

Client

WorkVentures Lts

Project

Evaluation of the PCs into Homes Initiative

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# Contents

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<b>1</b>	<b>The project</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Overview	1
1.3	Outcomes	2
<hr/>		
<b>2</b>	<b>The evaluation</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	Overview	3
2.2	Details	3
<hr/>		
<b>3</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1	Staff feedback	5
3.2	Stakeholder feedback	6
3.3	Participant feedback	7
<hr/>		
<b>4</b>	<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>9</b>
4.1	Conclusions	9
4.2	Key recommendations	9
<hr/>		
<b>5</b>	<b>Appendix 1: Performance against critical milestones</b>	<b>11</b>



# 1 The project

## 1.1 Background

In 2007, WorkVentures Ltd (WorkVentures) received funding from the Westpac Foundation to provide the *PCs into Homes Initiative*. This project aimed to increase Indigenous communities' access to personal computers (PCs), reducing the digital divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and enhancing their prospects for social and economic development.

"Digital divide" is a term used to describe inequalities between communities or groups' ability to access and use computer-based digital and information communication technologies (ICT).<sup>1</sup> ICT includes the Internet, word processors, accounting programs and email.

Due to our societies' growing reliance on ICT to conduct business, education, governance, service provision and interact socially, PC ownership and usage has been recognised as critical to individuals' opportunities for employment, social connection and further education and training.<sup>2</sup>

2006 Census data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has identified a significant digital divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Australia. *Patterns of internet access in Australia*<sup>3</sup> states that Indigenous Australians are about half as likely to have Broadband access compared to non-Indigenous Australians.

Further research by the ABS identified that barriers to online access for Indigenous people include:

- set-up and access costs
- lack of physical access (especially in rural and remote areas)
- disinterest/confidence or perceptions of irrelevance
- security concerns
- lack of skills/training and
- illiteracy.

The *PCs into Homes Initiative* aimed to address these issues by delivering partly-subsidised PCs to Indigenous people and establishing permanent PC distribution centres in communities where

Indigenous people could purchase computers at low cost.

Previously the Commonwealth and State governments have invested heavily in providing computers through community ICT hubs. According to WorkVentures, "Issues of ownership, factional conflicts and limited ongoing support have resulted in a collection of ICT hub centres sitting unused in many communities".<sup>4</sup> The *PCs into Home Initiative* aimed to overcome these issues by delivering computers directly into participants' homes.

## 1.2 Overview

The *PCs into Homes Initiative* was funded from January 2007-2010. The project was initiated with the following goals:

- to establish a PC distribution centre in each of three identified communities by quarter 3 of 2009
- to provide subsidised PCs and computer training to 150 Indigenous households across the communities, with the aim of 70% of PC recipients using their PCs more than twice a week
- to sell and support 50 PCs annually through the distribution centres
- to assist 300 Indigenous residents to complete training at their local technology learning centre in PC usage and accessing the internet
- to build the capacity of Indigenous communities by establishing delivery partnerships with Indigenous organisations
- to build WorkVentures' capacity to continue sourcing, refurbishing, supplying and marketing PCs to disadvantaged communities.

In doing so, the project would link with WorkVentures' goals as an organisation, i.e.:

- narrowing the digital divide that exists in disadvantaged and isolated communities
- creating pathways and opportunities for employment
- supporting individuals and communities to build sustainable small enterprises
- encouraging individuals back to learning and working with Indigenous people and communities to identify and support sustainable solutions to long-term issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Samaras, K, "Indigenous Australians and the 'digital divide', Libri, 2005, vol. 55, pp. 84-95

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> ABS, *Patterns of internet access in Australia*, 2006

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<sup>4</sup> WorkVentures Final Project Report for the Westpac Foundation, 2007

### 1.3 Outcomes

The *PCs into Homes Initiative* changed significantly over the term of its funding. WorkVentures' progress records and reports document these difficulties and adjustments. These difficulties are also reflected in this evaluation (described further in Section 2.1.1: Limitations).

Originally the project aimed to target Indigenous communities in three geographic locations across Australia (Airds in south-western Metropolitan Sydney, Cape York and an underdetermined location). However, due to internal staff changes and difficulties encountered with distribution partners, the project was reframed and its objectives and process adjusted. Initial partners did not commit the necessary time or resources to driving the project. One partner organisation also collapsed financially. New project partners in different geographical locations were sought out and the project refocused to target organisations already involved in up skilling and employment training for Indigenous people.

By the conclusion of the project 150 PCs had been delivered into eight communities across Australia:

- Airds (Sydney, NSW): 47 PCs
- South Coast NSW: 11 PCs
- Cape York (Queensland): 10 PCs
- Preston (Victoria): 5 PCs
- Canberra (ACT): 15 PCs
- Brewarrina (NSW): 10 PCs
- North Coast NSW: 40 PCs
- Regional NSW: 12 PCs

Note: 12 PCs were still scheduled to be delivered at the conclusion of the funding period (January 2010) following partners' delays.

PCs were delivered into a variety of settings including preschools, homes and community hubs. During the course of the project, WorkVentures recognised this flexibility was necessary, especially in extremely remote areas which do not have the infrastructure for broadband or wireless internet connections. It also became clear that providing organisations with ISP or affordable internet connections was needed to make the project more appealing and accessible for some participants.

A broader model relying on a flexible approach to supply, demand, funding and training was adopted. Functional partnerships were established, notably with the Smith Family, Auswide Projects and the North Coast Computer Project. Cross-subsidy for computers was also arranged, rather than seeking full payment from participants themselves. Targets for participants utilising their computers were adjusted and training largely conducted by partner organisations as part of their pre-existing programs.

The project timeline is described below. Measurement against original critical milestones is included in a table in Appendix 1.

#### Timeline: *The PCs into Homes Initiative*

Year	Project process	Distribution partners
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project commences (January)</li> <li>• Project Co-ordinator, Nick Van de Peer leaves the project in (October)</li> <li>• Project Co-ordinator role vacant (October – 2009). Some work on the project conducted by other WorkVentures staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation/Aboriginal Employment Strategy</li> <li>• WorkVentures Local Enterprise Centre</li> <li>• Hopevale Justice Committee and Local Council/ Wujal Wuja community</li> <li>• Koori Information Technology</li> </ul>
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steve Macready (Head – Connect IT) begins some work on the project. Distribution of equipment resumes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Auswide Projects/YWCA</li> <li>• The Smith Family</li> </ul>
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virginia Piccone (Manager, Social Programs – Community Partnerships) takes over the project (April)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Smith Family</li> <li>• The North Coast Computer Project</li> <li>• Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Council</li> </ul>
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project ceases (January)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gunawirra Limited</li> </ul>

Table: Project partners over the life of the project

## 2 The evaluation

### 2.1 Overview

As part of its proposal to the Westpac Foundation, WorkVentures indicated that they would appoint an external evaluator to measure the success of the project against the proposed objectives and outcomes.

The evaluation was required to examine the following:

- increases in computer ownership by residents of the Indigenous Communities
- greater participation in ICT education programs
- financial performance of community distribution partners
- enhanced operational capacity of Work Ventures Connect IT program
- improved social and economic outcomes for residents and communities.

Elton Consulting was appointed by WorkVentures in May 2010 to undertake this evaluation. The evaluation methodology was agreed with WorkVentures and designed to be appropriate to the client group and respectful of WorkVentures Ltd staff and the work undertaken to date. The evaluation did not consider operational elements of the *PCs into Homes Initiative* such as financial and project management performances. These project elements will be evaluated by WorkVentures Ltd.

#### 2.1.1 Limitations

At the beginning of the evaluation process, Elton Consulting and WorkVentures Ltd staff identified that due to difficulties encountered during the project (such as staff turnover, changing distribution partners and changing objectives), there was minimal information available to inform this evaluation. Most early agreements with distribution partners were established informally (subject to email documentation only). Programs and promotional materials were prepared but not maintained on file (and therefore not included as part of this evaluation).

In light of this, this evaluation does not have a large evidence base behind it. However every effort has been made to engage with the available records, resources and people to provide a realistic and informed evaluation. The scope of the evaluation was reduced. Elton Consulting was unable to

evaluate the financial performance of community distribution partners, for example.

The evaluation methodology was deliberately designed to be flexible. Records evidencing the project were gathered where possible, including files and reports. These records were supplemented with consultation with WorkVentures Ltd staff. Further, consultation has been undertaken with participants across the spread of the three years of the project.

### 2.2 Details

#### 2.2.1 Purpose

This is the final evaluation that measures the performance of the project to date. Further, it is anticipated that the evaluation will refine the *PCs into Homes* project in light of participants, stakeholders and staff members' experiences (recorded through the impact evaluation) and will make recommendations for program improvement.

#### 2.2.2 Methodology

Elton Consulting examined social and financial reports and assessments undertaken by the project throughout its lifetime. Using this data, we assessed the project's performance against key performance indicators, milestones and targets to comment on the impact and/or probable impacts of the project. The evaluation also included direct research with WorkVentures' staff (staff interviews), computer recipients (client interviews), and training and distribution partners (stakeholder interviews) to assess the project's performance.

All interview questions were targeted to assess the performance of the project against the project indicators as well as measuring individual outcomes for participants and stakeholders. Questions focused on:

- personal experiences of the project
- perceived and actual benefits for participants
- perceived and actual benefits for the wider community
- unanticipated outcomes/benefits
- challenges and opportunities for improvement.

Participant and partner interviews also explored the impact increased access to computers had on the social and economic wellbeing of participants and the sustainability of those impacts.

Details of the evaluation's methodology are outlined in the table below.

Method	Details
<b>Document review</b>	Project funding agreement and progress reports were examined, including records of previous evaluations conducted by WorkVentures staff during the course of the project.
<b>Staff interviews</b>	A joint interview was held with Virginia Piccone (Manager, Social Programs – Community Partnerships, WorkVentures) and Steve Macready (Head, Connect IT WorkVentures) on 3 May 2010.
<b>Stakeholder interviews</b>	30 minute phone interviews were held with three distribution partners (Auswide Projects, Tharawal and the North Coast Computer Project) in June 2010. Stakeholder contact details were supplied by WorkVentures, and contacted by WorkVentures staff prior to calls from Elton Consulting.
<b>Participant interviews</b>	15 minute phone interviews were held with eight participants during May and June 2010. Participant contact details were supplied by WorkVentures, and contacted by WorkVentures staff prior to calls from Elton Consulting.

Table: Evaluation methodology

## 3 Findings

As per the Westpac Foundation funding agreement, the overall objective of the *PCs into Homes Initiative* was to improve the capacity of Indigenous and underserved communities to access and use ICT technology, increasing their likelihood of advancing their personal, economic and social development. The *PCs into Homes Initiative* aimed to provide participants with:

- Access to PCs, preferably in their own home
- Training in using PCs, to build individuals' capacity – and willingness – to use the technology.

The project also aimed to build the capacity of organisations who work with these communities, to deliver more of these types of services and increase their reach.

Findings based on these aims are described below. Findings examine both process findings (the way the project was implemented) and social impact findings (the effect the project had on participants and their wider community). The three evaluation activities have been considered separately to ensure the detail of the evaluation interviews was captured.

The project's performance against critical milestones is outlined in the table in Section 3.3. Overarching recommendations and findings are included in the conclusion of this report.

### 3.1 Staff feedback

#### 3.1.1 Personal experiences of the project

Staff members reported that despite setbacks, the project achieved its objective of distributing 150 PCs and provided internet connections for eight Indigenous communities.

They described that it was necessary to adjust initial aims to deliver computers to a mix of settings (including homes, schools and community centres) for the following reasons:

- Some areas, especially those in isolated or rural areas, lacked the physical infrastructure for internet access in the home.
- It was unexpectedly difficult to engage Indigenous communities in the project to the extent they were willing to purchase their own computers. Staff reported encountering some resistance from participants to prioritise paying for

equipment when they were accustomed to receiving assistance for free. Others thought computers were important but would not prioritise paying for computer equipment over other options for leisure/entertainment, e.g. cable television. By the end of the project, staff members overcame difficulties by seeking out partner organisations whose participants were already interested in learning, up skilling or employment, improving their chance of connecting with motivated participants and their broader community.

#### 3.1.2 Perceived and actual benefits for participants/the wider community

Staff had received anecdotal evidence that the project had had a positive effect on some participants' behaviours, especially those in far north Queensland. However there was a lack of evidence for these findings and, in general, WorkVentures had little contact with participants. Staff commented that original distribution targets took focus away from working towards and measuring the project's longer-term social impacts.

#### 3.1.3 Unanticipated outcomes/benefits

Staff reported that partnerships established later in the project (particularly Auswide Projects, the Smith Family and North Coast Computer Project) are mutually beneficial and effective for delivering computers and working towards social impact objectives. WorkVentures staff members continue to have close contact with these partners, including recent visits to their headquarters in remote and rural locations. The project has built good will between WorkVentures and these organisations and established WorkVentures' reputation and desire for working with Indigenous people. This is important as partners may be drawn as future projects are developed.

#### 3.1.4 Challenges and opportunities for improvement

A major problem reported by staff was that there was no dedicated resource within WorkVentures to plan, drive and manage the project. This meant that problems encountered with distribution partners were difficult to address quickly and easily. Also, without this dedicated resource, selection process for finding distribution partners was ad hoc throughout the life of the project, leading to a lack of understanding of what was required from partners. Staff members identified a need for constant contact with partners, flexible delivery of ISP equipment and constant management of computer equipment supply and demand. Before beginning the project, the intensity of management needed was not understood by WorkVentures' staff members.

Furthermore, both small non-for-profits and large established organisations were unreliable during the course of the project, especially if they themselves did not have a proactive staff member dedicated to the project. WorkVentures staff described the need to employ a project manager who is sympathetic to the way these organisations work and who can actively manage the process of establishing and maintaining a relationship with each organisation.

Staff also reported that an insufficient amount of time was dedicated to investigating the viability and suitability of distribution partners. One distribution partner went bankrupt during the course of the project. While this was not the fault of WorkVentures, staff sentiments were that it could have been managed more effectively. Problems such as this caused delays in reaching the projects' objectives and added administration for WorkVentures.

## 3.2 Stakeholder feedback

### 3.2.1 Personal experiences of the project

Stakeholders were positive about the project and the opportunities it afforded. All stakeholders interviewed would continue to partner with WorkVentures and refer participants to WorkVentures projects.

However, stakeholders underlined the need for flexibility from both WorkVentures and their own organisation to achieve the project's objectives. One stakeholder described the unsuitability of delivering computers into participants' homes in their communities due to a lack of infrastructure in these areas. Stakeholders were able to negotiate with WorkVentures to come to an agreement and supply equipment into community hubs and community centres where needed.

Interviews indicated the most successful partnerships were between distribution partners who could provide training and extra services for participants. For example, Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation ran training using WorkVentures computers in conjunction with the Roads and Traffic Authority, Campbelltown Council and the Department of Families. Auswide Projects are active in running job seeking training programs. The Smith Family have established and successful educational programs such as the Learn for Life programs.

### 3.2.2 Perceived and actual benefits for participants/the wider community

Stakeholders reported the supplied computers had had a tangible effect on building the capacity of their targeted communities. This was especially so for participants living in remote or rural areas, where for example it is 70 kilometres to the nearest city with an educational facility. Many participants did not have access to a telephone or have a telephone only

configured for incoming calls. Computers gave these participants a method for interacting with the wider world. One organisation targeted young students in these isolated areas; their computers enabled them to work by distance education.

Other activities undertaken by participants included: learning to use (and actively using) job seeking and government websites, filling out online forms, online research, typing and online study (for example completing units for online study of TAFE Certificate courses). One stakeholder described that participants used the supplied computers to research and "tap into" jobs being offered by large organisations with quotas for Indigenous staff, such as Australia Post and Qantas. Participants were able to research the organisation online and familiarise themselves with the job application process, before applying online. Five young people participating through this organisation gained employment. This stakeholder noted that it was important for employers to see that participants had an email address and could be contacted electronically. Most importantly, however, the project built participants' confidence, as they could quickly, easily and assertively access online information.

#### Case study:

A Koori elder from the South Coast of NSW participated in the project in 2009. This gentleman had limited access to computers and a very low level of knowledge but needed skills to research online tenders for government projects and funding that would benefit his community. By using the computers supplied in the community hub and practicing on his computer at home, he built and retained computer skills and now works part-time with Auswide Projects/YMCA.

### 3.2.3 Unanticipated outcomes/benefits

Stakeholders said that though targeted communities had high levels of illiteracy, individuals within these communities were conscious that they needed to build basic computer skills. In many cases, whole families used the computers in their homes. One stakeholder reported that their organisation was now involved in training Indigenous parents in using computers, where before they had targeted 17 -22 year olds. Online social networking, such as Facebook, is popular because of its visual elements. Using these programs is encouraged as they help familiarise participants with the online environment, using a mouse and strengthens positive attitudes towards technology. A positive attitude to technology (within whole families) was felt to be the key to

fostering long term change and skill building within these communities.

#### Case study:

A participant from Box Ridge used the computers from the *PCs into Homes Initiative* to trace her family history and put together her life story. This exercise built up her familiarity with the computer hardware, improving her confidence.

### 3.2.4 Challenges and opportunities for improvement

Stakeholders reported that flexibility was vital to distribute the computers effectively, as demand from their participants was sporadic. They described an inherent tension between supply and demand of computers that put pressure on both WorkVentures and the distribution partner. At times WorkVentures' needed to deliver computers quickly to meet their targets while demand for computers in their own communities was sporadic and unpredictable. At other times, WorkVentures did not have enough computers to distribute to meet demand, as they were relying on suppliers with their own schedule. Partner organisations found it difficult to forecast need six months ahead. One stakeholder explained: *"The pieces of the jigsaw were difficult to put together"*. Stakeholders felt this could be improved for future projects by working more closely with WorkVentures, so each organisation can develop a deeper understanding of the others' needs and patterns of demand. More constant communication (for example, regular emails or newsletters to partners updating them about the project) was also seen as necessary.

Stakeholders also identified the challenge of asking target communities to pay for their equipment. They said *"At times the cost is prohibiting, so we have had to find another funding source for the full cost. This has worked well"*. Stakeholders supported this cross-subsidy model for the future, when it is needed. They also felt community hubs may be more appropriate at times and requested that WorkVentures decide an appropriate model with the partner organisation, as it is necessary. One stakeholder commented: *Take the lead from the people on the ground who deals with clients face-to-face"*.

It should be noted that one stakeholder was so supportive of extending the project that they were willing to employ their own staff member to distribute computers on behalf of WorkVentures and their organisation.

## 3.3 Participant feedback

### 3.3.1 Personal experiences of the project

Most participants seemed to greatly value their experience in the project. However one participant was dissatisfied with the computer supplied for her preschool. This computer was old, did not function properly and added little value to the classroom as it was not enabled for the internet and had limited software applications. The participant was put in contact with WorkVentures to try and resolve the issues.

This participant's experience seemed to be an exception to the other participants who were interviewed. Most were satisfied with their computers though described equipment as quite old. Participants felt more up-to-date hardware such as laptops and broadband internet connections (rather than dial-up) would be more useful to them, but recognised the financial limits of the program. Dial-up was seen as especially inconvenient for homes that use their home phone a great deal or who do not have a home phone at all.

Most participants felt well-supported by WorkVentures and their distributing partner in the case that their equipment stopped working. Participants had contact numbers for a support service to fix their equipment; some had used this in the past and found it convenient and helpful.

Participants' attitudes to paying for computers were different depending on the amount of payment required. Most participants were happy to pay a nominal amount of money, smaller than the original \$200. Those who paid \$50 to \$100 described their deal as "a bargain". However \$200 seemed an amount out of reach to most participants. One participant felt it was very important to ask participants to contribute to the cost of their computers to make the project fairer and encourage participants to take ownership of their computers.

### 3.3.2 Perceived and actual benefits for participants/the wider community

All participants reported that they enjoyed using the internet and especially social networking sites such as Facebook and Flickr<sup>5</sup>. One participants' mother said that using these sites has had a profound effect on her incapacitated daughter, and in reality is her only connection to the outside world. This young person has severe social and health problems and does not leave her house. However, she is an enthusiastic internet user, who enjoys looking up her favourite pop stars and other interests. She has also used the computer for home schooling in the past. This participants' mother strongly felt this had increased her daughter's social capacity by enabling

<sup>5</sup> A photo sharing site.

her to interact in the virtual realm and stimulate her mind. It also gave the mother hope that her daughter may be able to use her technical computer skills, e.g. typing, for future employment and possibly re-connecting with online education.

Participants focused on the practical benefits of being able to use computers, such as being able to pay fines online or use government forms. Most participants identified with the need to have computer skills to become "office ready" or to have a basic knowledge of computers to interact with society. Others felt pressured by Centrelink to find employment and understood they needed computer skills to do so. Parents that were interviewed felt strongly that computers were essential for their child's educational and vocational development. As one parent said *"Everything is online these days. Everybody needs to know how to use a computer"*. Another parent felt having a computer available for her son would *"...give him more options because he'll be able to find information online, do some of his courses (arranged by the Aboriginal Employment Agency)"*.

### 3.3.3 Unanticipated outcomes/benefits

Some parents interviewed described that while they originally had obtained the computer for their children, they found the computers unexpectedly easy to use and enjoyable, and had started using them themselves. They valued unexpected conveniences such as online banking and paying bills online. This was especially important for households where the parent does not drive, and public transport is lacking (e.g. south western Sydney).

Training offered through some partner organisations was also seen as an unexpected benefit. One parent had felt motivated by her computer skills to supplement this training by attending a computer skills course at TAFE. *"It hooked me in!"* This participant went on to further training in basic accounting. Another parent saw the value in the training but found it difficult to attend because of difficulties in getting transport to the training.

### 3.3.4 Challenges and opportunities for improvement

As described above, some participants found the computer and software equipment supplied too old to be useful. The internet was seen as absolutely essential to the computer's usefulness; however dial-up viewed as out-of-date and inconvenient. Mobile broadband was suggested as an improvement.

Other participants felt the process for obtaining a computer through the distribution partners took a long time. The delay between applying for the computer and finding out the computer had been awarded was not explained by the partner

organisation. Establishing a clear process and explaining it to participants is needed.

One participant (who uses the equipment in a pre-school) identified an opportunity for her pupils to use programs with Indigenous content if they could be supplied with the computer.

The final and most important challenge identified is keeping participants interested in building their computer skills in the long term. Participants suggested ongoing, accessible training and the opportunity to upgrade their equipment and software (as it ages and becomes out of date) as strategies for addressing this challenge.

## 4 Conclusions and recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusions

This evaluation recognises the *PCs into Homes* project was a pilot and that WorkVentures undertook significant steps to improve the project when its original goals were not being achieved. Despite challenges encountered, interviews with participants and stakeholders indicate the project had a tangible effect on some participants, such as:

- Enabling an incapacitated participant to interact and socialise via the internet
- Enabling participants to learn the skills needed to fill out electronic forms to regain their driving licences (and access these forms at all)
- Enabling participants to complete distance education courses online
- Enabling participants to research topics that interest them
- Enabling participants to use online social networking sites, familiarising themselves with computer hardware and learning at their own pace.

These effects cannot be measured concretely; however, the evidence collected points towards the project having achieved its goals of increasing each participant's capacity to use computers, and encouraging a positive attitude towards technology.

Flexible delivery of the project with a range of models has worked well to overcome difficulties the project has encountered. It has allowed staff time to seek out and build links with stable distribution partners with strong connections to their local communities, a factor that has been essential to the projects' recent success, and, it could be argued, has had the greatest impact on local communities.

### 4.2 Key recommendations

Implementing a similar program in the future will be challenging and must include careful reflection about short term versus long term goals of the program and methods for measuring both. To address these challenges, Elton Consulting recommends the following:

#### **Focusing on social outcomes**

The key recommendation is that the primary focus projects of this nature should be achieving social outcomes, rather than process outcomes (i.e. rolling out a project according to a funding agreement). Adjusting the project's model will be necessary to achieve this. Suggestions for adjustments include:

1. Adopting a flexible funding/cross-subsidy model to deal with the tensions and difficulties working with Indigenous communities, i.e. barriers around paying for computers and uncertainty and lack of financial stability of non-for-profits working within the Indigenous sector.
2. Taking the advice of partner organisations to focus on areas where partners have strong connections rather than pre-defining target areas
3. Tailoring the project's approach to suit each geographical area and each community – for example, community ICT hubs are a more feasible option for extremely remote communities, where neither broadband nor wireless are available. Getting computers into family homes may be the third or fourth step of the project once initial goals have been achieved.
4. Continuing to invest in networks and promotional collateral that allows WorkVentures to sustain the program as part of their current organisational structure, after primary funding ceases.

#### **Building strategic partnerships**

In addition to adjusting the model, building strong and lasting relationships with partner organisations is key to achieving social outcomes. Rather than measuring the number of computers distributed to participants, targets should be the depth of relationships that are established. Recommendations to improve future approaches to building partnerships include the following:

*Dedicating more time and effort to selecting and investigating distribution partners before inviting them to the project.*

Partners should be asked to provide evidence demonstrating the need for the WorkVentures project in their area and demonstrate that the WorkVentures project will meet that need. A strategy may be needed to balance the tension between seeking out partners working in areas of high need, and staying with partners because they are reliable (but may work in areas that do not have the greatest need).

*Investigating partners' financial stability and history.*

Partner organisations should have good ground support to offer WorkVentures and a track record in delivering projects to their nominated communities. Larger and more established organisations with secure funding such as the Smith Family may be more suitable than small non-for-profit organisations.

*Ensuring partners have a functional training component of their own project and can provide evidence of this.*

Partners should be able to demonstrate they can offer participants reliable and ongoing support.

*Establishing clear partnership agreements between WorkVentures and distribution partners with formal written records*

This will ensure each party is cognisant of their role and responsibilities.

*Actively training partners, so they understand the project's goals.*

Partners could conduct an ongoing evaluation of their part of the project's achievements/effects and return this evaluation to WorkVentures.

### **Strategic project planning**

Furthermore, while taking a flexible approach to the providing the project has been necessary to ensure project staff have had the capacity to respond to complications arising from delays, staff changes and collapsing partnerships, a formalised evaluation and strategic project planning is needed to gain efficiencies within the project and more accurately measure the impact this project is having on participants.

Strategic project planning should explore realistic initiatives focusing on long-term benefits for participants. Suggestions include:

*Undertaking reflective practice – both formal and informal – from the outset of the project.*

This will ensure that activities are built around achieving project objectives, milestones and key performance indicators.

*Adopting a robust evaluation framework and multiple evaluation tools that are appropriate to disadvantaged and Indigenous communities and measure against objectives, milestones and performance indicators.*

As mentioned above, distribution partners could play a part in evaluation. Tools could include pre and post testing of participants, observation by partners, collection of case studies and evaluation discussions at staff meetings. These tools need to be developed within a larger evaluation process so that evaluative practice is directly linked with project outcomes and reporting.

*Appointing a dedicated co-ordinator to drive strategic project planning, provide continuity and ensure that milestones are achieved.*

This co-ordinator is also needed to encourage distribution partners prioritise the project within their own organisations. Active management of the project will help minimise delays stemming from poor administration on the part of partner organisations.

### **Building on WorkVentures' strengths**

Lastly, a recommendation is for WorkVentures to build on the good level of awareness in the community that they are seeking to work in Indigenous communities, and work to strengthen possible partnerships that arise from this.

We also recommend that staff focus on building on relationships with existing partners who have had some success delivering the project to expand current initiatives.

Successes should be celebrated in the communities where future project operate, for example in Indigenous and local press, to reinforce achievements and encourage future participation.

## 5 Appendix 1: Performance against critical milestones

PROJECT OUTPUT 1: - Well functioning PC distribution centres		
Critical Milestone	Progress	Comments
<p>Secure distribution partners to facilitate project delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify distribution partners to facilitate rollout of Project in Airds (NSW)</li> <li>Identify distribution partners to facilitate rollout of project of Cape York, QLD</li> <li>Identify partners to assist in developing a further pilot into a new indigenous communities in South Coast NSW and Inner City Melbourne, VIC</li> <li>Identify and secure reputable distribution partner to deliver the remaining PCs for the projects.</li> </ul>	Completed	<p>Distribution partners secured in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Airds (Sydney, NSW)</li> <li>South Coast NSW</li> <li>Cape York (Queensland)</li> <li>Preston (Victoria)</li> <li>Canberra (ACT)</li> <li>Brewarrina (NSW)</li> <li>North Coast NSW</li> <li>Regional NSW</li> </ul> <p>Despite initial difficulties and downsizing initiatives in Cape York and the South Coast of NSW, adequate distribution partners were established to facilitate project delivery. However PC distribution “centres” were informal arrangements at the distribution partners’ discretion. Initial pilots in Inner City Melbourne did not proceed due to the partner’s financial instability.</p>

PROJECT OUTPUT 2 - Increase in household ownership of PCs and internet activity		
Critical Milestone	Progress	Comments
<p>Computers into households, training of partner staff and marketing of computers completed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PCs and training package developed</li> <li>Collateral developed and delivered through partners</li> <li>Indigenous communities valuing and taking up the offer</li> </ul>	Completed	<p>While this cannot be measured quantitatively, interviews with participants and service providers/distribution partners indicate an increase in computer usage in the target communities.</p> <p>Participants interviewed did value their opportunity to access ICT equipment, however this was dependent on their level of satisfaction with the technology itself (i.e. that functioned well and was not “old”), satisfaction with paying a reduced rate for PCs and level of self-motivation. Participants who were already engaged with partner organisations were more likely to value and take up the offer for PCs. Supplying internet connections and ongoing training with PC equipment was identified as the key to engaging participants in the project and ensuring some level of capacity building was achieved.</p>

PROJECT OUTPUT 3: - Stronger capacity for WorkVentures to refurbish PCs		
Critical Milestone	Progress	Comments
<p>WorkVentures enhances its offer and partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WorkVentures operation and staff developing expertise in delivering a broader PCs package</li> <li>• WorkVentures develops mutually beneficial relationships with a range of partners</li> <li>• Distribution of bulk quantities of marketing collaterals</li> </ul>	Complete	<p>WorkVentures has established strong and mutually beneficial relationships with the Smith Family, Auswide Projects and the North Coast Computer Project.</p> <p>WorkVentures has developed its ability to supply low cost dialup internet connections with PC equipment and training (delivered through partner organisations) to offer a broader PC package. Future improvements can be made in this area to offer more comprehensive training and more flexible options for internet connections as technology advances and becomes cheaper.</p>

PROJECT OUTPUT 4: - Improved quality and specification of PCs		
Critical Milestone	Progress	Comments
Evaluation Report	Final Evaluation	Final evaluation submitted by external evaluator Elton Consulting in July 2010.

