

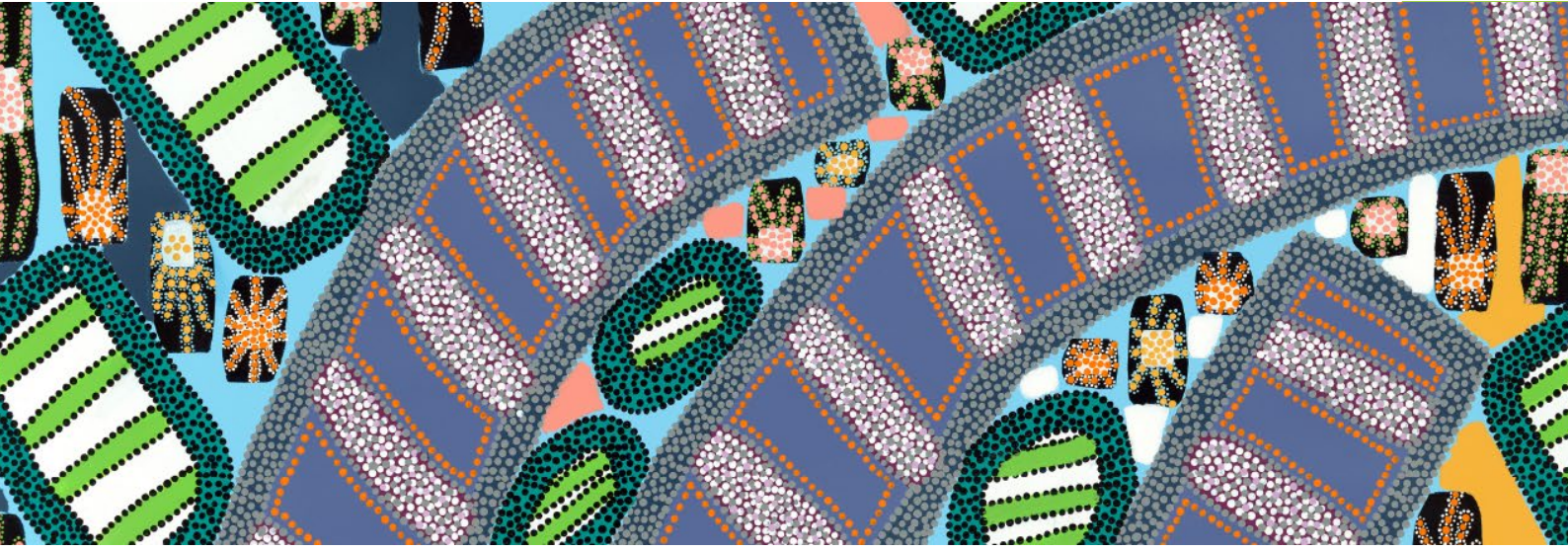


Treasury

Interview series for the development of NSW Treasury's Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Outcomes Framework

Aboriginal Economic Wellbeing Branch
November 2021





Acknowledgement

NSW Treasury acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live and work, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

We pay respect to Elders past and present, and the emerging leaders of tomorrow.

We celebrate the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country, language and culture and acknowledge the important contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to our communities and economies.

We reflect on the continuing impact of policies of the past, and recognise our responsibility to work with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities, towards better economic, social and cultural outcomes.

Artwork: 'Regeneration' by Josie Rose 2020

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1. Introduction

This document summaries the findings from Stage Three of the NSW Treasury Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Outcomes Framework (AEPOF) project. The background to the project and the different stages of development are outlined below.

1.1 Stage One - Origins of the AEPOF project

A discussion draft of the AEPOF was first developed by NSW Treasury in 2018 in response to recommendations from multiple reviews within the NSW Government.¹ The reviews highlighted that despite the multitude of initiatives and programs to increase the economic participation and capacity of Aboriginal people, the effectiveness of these initiatives was limited. A large part of this limited success was attributed to the absence of an overarching state-wide strategy to build prosperity and wealth of Aboriginal people in New South Wales (NSW). These findings were also reiterated as part of the 2019 NSW Ombudsman *OCHRE* Review Report.

The original purpose of the AEPOF was to create a state-wide set of outcomes to inform NSW Government policy development and investments and set the direction for service delivery. The expectation was that this would include a process for tracking progress against economic prosperity for Aboriginal people and communities.

Since 2019, the policy landscape has shifted substantially. The revised National Agreement on Closing the Gap and NSW Government Outcomes Budgeting Framework have filled the state-level gap in monitoring and reporting and are now the primary guide for directing NSW Government investment towards economic prosperity targets and outcomes.

In July 2020, the NSW Treasury Aboriginal Economic Wellbeing (AEW) Branch was created and has taken carriage of progressing the AEPOF in this new policy context.

1.2 Stage Two - Renewed approach and listening series

Under the AEW Branch, the AEPOF has taken a new approach – one grounded in the principles of co-design, place-based solutions and Aboriginal self-determination. This has resulted in a re-orientation of the AEPOF's development towards a bottom-up consultation led approach, re-focusing the AEPOF with input from the voices of Aboriginal people and organisations.

The first step in this process is to understand what the concept of 'economic prosperity' means to Aboriginal people and the aspirations and goals of Aboriginal people and communities.

¹ See NSW Ombudsman, 'Fostering economic development for Aboriginal people in NSW', 2016; NSW Parliament, 'Inquiry into economic development in Aboriginal communities', 2016.

To test this concept, NSW Treasury engaged Aboriginal-owned organisation, Inside Policy to conduct a number of roundtable listening sessions with key stakeholders to build an understanding of what economic prosperity looks like from a First Nations perspective.

The listening series was completed in August 2021, with approximately 55 stakeholders involved from over 30 agencies and organisations. The final report from Inside Policy with the findings from this listening series can be found at **Attachment A**.

1.3 Stage Three - Interview series and literature review

To further test and build on the findings of Stage Two, the AEW Branch has undertaken a series of in-depth interviews with a variety of individuals and organisations. The approach and findings of these interviews are outlined in the remainder of this Report.

The voices and messages of those consulted throughout the interview series will be used to inform the development of the final AEPOF and revised conceptual framework.

The AEW Branch are also finalising a review of literature to build further understanding around concepts of economic wellbeing and prosperity from a First Nations perspective and how this differs from non-Indigenous perspectives.

2. Approach

This section details the objectives of the Stage Three interview series, the participants involved, key questions and methods of engagement and the AEW Branch guiding principles.

2.1 Objectives

The primary objectives of the AEPOF interview series were to further test and build on the Stage Two Inside Policy findings, including to:

- refine the understanding of what ‘Aboriginal economic prosperity’ means from a First Nations perspective
- further understand the barriers and enablers of prosperity outcomes for Aboriginal people, communities and organisations
- test the draft AEPOF conceptual framework, outcome domains and definition of Aboriginal economic prosperity
- further understand the aspirations of First Nations people and the outcomes individuals and communities want to work towards; and
- how to ensure the AEPOF can be useful and relevant tool for end-users.

Overall, the Stage Two roundtable listening sessions provided a breadth of perspectives, while the Stage Three interviews allowed for more in-depth discussion and understanding with additional stakeholders.

2.2 Participants

The interview series included 13 interviews with a total of 19 participants from across a variety of sectors and locations. Stakeholders interviewed included NSW Aboriginal Regional Alliances, Aboriginal small business owners and individuals, and representatives from Aboriginal organisations and research bodies. To protect the privacy of all participants, the names of individuals and specific organisations have not been included in this Report.

The AEW Branch successfully engaged 62 per cent of those approached to participate in the interviews and endeavoured to get a mix of perspectives from different cross sections of the population. A particular focus was given to those areas and stakeholders who had not been consulted to date. The COVID-19 pandemic did impact the Branch’s success in engaging some potential participants, particularly in regions where Aboriginal communities were acutely impacted.

The number of interviews for this series was guided by research which shows an ideal sample size of around 12 for qualitative interviews. Beyond this the point, saturation is reached and themes tend to repeat with little new information.²

² Emily Namey, 2017, ‘How many interviews (or focus groups) are enough’.

2.3 Consultation method

This interview series was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, with NSW public health stay-at-home orders in place for the entire duration of the consultations. Given this, all interviews were conducted via video-conference and were up to one hour in length.

The interviews followed a semi-structured interview style. A series of common questions were asked across the interviews centring around themes of Aboriginal economic prosperity – what it looks like, what the barriers and enablers are, and how to conceptualise and define it. Some questions varied across stakeholders, and were guided by the experience, location and unique perspective of the interviewee.

Interviewees were also asked to share what they thought was important for NSW Treasury to know, providing an opportunity for open discussion on a range of issues.

2.4 Guiding principles

The AEW Branch approach follows four core guiding principles in design and engagement, which are:

- **Co-design** - Doing things with Aboriginal people and organisations, instead of to them.
- **Listening** - Taking a 'searchers' mentality where we listen with an open mind, instead of a set agenda.
- **Reciprocity** - Information in a two-way flow where we are not just 'extractors'.
- **Strengths-based** - Focused on the capabilities, skills, knowledge, connections and potential in individuals and communities.

3. What we heard

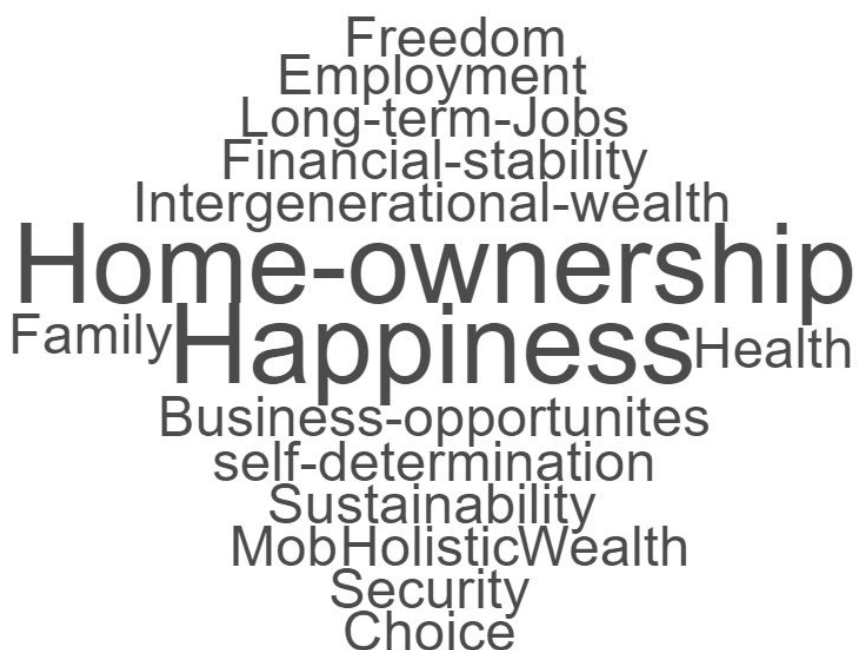
This section outlines the key findings from the stage three interview series.

3.1 What is Aboriginal economic prosperity?

The first step in building an Aboriginal economic prosperity framework is to understand what economic prosperity looks like from a First Nations perspective. To explore this question, interviewees were asked a series of questions to test the idea of economic prosperity conceptually.

We asked participants to describe what 'Aboriginal economic prosperity' means to them in one word (see Figure 1 below)

Figure 1: 'one word to describe what Aboriginal economic prosperity means to you'



Responses show that while economic and financial factors are central to the understanding of economic prosperity, this concept also finds basis in a range of broader needs and aspirations.

More detailed feedback from participants on the question of what 'Aboriginal economic prosperity' means to them revealed four common themes.



Economic prosperity means sustainability, independence and not having to rely on government

“It is key to community that they are not dependent, what is important instead is having access to the needed services”

“All organisations including small businesses ‘running their own ship’ and looking after themselves without having to depend on government funding for day-to-day operations”

“Must have access to all sustainable resources to support a productive long life”



Aboriginal prosperity is not just focused on the individual but also the family and community level

“A focus should be about a family, not just individuals, having a good healthy and happy life”

“It’s about being able to have a better lifestyle for yourself and your family”

“It’s about families. We have the history of trauma and it is something that carries through, want to see families healed and to see them flourish and be proud of who they are and be able to aspire to greater things”



Self-determination and freedom of choice are fundamental – it’s about being able to live the life you want

“The self-determination model, economic and financial prosperity is driven by the community for the community. No point trying to deliver financial outcomes or products if it is something that the community does not want”

“An approach that asks community - what is going to be the best for your community and how do we enact it”

“Mainly self-determination for Aboriginal people and being able to govern without needing to depend on government”

“Having the freedom to do what is best suited for you, your community and culture, and being provided with the opportunities to do that”



Prosperity is broader than just economic, its social and cultural and interlinked with wellbeing

“You don’t need money and the luxuries of life that successful people have in the western sense. We can be happy sitting under the tree or by watching the fishing line”

“It’s about being able to wake up knowing that you are secure, your kids are safe and you are safe. Basic human rights stuff, and then everything above that is a bonus”

“Need to ask them – what do you want? A lot of our people are not material but more spiritual and social”

3.2 What are the barriers to Aboriginal economic prosperity?

To understand how government can contribute to economic prosperity outcomes, we explored with interviewees what they see as the current barriers to Aboriginal economic prosperity.

Feedback from participants around barriers revealed that some are social, some are institutional, and others relate to past and present government policy and practice. While not all of these can be addressed through the AEPOF, this helps to build a holistic picture of the factors that are limiting economic prosperity outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities and creates a focus for policy and reform. Key barriers identified by participants are outline below.



HISTORIC & SYSTEMATIC

Intergenerational trauma and institutionalisation of children and young people

Ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma and continued institutionalisation of Aboriginal children and youth is adversely impacting prosperity outcomes

“Listening to the community, there are a lot of stories that tell that they are proud people but they have been through hardship. There is lot of resilience and hardship, we know there is a lot of heartache”

“There are a lot of legacy issues also to address and deal with from the stolen generations period, and some of the issues have not been addressed well, which have resulted in intergenerational trauma”

“Overrepresentation of children and young people in Out of Home Care, their future and economic prosperity will always place them at a disadvantage because they have not been living in a stable household with their family”

“A high proportion of kids are starting from behind the eight ball when it comes to prosperity because they can be placed in a lot of households from a young age and not have a lot of stability. Their self-identity and sense of belonging may not be as strong”

“There are a lot of obstacles and barriers to overcome... there is a generation of kids who have been removed from their families who have links with Juvenile Justice”

Home ownership and intergenerational wealth

Aboriginal families are locked out of the benefits of intergenerational wealth and inheritance, adding to the wealth gap between non-Indigenous people and First Nations communities

“Keen to create intergenerational wealth and shift community away from intergenerational welfare”

“Property and land ownership has played a huge part of building intergenerational wealth except for Aboriginal people. Stolen land, not having opportunity for employment and or being restricted or not allowed to buy into the property market contributed to in imbalance of home ownership and intergenerational wealth”

“Often, Aboriginal people don’t inherit wealth, if we are lucky we inherit a clean slate, but more than likely we inherit debt. This debt is accumulated over lifetimes and generations and comes last to surviving which means the reliance on handouts”

“It’s a continued system that continues to support the success of non-Indigenous people but for Aboriginal people has allowed this level of reliance and dependence which started with tea, coffee, sugar, flour”

“Support for some home ownership needs to be greater because there is not enough support and there is a long waiting time for this”

“Housing is unattainable and unaffordable especially in Metro regions. Without understanding and support on how to make things work, the middle class can’t get into the housing market, they will always be behind and there will be challenges around creating that intergenerational wealth”

“Disparity continues to grow. Counterparts have something to work with because 50 years ago they had someone in their family that had managed to get onto the property market, whereas the Aboriginal community does not have this benefit”

“Super funds and retirement ages feel like they are not applicable to the Indigenous communities given the life expectancy. When there is a greater chance that you may pass away before you can access super, the incentive to have it is not great”

Racism and discrimination

Racism and discrimination within organisations continue to negatively impact career progression and business opportunities

“When working in the government – even evidence shows this – there is the glass ceiling and there are challenges with the employment pathways. Showed that more people stayed at the same level than rising up”

“Systemic and structural issues including racism which takes away the opportunities”

“Don’t like using the words racism and discrimination. But they are real and they happen, it boils down to attitudes towards the abilities of Aboriginal people”

“It is a barrier to us progressing, no one is giving us jobs in private enterprise or outside. No one is giving us jobs in government particularly in rural areas”

“Racism is a big barrier, people within businesses and organisations who are hiring Aboriginal people have certain notions of Aboriginal people and incorrect stereotypes and people are not getting the jobs and cannot economically support themselves as a result”

Native title and land usage rights

Restrictions around land use under native title limits the ability of Aboriginal people to access capital and create business opportunities

“Native Title is self-determination but it’s only the start. We need to build capacity with Aboriginal people to achieve economic opportunities by using their land”

“It’s important to recognise that the land is a tool to be able to achieve economic growth or prosperity but also allows us, if we choose, to practice our culture - can set up tourism business or agriculture and other things where you use the land as a way of providing or gaining income and maintaining that land and keeping sure that you protect that land”

“Once groups have native title there is the question of what do we do with the land. That is where the barrier exists because there is no capacity and know-how when it comes to starting a business, how to handle mining companies, leases to government and all these things that sound like a great deal”

“Access to capital is a massive blocker and the ability to use the assets and the resources that we have - particularly where they are looking to develop where we have native title. It is part of the conversation”

“They have secured interest in the land and provide it back for the broader community to then come back and use the land i.e provide opportunity for community to operate business or access the service (provides broader economic benefit to the community). Sometimes we do not run the service but instead lease the land out”



ATTITUDES & UNDERSTANDING

Financial literacy

Lower levels of financial literacy within families inhibit capacity for financial planning and long-term strategies for wealth building

“Starting to understand some key concepts of money and what feeds into economic development. Important there is understanding of this and things like home ownership, investing and sovereign funds”

“Intergenerational wealth is something that has never been discussed or properly acknowledged and how beneficial it is to have. As well as knowledge of wealth and financial literacy, understanding savings and conversations around money in general”

“People are not talking about wages or how much things cost, nor are concepts of money openly discussed”

“I went into finance because I wanted to help my community. How do you have robust conversations with family about finances? We did not talk about money and what people got in the past because there was either a shame factor or a lack of emphasis on wealth building, but now it is improving”

“Important to have those conversations and as people have more conversations about this, then the prosperity side of things will become easier”

“Being taught financial literacy should be in school. So should understanding scams, contracts and other predatory things that target vulnerable people”

“The understanding of how to do business and talk that talk. It’s not in our blood and in our DNA to do that kind of business and we are not taught at home or at school”

“The important foundations of being a child and knowing how to control and use money and not abusing it. Not enough education on how to handle money – the financial literacy piece training and education”

Undervaluing ourselves and our skillset and being undervalued by others

Lack of confidence and uncertainty about skills and expertise and appropriate remuneration – combination of undervaluing ourselves and being undervalued by others

“A lot of Indigenous people are undervaluing their skills and value set, need to create the value, aiming not to be seen as ‘ripping people off’. Important not to worry about perceptions or have imposter syndrome”

“Understanding your value as an Indigenous person and the value of intellectual property - a lot of people are devaluing themselves”

“If you have a skill set you should value it in its full form and not devalue yourself and what you have to offer. Have pride in the skillset you have and what you are able to earn and offer”

“It feels like it’s still in the stifled stage because the opportunities have not been there or the confidence in ourselves and just knowing how we go about doing business and achieving success”

Tension between western way with money and cultural way

The traditional collective versus the western individual and how to walk in two worlds when it comes to money

“Modern-day adaptations of traditional values which have been unfairly skewed. There are traditional values to uphold but there are some values that may have to adapt and evolve for the current landscape”

“Culture should never contribute towards poverty. Having culture means you’re one definition of rich but it shouldn’t mean you’re another definition of poor”

“In our communities we have people fully immersed in the collective community where one person has to distribute wage in the family. Then there are people living in a similar way to the western way and trying to look after themselves or immediate family, then there are people who sit in the middle of this spectrum. We need to start coming up with solutions and financial literacy programs that can support every individual’s personal needs”

Mistrust of banks and negative attitudes around money

Lack of trust in banks and financial institutions and negative views of people who are focused on money or income

“There seems to be a toxic and taboo approach to money and what that means and if you have a lot of money, what kind of person you are”

“Money is seen to be bad, and the view that is held is that earning a lot of money is bad”

“Views around the banks by mob are usually negative, and are generally seen as ripping people off”

“An understanding of financial management is a strong component that is becoming increasingly more important in the current system. Question is how we as a people use this and avoid ‘crabs in the bucket syndrome’ or the ‘tall poppy syndrome’, and ‘coconut way’ call outs?”



POLICY & PRACTICE

Rural and remote areas

Rural and remote areas have unique challenges, including limited access to services, housing, employment opportunities and transport which require targeted policy responses

“Access to employment for the regional centres, access to housing, health and general day to day things that people in metro areas do not have to worry about but in regional and remote. It’s a big concern and impacts on economic prosperity”

“In the metro areas you get to see people and interact with businesses and jobs are easily available, so there is a vast difference in terms of the opportunities that are available”

“If you are in a rural or remote area the wage and earnings are concerning as one person may be supporting an entire household”

“Public transport and licence issues is an issue”

“One of the key issues, even for a place like Wagga Wagga, is the public transport issue which is not convenient for work purposes. Timetables for transport do not suit the community and the industries that are in the area”

“When you drive for an hour in the country it’s 100 kilometres. With no car or licence it’s hard to maintain work in the long term. Relying on family, friends or the industry to get on their own feet”

Capital projects and infrastructure

Capital projects continue to represent a missed opportunity for Aboriginal employment, with current policies not holding planners to account

“Structures in government that look at capital works have to be able to do it better and create opportunities to employ Aboriginal people and do so with a long-term view”

“Lack of employment opportunities and missed opportunities when there are opportunities that arise from projects that run in the area – such as the Pacific Highway upgrade and the new jail”

“Have got to keep people honest and the ones responsible for management of projects need to commit and be held accountable. They certainly talked to community, and there were promises made, but a lot of them were nowhere near the targets set at the consultation stage and with stuff like this there will always be excuses for not meeting the targets”

“There were targets that were set to get Aboriginal people employed and there was commitment from management, but that did not eventuate”

“Would like to see more of the construction companies be more specific when they look at improving access to opportunities for Aboriginal people”

“Relationship with council needs to be changed to help them understand and think about the community and how to build a partnership”

“Got involved with the council... but they had no idea on how to connect with the Aboriginal people. Needs to be more work done in this space”

Local Decision Making

Asymmetry of power and resources, as well as insufficient authority and decision-making power within the NSW Local Decision Making (LDM) model

Please also see feedback in section 3.3 for discussion of the benefits of LDM and the importance of placed-based solutions.

“Alliance does advocate on behalf of services but these are funded by the departments - we don’t get any say into what gets funded”

“Currently do not get input or oversight about the tender process – need to do more closed and select tenders for the services that are designed for the Aboriginal communities”

“We have a pathway that works for us and we just need government to help us and deal with this and help the funding of programs”

“A lot of the change needed will take time and a lot of it comes down to relationships and getting a deep understanding of what’s needed in the community. This approach always gets put into the too hard basket by government”

“Have delegates who are all volunteers, the Chair’s role is paid but the delegates are not”

“Arrangements that are in place, particularly around remunerations has created a power imbalance, as the Chair the contract would be the equivalent of a grade 5/6 who then has to negotiate and work with/report to someone at a higher level”

“LDMs have people that are living and working in the area who know what is happening in the community and whether investments are doing as promised. LDMs can provide some truth telling particularly where organisations are interested in the KPIs but there is no truth telling around their performance or accountability”

“See alliances included in the commissioning of any grants and work. Need to know what companies are coming and doing a good job versus who are just driving in and out of our communities”

“The big NGOs have people who are employed to do specific work, for example grant writing, but our organisations with fewer staff that are not as appropriately remunerated there is an expectation that we also do the same and still deliver on our other goals”

“Resources are an issue, and they prevent alliances from being included in some of the processes... The budget is quite tight, and we must find the extra funds to get some of this stuff done. If LDMs or alliances are part of some of these processes this would be helpful”

Access to data and data sovereignty

Lack of access to government data in community and for service providers creates information asymmetry and denies Aboriginal people the right to view and use their own data

“Hitting brick walls around getting data from government”

“One of the key challenges is getting access to data. We have been asking about what is being delivered by individual departments and where they are delivering and what data they have which would be good to know including what is being delivered by who. However, not much luck about getting transparency. Also would like to know about what is also being funded for Aboriginal people within the mainstream services”

“Data collection needs to be developed with communities and express where the people are. Governments need to reframe the data system and who collects what, where and when and who gets to see it”

“Another good thing to have is visibility of what is being funded. Even the government agencies were unable to say what is being funded and to whom and where”

Accountability and information on 'what works'

Current systems lack accountability and data collection and evaluation continue to focus on outputs rather than outcomes

"No one really knows what is working and what is not working"

"Important to ensure that the decision makers have some goals in their contracts in how they can be supporting Aboriginal communities and relevant targets in their contracts to make them accountable. Need to know - what are the agreed targets for service delivery?"

"There is an Aboriginal community hub service centre where service providers would come in. One service provider would come in twice a week and service six families. Another would come in on separate days and still see the same six families. A total of three service providers in the space of a week coming in and only reaching the six families. So, in their reporting, they may have met their KPIs but the reality is they have only reached six families"

"What is reported are often the outputs and statistics, and there is no clear picture from the data collection and data collected on Aboriginal people that tells you or them how well things are working. There is little data collected with community and service users that allows them to express how they are going within a program meant to benefit them"

"There are not enough culturally appropriate designed tools for the sector that collect the data needed so demonstrate what real improvement has been made to people's lives and circumstances, and what benefits have been gained. Currently, tools are focusing on outputs instead of outcomes and don't indicate real improvement made through a program"

"Previously worked on a program that was evaluated... There was no appropriate criteria for reporting. Accountabilities were dodgy and evaluation was an afterthought"

"Need to meet regularly with stakeholders to look at what has been achieved and have a continuous feedback loop that should involve all the key stakeholders. Similar to action research"

Short-term funding cycles

Short-term funding agreements and 'pilot' programs that don't go through to long-run implementation are limiting the ability and effectiveness of services

"A lot of us survive on one year funding cycles. At best might get a 3-year cycle. So, the key question to ask would be around the opportunity for Aboriginal programs to be sustained and funded for a longer period and it is the same feedback we've always given"

"There are programs that have been a success, but they have not continued because it is a pilot, and it falls off. So, it always comes back to the question and the commitment of government to making sure that this framework is implemented and supported all the way through"

Government Procurement policy

Current procurement policies limit the ability of some Aboriginal organisations and businesses to be competitive, with many of the broader benefits to community not taken into consideration in tender decision making

“Ideally would be good to see more government department agencies have closed or invited tenders for initiatives that are designed for Aboriginal communities (e.g., DCJ³ has several programs and they could have more invitations to tender)”

“The approach of government needs to be changed around the procurement policy side of things. We understand procurement and why our community has the capacity, and we don't understand why we have to compete with other business to do things that we have been doing and will be here doing for the next 100 years”

“From the procurement they have looked at the financials but there is a lot more. Feedback is always that ‘our procurement will not allow us to do it”

“Procurement could look at certain projects where a community that has been there for a while, that is setting itself up to have a different approach and that maintains the values and integrity of the area and the associated stories and culture”

“It's not just about a job, but building individual capacity and the families to let people get a better experience out of the situation”

“Much better to invest and build capacity in our own mob”

“Seems that there is willingness to pay consultants but will give crumbs to our mob”

“Need to create systems that take into account the value that is invested in the community beyond getting the lowest price”

³ Department of Communities and Justice

3.3 What are the enablers of Aboriginal Economic prosperity?

Participants were also asked to identify what they see as the enablers of Aboriginal economic prosperity. Many of the responses centred around addressing the barriers that have been limiting prosperity outcomes (outlined in section 3.2 above).

Other key themes identified through questioning around enabling factors revealed connection to culture, Aboriginal leadership and the shift towards a strengths-based mindset as key factors supporting prosperity outcomes.



CULTURE & COMMUNITY

Connection to culture

Building Aboriginal economic prosperity also requires supporting and building cultural prosperity – which brings a sense of pride and belonging

“Great opportunities in the culture space, and a lot of push to look at culture, language, dance, music and the relationship this has to empowerment of self-belief and the impact this has on individual and community pride. It all feeds into prosperity, whether it is economic or something else”

“If culture is what will provide pride and empowerment, then this is what needs to be supported so there is growth”

“Gives a sense of belonging and helps me reevaluate the ‘why’ of what I am doing and achievements I am trying to get to. Helps with realising that it is the foundations I am trying to achieve for the people around me”

“One of the biggest opportunities is getting local people back into the culture and going back to country, showcasing our culture in some way”

“It’s about building trust and showing that not everything out there is bad and we can respect their cultural beliefs. So understanding the culture and then adding the economic component to it. Showing that the benefits are for the people”

Positive role models and leaders

Aboriginal leaders and role models, within community and culture as well as in business are key to building economic prosperity

“There is a need for Indigenous champions. Growing up we saw the sporting stars but now transitioning to business it is a challenge, need more champions and need to show more people what they could achieve”

“Should government consider providing a platform for champions? Absolutely, growing up they are things we hardly get to see i.e., champions in the business space. Only now that I’m in the space that I get to see them. As a young kid didn’t get to see enough of it”

“I’m the first in the family to get an office job and I’m sure I’m not the only person like this, there are many...and what’s important is knowing that just because there hasn’t been anyone who has done it before me, does not mean it cannot be done”

“Current successful business people, tertiary and TAFE educated, and sport people have a part. Examples include the Fainga’s brothers, Adam Goodes and other sports people who have gone into business and are pushing a different narrative post sport”

“We also need role models beyond sport, we need role models in finance, economics and other fields”

“It would be good to consider how celebrations like NAIDOC can also incorporate awards. For example, we have young achievers or elder in the community, women in sport, but what about the business or economic achievements?”

“Having people in the workforce who then become the role models for the young people and what they can aspire to is important instead of looking up to people that have low aspirations. Great to get exposure”

“The reality for some is that work-for-the-dole which is something that is the ‘model’ or example they see growing up and need to have more people in other roles. So the elders and the people in community are important”

Strengths-based approach

Moving away from the deficit/welfare approach and towards a focus on the positive contribution of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal business

“Change in perspective about what the Aboriginal economy consists of and what we contribute and the impact we have”

“Western business and senior leaders have not been able to see what we are capable of and in the past have not afforded us those opportunities...and now there are initiatives that are allowing Aboriginal people to shine through”

“Community attitude also comes down to the education opportunities we had and the employment opportunities especially if family pattern has been that the lifestyle is one of relying on government. We need to have the motivation to break these kind of cycles”



Programs and initiatives that are changing the narrative

A range of programs and organisations are emerging which are shifting the narrative towards building Aboriginal business and Aboriginal wealth

“IBA⁴ are trying to change the narrative by bringing business to forums where there are discussions about who Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are and how we conduct business. These platforms provide access to role models and normalising the success of business”

“Supply Nation’s ‘Connect’ is another initiative that celebrates businesses and aims to build a prosperous and sustainable Indigenous business sector”

“Universities going out there and changing the conversation about future education”

“Dream venture masterclass from the Minderoo Foundation has a focus on investment and has introduced the Black Angel investors. It is the pushing the next level of conversation, beyond savings and budgets with respect to the generation of wealth”

“Government procurement strategy needs to continue as its helping businesses to get government jobs and tenders, it is something that is positive and helping businesses get a foot in the industry”

Early intervention and holistic service design

Greater focus on early intervention services and holistic service design is the key to getting young people and families on a good pathway

“If we have economic prosperity there has to be holistic housing, health employment”

“It’s not just one program and one support, but the continuous support from a young age all the way through”

“Everything has to move together. The issue is that a lot of organisations and government tend to focus on one thing at a time, but you need to have small increments across everything at the same time. It’s an equilibrium balance that’s needed. Will go slower but then it addresses the constant changes”

“A lot of the funding is focussed on the later part of the continuum of support — at the crisis end — instead of upfront support for families to stay together when they need it and helping them to get off the challenging paths. Families need access to early childhood education play groups and early intervention support”

⁴ Indigenous Business Australia

“Instead of focusing on the crisis component of the system, mechanisms should reverse this so the focus is on early intervention to achieve better outcomes”

“Need to build programs that respond to the aspirations, wants and needs of people... often families have to fit in with the program instead of the program fitting around what a family actually needs”

“Support services built in a holistic way... That type of model is often rarely funded but it is needed. That’s where you get prosperity and stability for individuals, families and communities as it gives access to better focussed opportunities”

“Having worked with DOCS⁵ and juvenile justice, I believe we need to move away from the reactionary response to families that are classified as dysfunctional by government. Pleased to see that there are some steps in this area, but we can go further”

“Early intervention is particularly important in the field of education where there are not many options apart from suspension and expulsion for children that are struggling. Need early intervention that supports ongoing education needs for young Aboriginal people”

“Outcomes for them do not always mean getting HSC, but it is about getting the abilities and skill through apprenticeships. What matters are the key skills and there are emerging opportunities in areas of vocational support that should be explored like IT and mechanics where they have interest that they can be engaged. It’s not always that our kids fit in the mainstream”

Employment and training

Genuine long-term employment opportunities and training that is relevant and purposeful is needed

“Have a lot of Aboriginal adults who did not finish school but end up doing TAFE courses that have no relevance to leading to jobs. So overqualified but cannot be matched to the roles which creates issues and challenges”

“Invest in Aboriginal employment instead of non-Aboriginal employment. A lot of the funding goes towards non-Indigenous people running things for Indigenous people, links back to self-determination”

“Aboriginal people cannot get jobs but backpackers coming in get the jobs and there is a preference”

“Getting more Aboriginal people into good long-term jobs that are not subsidised - not the 1-2 year kind of roles, something more stable”

“For some of these providers they may indicate that they will employ an Aboriginal person, perhaps a requirement of the contract that they report on, but the roles are temporary. There

⁵ Department of Community Services

is no quality in the placement and there is no ongoing development or growth, they are just getting people in as trainees”

“Getting more Aboriginal people into good long-term jobs that are not subsidised - not the 1-2 year kind of roles, something more stable”

“Culturally safe workplaces means allowing to bring all aspects of your diverse cultural identity to the workplace. This means understanding the importance of connection to culture and includes the opportunity to continue to participate in culture and still be employed. Workplaces are still failing to structure their employment conditions to meet the needs of Aboriginal people cultural obligations and participation”

“Employment leads to opportunity and from this access that helps you move on... gives capability to then transition if they want to get into business”

Supporting home ownership

Building pathways to home ownership is important in helping to build intergenerational wealth and financial independence

“Looking at how to work with government and legislation around the home ownership piece for different areas and groups”

“IBA working with all the banks to not having people on the LMI⁶. Looking at how to remove barriers”

“Looking at things like property-share, which is about applying to buy a home together — different options to help with the payments so they have ownership stock in the property”

“Other big one that is not highlighted is home ownership... because there are a lot of people (intergenerational) that are still renting either from Department of Housing or FACS⁷ or from the private sector and as we know the private landlords out west can be quite picky”

“A slow process that works across generations. A holistic approach that includes better education, jobs, financial literacy and more are all important to getting into the home market and succeeding”

“Home ownership support and wealth independence support need to be diverse because Aboriginal people are so diverse not only in their culture but in their financial literacy, current wealth status and future wealth success. The definition of wealth means different things”

⁶ Lenders Mortgage Insurance

⁷ Department of Family and Community Services

Place based solutions and local decision making (LDM)

Community and locally led solutions are the pathway forward, community knows what they need and what works best

“Regional models work, it is something that we live and breathe, and it has emerged from community and it is driven by the voices of the community”

“Unless people start doing something differently then we will not be seeing any different outcomes. People have only been recipients and have not had a say”

“LDM is extremely important but does not happen enough. Local targeted investment with targeted commissioning is needed. Programs still need to look at local experience and people’s lived experience when designing services. Users are usually not considered or taken into account when designing or improving services There’s usually no commitment or drive to do things this way”

“Bottom-up design and approach to things is what is needed to create real change - mapping out a design on what needs to be in place for things to work and having end users involved in the design of a solution”

“Part of the LDM is that they have this discussion about what is not working on the ground program wise. Need more processes like this and it is something that happens with the Empowered Communities too where they have funding that goes to many organisations”

“Have had to fight for everything and did not get everything, but have managed to see some shifts”

“Need something that fits with our pathways to empowerment and economic purposes, so place based and government working with us directly is more effective”

“For too long government was coming out and shopping around for what it wanted, and in the process fuelling dysfunction by creating competition among organisations and the community. Decided that this was not the best approach”

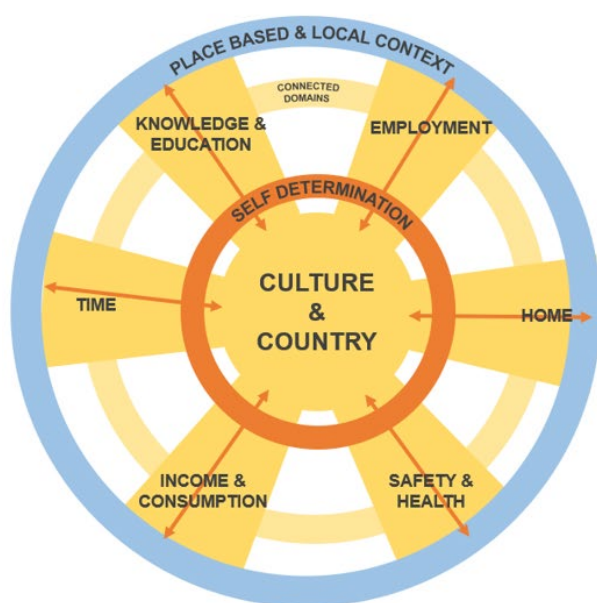
“Government needs to look at the model that is on the ground with communities instead of following what the national and state bodies are saying and stating. Need to start engaging more with community”

3.4 Testing the conceptual framework and definition

As part of the previous AEPOF Phase Two roundtable listening series, a draft conceptual framework and definition of Aboriginal economic prosperity was developed in collaboration with participants.

To further test and build on these findings, interviewees in Phase Three were asked to share their thoughts and initial responses to the draft framework and definition statement (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: AEPOF draft conceptual framework and definition



A definition of Aboriginal prosperity:

Aboriginal economic prosperity is about everyone having enough and there being enough for everyone

This concept draws on the commonly cited notions of reciprocity, community and the overall sense that one's prosperity is linked to the prosperity of their family, community and culture.

Comments on the definition statement

Participants generally agreed with the proposed definition of economic prosperity. Key things that resonated with participants included:

“Provides a strengths-based approach that still plays into the values we have”

“The definition builds on cultural aspects. Take what you need and share what you can”

“Definition makes sense... Can't have individual prosperity without community prosperity”

“I was expecting to see dollars and cents, happy to see what has been sent through on the framework — it's unlike Treasury”

“I like the notion of reciprocity that is captured in the definition”

“Sounds very true and love the definition that has been provided. Brings out the holistic family units and communities”

“Definition makes sense. I spoke about happiness earlier — if everyone has enough and there is enough — this supports the happiness comment made earlier. Definition is pretty close to the mark”

Comments on the use of the word ‘everyone’ and ‘enough’

Several participants had questions around the meaning and interpretation of the word ‘enough’

“Would need to think about what the word ‘enough’ means. The word enough implies there is a limit and you cannot go beyond it, when we should be able to aim for the stars”

“Instead of using the word ‘enough’ may want to think about something different. When the word enough is used it may put a barrier on what is needed by the individual or the community and it implies there is a point at which you stop things”

“What could perhaps be emphasised is that things are not going to waste — so when speaking about Aboriginal prosperity, we are speaking about using all parts of the economic component — take only what’s needed. Not sure if the wording ‘enough’ hits the mark”

“What is enough is the question? In some contexts, some people may see welfare as enough”

“Interpretation of enough should be to the reader and to the individuals and communities to determine what is enough for them”

“Think about what individual families and communities want and gauge as being enough... needs to come from the community about what people want”

“The word ‘enough’ ... What is enough? Is it money? Wellbeing? Capacity to perform your culture on an everyday basis. With family, what does that mean? So would need to have more work to further define the domains”

Comments on the domains and conceptual framework

Participants generally agreed that the conceptual framework and domains captured the key aspects of Aboriginal economic prosperity.

“Captures the essence of all the spokes of the wheel that need to work together to achieve prosperity”

“It is not just a linear thing, it is interrelated and a continuum and there are connected domains, that cannot be separated. Good concept”

“All the domains are the most important things to people - the diagram has the fluidity”

“You’re on the right track — keep it going. It’s always about dollars, cents and wealth whereas in our world it’s not that at all, so keen to see the framework develop further”

“Culture and country at the centre resonates and also having the self-determination”

“Love that culture and country are at the centre... maybe to have it in a different colour, read it as they all contribute to country and culture and vice versa”

There are some factors that are foundational

Some participants identified certain domains as more being foundational, on which other domains build upon in a hierarchy

“It flows in like a circle but there are priorities and foundations that need to be built into this. Perhaps think of it in a similar way to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs – there are some foundational things to have”

“Important to communicate that there are some basic needs that are foundational and without these, things will not work”

“There are foundations that need to be sought before we can even think of economic development”

“It was not clear what should be the foundational or key domains. For concepts such as ‘prosperity’, domains/elements tend to sit on a spectrum. Within each domain, there would be a foundation outcome that other things build on so that there is progression. Not every domain is foundational. So, there are foundational elements in each domain that build up to a higher order”

“Seems to align with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and has the key things that are needed, so things like the income and consumption come because you are able to gain employment”

Comments on domains

A few participants questioned the language and meaning of some domain names

“Broaden employment domain to relate more to “work” and reconceptualise what we mean by work. Also consider this for the education domain. What matters is not necessarily education in the western sense but *learning*, there would be aspects to capture there that are not all related to formal education as we know or conceptualise it”

“Not quite sure what consumption means... is that consumption of goods?”

“Traditional knowledge should not be just what the western has but what the traditional considers (e.g., knowledge of Country which is just as important and should be regarded as so)”

Gaps identified in the draft framework

Income is not the same as wealth - wealth creation is missing

“Important to emphasise that you cannot get wealth from income. Wage is not your primary source for wealth creation”

‘Family’ and/or ‘community’ is missing

“Perhaps it’s implicit, but the thing that is missing is family and community. Maybe it fits in its own category or fits in place-based or in the home category”

Indigenous Leadership and role models is missing

“What may be missing is Indigenous leadership or community leadership as something that is big”

“Would add in positive role models somewhere — we need the right role models for guidance — so leadership is missing from the domains. Need the right people to follow and listen to”

Aboriginal business is missing (rather than just employment)

“Maybe the part of employment should have something to do with business...the aim is just not working for someone else, but you can work for yourself”

Meaning of Culture and Country – needs to be broad so not to exclude the diverse stories and identities of Aboriginal people

“Culture and country — country doesn’t just mean physical land. They are probably similar or the same — not just about the land you have your feet on”

“Access to culture and Country is a choice that individuals make, except for the stolen generation where it was taken from them. So, in that sense culture and country could still remain in the framework without excluding anyone”

“For the stolen generation it is really hard to think about culture and country. Fear of rejection and the lateral racism piece that plays out especially for the stolen generation and people seeking to reconnect”

“There is also the stolen generation, people who are only just discovering their Aboriginality and haven’t had that chance for cultural connection – you only know what you know”

“One of the key issues I encountered in working with DOCS and the Juvenile Justice system was around the issues of identity. A lot of the kids did not know about culture and Country and when they usually have this, they have a sense of belonging”

“Home and housing, and affordability while important cannot be achieved without land and the pre-existing policies that have locked people out. Need something that talks about access to land and land rights. It’s not just about land rights, but people being able to own and build economic stability through having access to Culture and Country”

“Your economic journey in the Western sense is go to school, work and all these things, but in the traditional sense these constructs do not exist. So, while we may go to schools — boarding schools and to other place — there are so many more Indigenous people that are being taken away from family, land and culture. So, in the end they have missed out on 6-12 years of their culture and community and the land ...if you are not connected it is equally as bad as missing out on school and you will feel as equally as bad in my view”

The role of non-Indigenous people is missing

“Doesn't pay homage to the fact that we need our non-Indigenous brothers and sisters to help us”

“Currently framework is very Aboriginal centric, we try to get our problems sorted by ourselves”

“Yes, we need to create our own foundation and strength, but we need others and we don't want to segregate and have an us versus them. It is inferred but not explicit to gain prosperity”

3.5 How can NSW Treasury ensure this framework is a useful tool?

Walk the talk and be held to account

NSW Treasury needs to be held accountable for implementation and delivery

“The work is great around the AEPOF, however, noting that it has all been said before, so it is the actions that will arise from this and the implementation that is always the critical part to this. Looking at past reviews and recommendations, it's always the case that only a fraction is implemented”

“The same things are raised year after year and decade after decade, and little progress seems to be made on implementing the recommended improvements that would make a difference”

Follow a place-based approach

A one size fits all approach will not work

“Better than having government come in with a state-wide plan that does not suit us. If the plan does not suit us, we just ignore and focus on our goals around the social, cultural and economic components”

“It cannot be done if not co-designed at the local and regional level. If it is not place based and if it's one size fits all we will likely not spend too much time on it, it would be a distraction for our community and where we want to go”

“A framework that can be moved around or shaped to the community or area that you are working with or in. Something adaptable and agile – each community is not fixed”

4. Next steps

This report represents the finalisation of the Stage Three interview series and summarises the key findings.

The AEW Branch will now move into Stage Four of the AEPOF project, which will draw on all the learnings from what we have heard so far. This will include redeveloping and expanding on the conceptual framework, domains and definition which will form the backbone of the final AEPOF.

Work will also progress on how the APEOF can be practically applied by government and non-government agencies prior to testing of the framework in early 2022.

The AEW Branch would like to thank everyone who shared their time and their story with us. We have heard you and look forward to sharing further details on how your contributions have shaped this important part of NSW government policy.

Further information and contacts

For further information on the framework, please email the NSW Treasury Aboriginal Economic Wellbeing (AEW) Branch at aew@treasury.nsw.gov.au

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