations. So that’s why we have to bring them in and work with them. It’s about building cultural identity.”
– GLaWAC

“There’s a need to partner with other organisations like education or sport club space to integrate more cultural diversity so Australian children are getting raised with an understanding of Traditional Owner rights and we’re breaking down barriers.”
– WWAC

DEVELOP TAILORED HUMAN RESOURCE STRUCTURES



Traditional Owner Corporations are complex organisations; no two are the same, and each needs strong human resources structures to support its employees to carry their cultural responsibility for the Nation’s Country and community. These structures include a dedicated award framework, recruitment processes, and employment lifecycle and succession planning processes that are grounded in Traditional Owner ways of knowing, being and doing.

“Existing modern awards don’t adequately cover the complexity, cultural responsibilities, or the hybrid roles within our organisation.”

– TLaWC

RECOMMENDATION	POTENTIAL ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ALIGNMENT
4a. Implement an appropriate award system and salary banding that creates wage parity, compensates for colonial and cultural load, captures the complexity of roles within TOCs and provides appropriate leave entitlements.	• Pool knowledge and experience of TOC human resources teams and staff to identify requirements and features of an effective award. • Ensure award system includes recognition for cultural and colonial load and considers both monetary and non-monetary forms of compensation. • Ensure award system includes appropriate leave structure including distinct cultural leave and sorry business leave. • Partner with ACCOs to assess areas of crossover and increase advocacy and leverage. • Access pro bono legal and policy support from private sector if required. • Integrate award framework in TOC core funding proposal.	• Victorian Fair Work Commission. • ACCOs. • Private sector partners.	• Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendation 92c. • Yuma Yirramboi Aboriginal Employment Action Research.

“We need to be more flexible in our recruitment processes. TOs want to have a yarn on Country around a job. From the HR perspective it seems like people don’t apply, but the step before that is that people don’t feel capable of applying, so we need to change the way we’re expressing that.”
– DJAARA

“Having the ability to see a path forward is always good, so making sure we have those progression lines to have Bunurong people in important positions would be really empowering for them.”
– BLCAC

“Lack of long-term funding and reliance on project-based funding from governments mean we can’t compete with other employers especially owing to restrictions put on that funding by the funder.”
– BGLC

RECOMMENDATION	POTENTIAL ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ALIGNMENT
4b. Develop tailored recruitment processes founded on Traditional Owner ways of knowing, being and doing.	- Pool knowledge and experience of TOC human resources teams, staff and community to design a culturally appropriate recruitment framework that can be adapted to each TOC's context. - Framework should include: - alternatives to written position descriptions and formal interviews - opportunities for role development between the TOCs and Traditional Owner community.		
4c. Develop a Traditional Owner Corporation-specific Employment Lifecycle and Succession Planning Framework.	- Pool knowledge and experience of TOC human resources teams, staff and community to design a statewide TOC Employment Lifecycle and Succession Planning Framework. - Partner with ACCOs, government departments and private sector to access resources, knowledge and experience.	- Whole of Victorian Government. - ACCOs. - Private sector partners.	- DFFH – Aboriginal Workforce Strategy. - VACCHO – Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy.
4d. Advocate for a Victorian Government commitment to standardised funding for government-funded roles and efficient, standardised grant administration.	- Pool knowledge and experience of TOC HR community of practice to develop minimum standards. - Partner with ACCOs to increase advocacy and leverage. - Standards could include: - Minimum five-year funding cycles - payment of overheads - Provision of opportunities for professional development - reduced reporting requirements. - Set minimum administration fee amounts.	- Whole of Victorian Government. - ACCOs.	- TOC Core Funding Proposal. - DEECA Best Practice Guidance. - Yuma Yirramboi Aboriginal Employment Action Research.

CASE STUDY

First People of the Millewa Mallee build community strength

The Nation Building Resource Pool program (2020-2026) provided Traditional Owner Corporations with funding to do the self-determined work needed to rebuild their Nations and put them in a strong position to negotiate Treaty if they choose to. In December 2024, First People of the Millewa Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (FPMMAC) entered a period of special administration following the breakdown of the Nation's trust in the Corporation's governance. In November 2025, FPMMAC emerged with a new board and executive and – using its Nation Building funds – made cultural healing and strengthening trust and accountability its top priority.

The Corporation held individual family group gatherings to understand each one's goals for the future. These were followed by a full group meeting that brought the community together with Indigenous leader Mark Yettica-Paulson from Collaboration for Impact to develop culturally informed dispute resolution and consensus-building practices. FPMMAC CEO Ken Knight says, "when we used the Mark Yettica-Paulson model with our cultural protocols and with our Elders in the room, things turned out so well. The meetings have given everyone a tool, a cultural way to do things. And now some of the family groups want to engage us and Mark to help them with their family healing".

These meetings and new approaches have been essential to building trust between the Corporation and family groups. Uleena Murray says, "now, because of everything that was brought up and talked about, the staff at FPMMAC can start working on what mob want. We heard especially about supporting our youth and truth-telling. It was great that people are open and honest to speak about that even if it's difficult". With the right cultural ways in place and trust and communication growing, the Corporation has been able to develop a new strategic plan. Founded on the community's goals and priorities, the plan will guide FPMMAC as it enters this new phase.



Kings Billabong, on Ngintait, Latji Latji and Nyeri Nyeri Country.
Photo credit: Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations.

ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS



A lack of access to offices and depots, housing, transport and culturally safe services – particularly in the regions – makes it difficult for Traditional Owner Corporations to attract and retain Traditional Owner staff. Traditional Owner Corporations need committed ACCO, government and private sector partnerships to address these challenges.

“Lots of people want to come back home to live on Country and to work, but there’s just not enough good quality, safe housing.” – FPMMAC

RECOMMENDATION	POTENTIAL ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ALIGNMENT
5a. Improve access to culturally safe services to provide wraparound support for employees – including education, childcare and health – particularly in regional and remote areas.	• Grow TOC-ACCO partnerships and assess the potential to deliver/expand tailored services, for example, co-located childcare. • Adopt and implement the relevant recommendations of the Yoorook for Transformation Report to strengthen the ACCO sector. • Provide adequate self-determined resourcing to ensure ACCOs can provide effective services.	• ACCOs. • Whole of Victorian Government. • Gellung Warl. • Closing the Gap Partnership Forum.	• Yoorook Justice Commission recommendations 70-85. • Victorian Statewide Treaty. • VAAF. • Yuma Yirramboi Aboriginal Employment Action Research.
5b. Address transport challenges, particularly in regional and remote areas.	• Advocate for and contribute to development of a First Peoples’ Road Safety Strategy that considers: - Access to safe private vehicles. - Access to and uptake of culturally safe learn-to-drive programs. - Development and turnover of TOC vehicle fleets, including mobile accommodation vehicles. - Improvement of public transport options particularly in the regions.	• DTP. • Transport Accident Commission.	• TOSA RSA negotiations. • Traditional Owner Treaty negotiations. • Local Transport Flexible Solutions program. • Yuma Yirramboi Aboriginal Employment Action Research.

“In terms of land, we’ve got big enterprises on our Country with custom-built offices, while Bunurong has to pay rent for a space on our own Country.”
– BLCAC

“Lack of transport is significant, both private and public. We could get lots of people working if we had good transport.”
– BGLC

“Helping people get their licences is key; we have good applicants, but they can’t drive yet. So, we want to be supportive. Some people you can see once they’ve got their licence their life changes forever, they get the job, and they get that responsibility and then they’re good to go.”
– GLaWAC

RECOMMENDATION	POTENTIAL ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ALIGNMENT
5c. Develop and expand programs to deliver culturally appropriate housing on-Country.	- Engage with AHV to contribute to Regional Housing Plans. - Each TOC may consider developing a housing strategy that considers: - The housing needs for its community and staff including assessment of type of housing including social housing, affordable housing, shared equity housing and private ownership. - Possible consortium approaches in which TOCs partner with Homes Victoria, developers, investors and service providers to deliver and service housing. - Land handback opportunities from Victorian Government. - The TOC's capacity and interest in gaining Registered Community Housing Provider status. - Commonwealth and Victorian Government property purchasing assistance schemes. - Potential to contribute to housing design through partnership with Homes Victoria. - Pool TOC knowledge and experience to develop a standardised relocation assistance framework that includes financial, social and wellbeing considerations.	- Aboriginal Housing Victoria. - Homes Victoria. - ACCOs. - Private sector partners. - Commonwealth Government.	- Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendations 86, 88, 89. - Traditional Owner Treaty negotiations. - TOSA RSA negotiations. - Yuma Yirramboi Aboriginal Employment Action Research.

CASE STUDY

Taungurung takes ambitious steps into housing

Taungurung Land and Water Council (TLaWC) has stepped into the housing space with ambitious plans to provide housing on Country for Traditional Owners and First Nations people. Through philanthropic funds, investment of the Corporation's own resources and funding from Homes Victoria, the Corporation has developed a plan to build a mix of social and market housing on Taungurung Country.

Through developing the plan, TLaWC has navigated some key decisions. CEO Matthew Burns says the Corporation's goal is to bring Traditional Owners back on Country, not to become a full-scale housing provider:

"that means we have become a registered housing provider, but we are planning to partner with ACCOs and the state to provide the day-to-day servicing".

Another important thing TLaWC is considering is how to ensure the housing is embedded in culturally safe communities and with appropriate services nearby.

TLaWC's key messages for any Traditional Owner Corporations wanting to get into the housing space is to start thinking about the sites they want to build on, what role each Traditional Owner Corporation wants to play, finding the right experts to help get the initial plans right, and opportunities to build economic independence into their housing strategy.

Maanamak Murrup (meaning a comfortable life) is TLaWC's social and community housing program. Photo credit: TLaWC



CASE STUDY

New premises across Yorta Yorta Country create employment opportunities and attract new staff

One of the major challenges for Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation (YYNAC) is geography. Based out at Barmah on the banks of the Dhungala (Murray River), the Corporation found it difficult to attract new staff, and those already working for the Corporation had to spend hours driving across Country to get to work.

Over the last two years the Corporation has been strategically expanding its office, depot and cultural centre sites. Home base is in Barmah, a mid-point where staff can easily access Country. “The Hub” is a new office space located in Shepparton. As YYNAC CEO John Patrick Kerr says, “having multiple offices is about attracting, not just the entry level people, but also people that have been in the industry for a long time. They need to be able to base themselves in a major centre like Shepparton. Then they can live and work there.” The Hub was secured through grant funding for a two-year period but the Corporation has plans to develop economic opportunities out of the centre and use these funds to eventually buy its own Shepparton premises.

Then there’s the Dharnya Centre, Yorta Yorta Nations’ cultural keeping place. This restored centre is not only preserving the Nation’s cultural legacy but will also serve as a base for delivering technical and tertiary education, further strengthening YYNAC’s role in cultural heritage management and sustainable land use. It will also generate economic opportunities and jobs for the Yorta Yorta community through its planned cultural tourism offerings.

Barmah Forest is the tranquil but remote location of YYNAC’s head office. Following the strategic expansion of work sites, it now serves a mid-point between a number of offices, depots and cultural centres from which staff can work. Photo courtesy of YYNAC



RECOMMENDATION	POTENTIAL ACTIONS	POTENTIAL PARTNERS	ALIGNMENT
5d. Develop a program for TOCs to gain office and depot spaces in multiple locations on their Country.	• Develop an audit of TOC requirements, appropriate properties and lease or transfer options. • Develop and implement a program to deliver appropriate properties to TOCs under appropriate legal structures. • Ensure process does not affect Recognition and Settlement Agreements under the <i>Traditional Owner Settlement Act</i> (TOSA).	• Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet. • Victorian Government Department of Transport and Planning (DTP). • First Nations Legal and Research Services.	• TOSA Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA) negotiations. • Traditional Owner Treaty negotiations.

“Housing access is already an issue in the Wimmera, but it’s going to be huge owing to the coming critical minerals mining and renewables boom.”
– BGLC



METHODOLOGY



STEP 1

Desk-based research including TOC Country Plans and strategies, National Agreement on Closing the Gap, submissions to Yoorrook Justice Commission, government, ACCO and private sector Aboriginal workforce development strategies, policy papers, and academic research on Aboriginal employment, recruitment processes, experiences of racism/cultural safety, and factors relating to retention.

STEP 2

Interviews with TOC executives and staff. Initial interviews conducted with 10 TOCs.

STEP 3

Development of Reference Group consisting of staff from five TOCs, and facilitation of 1.5-hour workshop.

STEP 4

Consultation with Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages and Greenshoot Consulting (regarding Yuma Yirramboi Aboriginal Employment Action Research).

STEP 5

Engagement with government departments and ACCOs through presentation to Closing the Gap Partnership Forum and individual interviews with relevant departments and ACCOs.

STEP 6

Follow-up engagement with TOC staff consisting of interviews, phone calls and written feedback on the draft Framework.

STEP 7

Presentation to Federation's CEO Forum (representative forum of all Registered Aboriginal Parties) and follow-up workshop.

STEP 8

Final assessment and feedback by Reference Group, CEO Forum and TOC staff.

ENDNOTES

1 The 12 Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations with formal recognition under Commonwealth and Victorian legislation.

2 *Closing+The+Gap+Review.pdf pp21-23, Productivity Commission review pp49-54.

3 <https://www.yoorrook.org.au/focus-areas/economic-prosperity>

4 VACCHO 2022, *Victorian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy 2022-2026*, <https://www.vaccho.org.au/wow-strategy/>

5 Yumi Yirramboi: Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, 2025, Mallee, Wimmera Southern Mallee, Loddon Campaspe and Gippsland Region Aboriginal Employment Action Research Reports, <https://www.greenshootconsulting.com/project-yuma-yirramboi>

6 Department of Families Fairness and Housing and Department of Health, 2021, *Aboriginal Workforce Strategy 2021-2026*, <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-workforce-strategy-2021-2026>

Photo credit: GLaWAC's Towera [fire] crew conducted a cultural burn in Colquhoun State Forest in March 2026. Photo courtesy of GLaWAC.







**Federation of
Victorian Traditional
Owner Corporations**

fvtoc.com.au

info@fvtoc.com.au



@fvtoc

