



Ngukurr Sunrise – towards voting and elections through community way

Remote Polling Booth Research

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Ngukurr Community Voices

Research team: Ian Gumbula, Mercy Gumbula, Shay Gumbula, Joleen Wanambi, Peter Dhamarrandji, Michaela Spencer

Report compiled by: Michaela Spencer and Michael Christie



GroundUp



Summary:

This research was carried out as part of an NTG funded project Remote Engagement Coordination – Indigenous Evaluation Research (REC-IER) – Phase 2: Electoral Engagement and Education.

The research was led by a small team of staff from the research organisation Gumbula Consultancies, and involved speaking with people in Ngukurr about their experiences of voting. The local research team included senior researchers Ian Gumbula and Mercy Gumbula, and research mentorees Shay Gumbula, Peter Dhamarrandji and Joleen Wanambi. This team also worked in partnership with CDU researchers Michaela Spencer and Michael Christie.

The Gumbula Consultancies research team facilitated conversation style interviews with 14 households within Ngukurr.

A set of simple questions were used to start the conversation:

- Do you know about how to vote?
- Last time you voted, what was good and what was bad?
- How can we work together to make voting better in Ngukurr?

Community members told their stories of voting and what they experienced as good or challenging, as well as ways that voting at elections could be better supported in Ngukurr.

In this community report, we present some of the main points from each discussion. This is so they can be checked and edited by those who participated.



Gwen Rami

There are issues with elections, that some of our people can't understand. Normally, through cultural way, we work together and follow our elders. But for elections you have to vote for yourself.

When the election comes, people aren't always ready or aware. It would help to have something in the community (an event or education), getting people ready for voting.

Part of getting ready, is helping people to know why voting is important for them. What is the purpose of voting? Often people don't understand why they are voting, or who they are voting for. They don't understand the groups (parties), so just vote the same way as family.

There can be education in the schools, (for 16-18 year olds). Helping them to practice how to vote, and getting used to doing that themselves. Also teaching people in Ngukurr how to understand and not be fooled by the language that politicians use to persuade.

We, in the community, need to find better ways to judge who is doing a good job. We need to see the progress from those politicians over years, and judge on that. Not just who is my friend today.



Bobby Nunggumatjbarr



Young people can be confused when the election comes, because this is a unique situation where they have to make their own decision. But old people can also struggle and need support.

There needs to be help for the elderly that can't get to vote by themselves – this can be through aged care or other services.

When the electoral commissions come into Ngukurr, Yugul Mangi are the right group for them to connect with.

The Yugul Mangi corporation are a local organisation that can help with information, education and providing services.

Anthony and Cherrianne Daniels



With voting, it is important to get the story straight – why we vote, how we vote, what our choices might be.

If parents are interested in voting, then they pass that story onto their children like I am doign with my daughter now. But not everyone is interested. There is nothing in the school at the moment. Helping young people to learn about voting. Role playing would be good.

Some people are shy and didn't go to school. They can be afraid of voting, or of being fined or jailed for not voting.

Its important to use interpreters and Kriol language, and to support people to vote. The more senior or more confident people can help others. People need to feel confident that they know what to do, that they know it is up to them to choose, and that ultimately they have to do it alone.

Carol and Andrew Robertson

School children should be learning about elections and voting. But there also needs to be adult education. The how-to-vote cards don't really help enough. They could be clearer. And they could also use interpreters.

Some people have a good idea of the history of different party policies in government. But some don't trust the election promises or their relevance to the local community.

We see the television debates for the federal election, not for the NT. People really need to have a chance to decide who they are going to vote for before they have the paper in their hands.

But whichever way we vote, it's still all about what Balanda want for Aboriginal people, not about what we want. Some politicians don't know anything about Ngukurr.

More could be done to support homelands people and elderly people in voter education and voting. And when the NTEC and others come, they should learn about Aboriginal corporation governance – like Yugul Mangi – and electoral processes at the same time.

Gavin Hall and Amelia Huddleston

Young people need to be assisted to understand how to go on the roll, and what for. The voting can be confusing, so they need to know who they are voting for and why.

I want to vote, because voting can make a difference to the community.

Voter education can happen at school or at a community event with a BBQ, or at the festival, or social media (good for younger people - they need screens) but education also should be ongoing.

It would be good to get feedback from the NTEC after the election – who won? Who lost? Which way did the Ngukurr votes go?



Justine Rogers, Robin Rogers & Peter Gumbula

People at the polling booth won't even explain the process to us. They should have a Kriol speaker and Kriol handouts.

Young people and old people don't really understand, they are likely to vote for the one with the prettiest face.

Some people just put ticks in the boxes, not numbers. It needs to be explained better.

The parties should come and talk to us and have a workshop about how to vote for them. Definitely needs to happen in the school for senior students. They need to know what the different parties' policies are.

We finally got the bridge but we don't know which party gave it to us. Its not clear how different people and parties offer differnet things. Its people inside Ngukurr who can help.

People inside Ngukurr like Gumbula Consultancies should be able to give us the information in simple language, in Kriol.



Angelina Joshua

Does voting actually make any difference? This is a question I ask myself, especially for Aboriginal people. We are always voting for a Munanga candidate. Same old thing over and over, makes me sick.

We need to fix our problems as a family-community, but we're not. We need support, funding, better understanding.

We need the help of local communities members who are bicultural – understand both-ways.

Sunrise Health does a good job supporting people with mental illnesses and other disabilities.



Daphne Daniels

Because there is no ongoing conversation in the Ngukurr community, people generally don't have enough understanding or information when it comes to election day.

There are things that can be done about this. More visits by candidates, more information about party policies, more local interpreters and educators using language, more involvement of teenagers.

They could set up a place in the community – maybe on the oval, or in the shade - where people can go before the election to learn what the candidates have to say.

There have been difficulties with the roll – people thinking they had signed up and found out on election day that they weren't on the roll.



Melinda Thompson and Grace Daniels

The level of support people enjoy in their work is seen as the responsibility of government, and elections help to change that.

But by and large people don't even understand that there are three tiers of government, and the young people don't have any idea about the different parties.

For the election to work properly people need to know in advance who they can vote for, how to vote, how that parliamentary party works.

We are unhappy about outstations policy – promised money, no discussion, no progress, outstations without proper resources. Outstations should be supported as places for young people to go when they mess up.



Davin Hall

Sometimes people have problems with being able to vote – they may be away, may be in hospital. We should be able to show good reason for not voting and avoid a fine.

A bus should be available to pick up old people. People should be told in plenty of time that the election is about to happen.

People don't understand postal voting. They don't know what to do on election day. They don't know who to vote for. But everyone knows about the fine.

It's hard to believe that the candidates really care about blackfellas in Ngukurr. They don't. think they should come and sit down with us by the river and drink some tea. If they did that, they would start to see a different perspective. We see Snowdon at election time but not any other time.



Susanne Thingle and Julie Nelson

Voting is easy for people who have done it before, but not for young people their first time, they can be a bit shy.

Some are maybe so shy of being seen or of not doing it right, that they don't turn up, even if they know that they might get a letter.

Sometimes governments tell lies and don't do anything to help us, but they still force us to vote, and if you don't you'll get a fine. They are forcing us to go and vote.

Old people and young people need help with voting. People who have voted before can help the old people and the new voters.



Gordon and Heather John-Forrest

If young people are not shown how to vote, they might just put numbers randomly on the ballot paper. They should have education, this should happen when they are 16, not 18.

Education is important, how to vote, information is important at every stage.

We need more information about the stories behind the names (ie the policies of various candidates). We need to be good judges.

We are looking for a government like the Whitlam government – whether it's liberal or labor.

Compulsory voting is wrong.



Eric Woods

I know what to do, but the young people didn't. They need advice, explaining what the parties stand for.

Everyone should know that they have a right to vote. We didn't have the right to vote in the past.

Marlene Andrews

People often learn about voting from the rest of the family. Now I am teaching my own children. Taking part in the election will produce confidence for participating next time.

I learn about the election results from other people at work. I don't really hear through other ways.

Some people are a bit shy and confused and ask questions Why am I doing this? What is this all about?

Candidates should come and tell us what they stand for, and answer questions. They could organise this through Yugul Mangi.

Voting feels a bit like school, you look around to see if you are doing it right. If the one you vote for doesn't win, you feel like you've done the wrong thing. We think, if our team didn't get to win, maybe better next time.

Local people are good to educate and teach people in the community. They are also good to facilitate sticking to cultural rules of avoidance and respect in community voting. They can act as interpreters. Older people should be allowed to vote first.

Young people feel nervous and afraid, they need to know that there is no right or wrong answer.

They are also frustrated that they are required to vote, and yet the government doesn't give us what we want. We just vote, and then these bad decisions just come and land on us.

