



Electoral Engagement and Education Research

Naiyu Community Voices

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Naiyu

Key Issues:

- Electoral engagement and education is not separate from the history and legacies of trauma experienced by community members seeking to navigate contemporary life.
- Being able to engage the community as a whole is seen as a priority around electoral issues, and in relation to other forms of government engagement
- Provision of electoral information and ballot papers in local languages is an important way to assist community understanding (with Kriol and Muranpatha being identified as the two key languages for the Daly region).
- Forms of visual representation such as photos of colour coding would improve understanding at the ballot booth, and support people to exercise their democratic rights enabling them to successfully vote for candidates they know and trust.
- Opportunities for Electoral Education in Naiyu need to take into consideration that local schooling finishes at Year 6. Therefore, CDP or other service providers may provide better avenues for electoral education than the school.

What we did:

The CDU research team were asked to take on an exploratory site as part of this project contract. This to be a place where the CDU team did not have previous research experience, with the purpose being to explore how research and evaluation of government engagement might occur in sites where there was not established collaborative research relationships.

Naiyu was selected because it had been identified as a trial site by the Electoral Engagement and Education Working Group (NTG) and it was also a place where the GroundUp team were interested in developing new connections and possible working partnerships.

In establishing new research connections in Naiyu, we initially worked with Ian Gumbula facilitated some initial discussions with William Huddleston (a local consultant/NLC employee) who was provisionally interested in the role, but later withdrew. We subsequently worked with Gavin Morris, a CDU lecturer, who has close ties to the area. Gavin assisted with introductions to Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, a senior authority in the community, as well as members of her family. He also assisted with introductions to Theresa White, a local TO.

Three trips were made to Naiyu by the CDU GroundUP researcher.

- An initial trip to facilitate introductions
- A second trip to further discuss a research approach and possible local researchers
- A third visit where Miriam-Rose facilitated a consultation with senior women from within the community. This consultation involved sitting together, sharing food and talking while the women painted on canvas.

Ideally, we would have also made another trip to work with younger emerging researchers, visiting families in their homes to talk further about electoral engagement. However, this was not possible given the busy schedules of many of the people involved. We also would have liked to work with both Miriam-Rose and Theresa White, but Teresa was not in the community beyond the initial visit.



Electoral Engagement and Education

Seeking to develop feedback for government and the NTEC around electoral engagement and education in Naiiyu, a group of senior women sat and talked about their experiences of voting, as well as problems they had experienced and their ideas around good practices of electoral engagement.

Enacting civic duties

Participants expressed a strong interest in being able to exact their democratic rights. They saw the capacity to do this as residing in forms of mutual responsibility, where good practice on the part of government could be responded to and met by good practice within the community at voting time. This relates to ballot papers, but also engagement around political issues.

- It's important how government puts [options] on the paper, so when they come here we can do things proper ways
- They [politicians should visit before, then come back at election time and say they have made ready that thing [that they promised]. We will see it and do our best to put in guidelines or law or policy [through voting]
- We visited parliament house, and sat in the visitor's chambers. We were there waving to Gary [Higgins]. We know him well, buttered him up but some still didn't vote for him
- People here have been through a lot, there is trauma here, this is part of how we respond

Engaging the community

Having enough time to spend with government and NTEC staff, as well as candidates, in the lead up to election time is important. The whole of the community is involved in elections, and participating in a general 'getting ready' through sharing stories, and slowly building a 'buzz' prior to election day can be helpful in supporting fuller engagement.

- When visiting, can't just whizz through
- Stay for a couple of days – not just visit Monica, Jane, Miriam
- Have to go to whole community
- Voting coming up – can be getting ready, these are the things this mob want us to do

Local assistance

The task of engaging the community can be made easier by working with local consultants. There has been some precedent for people in Naiiyu for people being employed to carry out such activities. Ideally there would be a small team of a woman and a man, working together to speak with people across the community. In the lead up to an election the community can become highly politicised and such consultants are unlikely to be neutral.

- Have someone here, working around election time
- When getting ready for elections, part of the process can be to mentor them, and they can visit everyone
- One woman and one man for a few weeks or a month when walking and talking
- Have done that before. Paid people to do it.
- Is hard to find someone neutral at that time

- People employ people who are faithful for their parties, know who votes for them in their communities

Electoral information

There was considerable discussion about ballot papers and how to vote cards. Visual communication and pamphlets in local languages were seen as a priority. This is particularly for elderly people, and those who may be confused by the situation as the ability to understand English and new complex concepts decreases in situations of stress.

- How to vote pamphlets should be in Kriol, for all areas from Daly to Peppermintarti: Woodi, Emu Point, Nimuluk, Murapan, Nauiyu, Adelaide River, Batchelor
- For others places, pamphlets should be in Murinpatha: this is from Palumpa to Wadeye
- Put photos for politicians that are going to stand
- Have in colours representing different parties – Orange, Red and Green. The column with the candidates can be the same colour as their party.

Respecting senior people

People recalled a story from a previous election where a senior woman was trying to vote, and was at the polling booth alone, without local assistance and with several media cameras pointed at her. Situations like this are not considered appropriate and should be avoided, with senior people receiving assistance around mobility and in understanding the voting process. This is appropriate to their needs, and to the position they hold within the community.

- More support for people who can't get to the booth. Go to the house, get aged care involved. We don't do that here.
- Senior people can have priority at the booth
- Some don't have literacy, and there can be help from people they know

Electoral Education

The situation in Nauiyu is such that local schooling finishes at Year 6. This means there is little capacity to provide educating for people close to voting age through the school. Other avenues could include working through CDP or other services. Or working through family networks in the community.

- Should have some education outreach in CDP
- Not schools because finishes too early



Remote Engagement and Coordination

Part of the research consultation in Nauiyu, involved discussing appropriate processes for supporting further electoral engagement and education in the community.

Detailed below, these suggestions are intended to offer guidance to any government staff or NTEC officers seeking advice, or looking to partner, in the future.

Spreading the word

Generating awareness that something will be happening helps people to be prepared with government or other organisations arrive.

- Emails can be sent in advance to service providers
- Word can be passed to local consultants

Community gatherings/meetings

Community meetings or gatherings are a way of engaging across different families in the community, ideally in a relaxed setting.

- Can give notice there will be a general meeting
- Good idea if there is food or a BBQ
- Can bring a PA or talk to people in groups
- People will know they can have a feed and ask questions

Timing of visits

Having a series of visits planned helps people to engage with the issues being raised.

- People to have time to think about what is being said
- They can talk to each other
- NTG or NTEC can say when they will be back again so people are ready

Local consultants

It is always good to work with a local person when in Nauiyu.

- Miriam-Rose can help advise around this, or help coordinate consultants.
- There are some young people who are skilled at working cross-culturally, and speaking with people in language (like happens with translators and facilitators at the bush court)

Feedback loops

Providing feedback to community on what has been done is not only an issue for government bureaucrats around elections, but also for politicians. Through the processes above government/candidates can inform people:

- If they are going to stand again
- What they will do in office
- How they will implement our recommendations as best as they can

Local evaluation research capacity in Nauiyu

The research consultations carried out in Nauiyu were facilitated by Miriam-Rose, as a senior community authority. They also involved, to some extent, younger members of her family who were able to support the research.

There is already a tradition of ‘Dadirri’ research, following a method research associated with deep listening that is well-known in Nauiyu. This research approach is overseen by the Miriam Rose Foundation, and is supported by specific training and practice. (For more information see: <https://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/about-dadirri/dadirri-text>).

The focus of this project was social research associated with government engagement, service delivery and evaluation. It did not arise as appropriate to use the Dadirri approach in relation to this project. Instead we began to discuss and negotiate GroundUp ways of working together.

The relationships, and working practices, associated with GroundUp research are still very young in Nauiyu. However, there is an interest in local community members being able to work together with government or others to provide feedback around electoral, or other issues in the community.

Preferred working arrangements:

At present, there are certain forms of research approach that have been discussed, and are considered potentially valuable for providing feedback to government on electoral or other matters:

- Local consultations involving small groups of community members facilitated by Miriam-Rose and attended/ co-facilitated by government staff
- Community consultations involving a broader group of attendees facilitated by government staff. This could be supported by Miriam-Rose and her family, and would ideally include a BBQ or other ways of sharing food together.
- Collaborative work between CDU and government staff, and young emerging researchers in the community. This is a promising approach that has been discussed and endorsed, but not yet tested. Working in small research teams would enable these groups to visit people in their homes, or at work, to discuss important issues without convening a community meeting.

Requests around such work can be directed to Miriam-Rose:
enquiries@miriamrosefoundation.org.au

