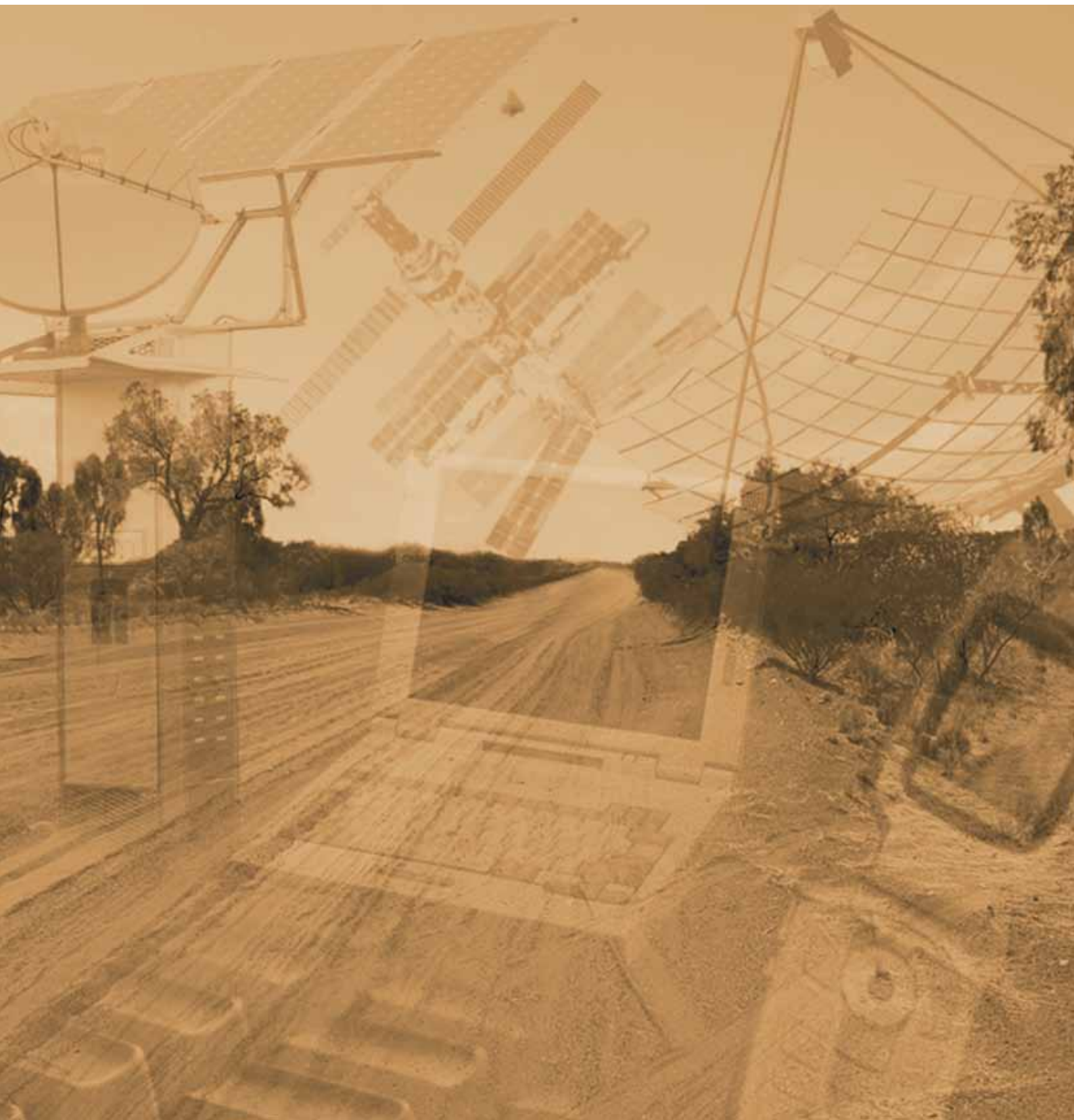


online and communications council

Framework for the provision of communications services to Indigenous communities



We, the members of the Online and Communications Council, express our commitment to this Framework as a basis to work together to deliver improved communications services to Indigenous communities throughout Australia, particularly to Indigenous Australians living in remote and very remote areas.

We agree that promoting the development and effective use of communications services will enable positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians living in remote and very remote areas to have access to services and support improvements to safety, health, economic development, social participation, self-determination and education.



Overview

The Online and Communications Council (the Council) was established by the Council of Australian Governments in 1997 as the peak ministerial forum for consultation on, and coordination of, information and communications matters of national strategic importance across all governments.

The Council has identified a key priority to address communications concerns in Indigenous communities. A key task of the Council is to propose strategic priority areas for online and communications policy and program development.

Communications infrastructure and services are significant factors in enabling greater social inclusion for Australians in all jurisdictions.

It is recognised that Indigenous Australians living in remote areas lack the infrastructure, population density and resources that enable the viable provision of communications services, such as internet access by private enterprise on a purely commercial basis. Despite this, Indigenous Australians share the same rights as other Australians to have reasonable access to telecommunications services.

This Framework reinforces the need for a collaborative approach to improving communications services for Indigenous communities.

Principles

Three key principles guide this Framework:

1. A Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commitment—the National Indigenous Reform Agreement has been established to frame the task of ‘Closing the Gap’ in Indigenous disadvantage. Australian governments recognise the importance of closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and have agreed to six priority targets, which will underpin the directions taken to improve communications services to Indigenous Australians living in remote areas.
2. Given the diverse circumstances of Indigenous communities, a tailored approach to the provision of improved communications services is required, that considers population size, geographic location and incorporates innovative and appropriate technology responses.
3. Each government jurisdiction has different roles, processes and responsibilities, and these different roles should be acknowledged, respected and utilised in a cohesive national approach to improve communications services to Indigenous Australians living in remote areas.

Roles

The Australian Government maintains responsibility for telecommunications services policy and the regulatory environment. In performing this role, the Australian Government consults with other jurisdictions and the private sector as required.

The Australian Government continues to ensure the availability of communications services for all Australians, particularly for those in remote areas.

All governments can enhance government service delivery through innovative and effective use of communications services, including health, education, emergency services and environment.

All governments can foster inclusion and participation in the digital economy by addressing barriers to access and effective use, such as by building confidence, trust and expertise in the use of digital technologies.

Objectives and strategies for collaboration

The following objectives and strategies have been identified for collaborative action:

Communications services standards in Indigenous communities.

Objective: To identify an adequate level of communications services in Indigenous communities throughout Australia, particularly those in remote and very remote Australia.

Strategies: We will work towards:

- Identifying existing communications services in Indigenous communities factoring in population levels and access to communications infrastructure.
- Identifying consumer safeguards and protections.
- Undertaking comparative analysis of communications systems with communities of similar size.
- Developing an agreed set of communication standards applicable for use in remote Indigenous communities.
- Improving communications services to support government service delivery to Indigenous communities to provide better economic, environmental and social wellbeing.

Appropriate and affordable communications products and services.

Objective: To identify innovative and best practice communications products and services that would have particular benefit for Indigenous communities, especially those in remote and very remote Australia.

Strategies: We will work towards:

- Identifying existing appropriate and affordable communications products and services.
- Encouraging and promoting innovation and best practice in the development and use of communications products and services, factoring in user requirements, infrastructure, and technology options.
- Utilising the benefits of government purchasing and contract arrangements, where feasible, to optimise communications services availability.
- Sharing knowledge of successful communications solutions and applying the lessons learned between jurisdictions.

Take-up and use of communications services by Indigenous Australians particularly those living in remote and very remote areas.

Objective: To improve Indigenous Australians' awareness of available communications services and ability to utilise communications services to improve their economic, environmental and social wellbeing.

Strategies: We will work towards:

- Identifying and reducing social, cultural, economic, educational and other barriers that Indigenous Australians face in becoming aware of and using communications services.
- Raising awareness about the benefits and use of communications services.
- Improving access to and use of communications services by Indigenous Australians.
- Identifying ways in which the use of communications services can improve the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, particularly those in remote and very remote Australia.



Next steps

We will task the Indigenous Communications Group to:

- Report to Council on communications services that should be available in Indigenous communities.
- Report to Council on best practice and innovative communications products and services that are appropriate and affordable to assist Indigenous communities.
- Engage with Indigenous stakeholders to develop strategies to identify and reduce barriers to the access and use of communications services that impact on the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of Indigenous Australians in remote and very remote communities.
- Develop and implement an annual work plan, addressing the objectives and strategies contained in this Framework, including developing a strategy for measuring progress of the priority areas.
- Report to the Council, through the Standing Committee, on the progress of its annual work plan.
- Review the Framework and the Indigenous Communications Group's work plan regularly, and update as necessary, to reflect changed needs.



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