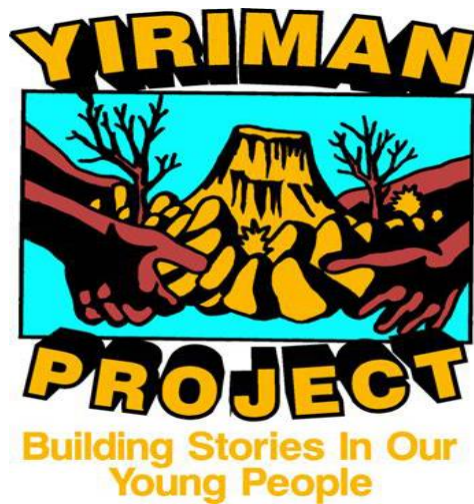


THE YIRIMAN PROJECT

KEY COMMONWEALTH & STATE POLICY ALIGNMENTS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

There is a youth suicide crisis in the Kimberley. As a culturally-based initiative, the award-winning Yiriman Project is critically underfunded and yet has the potential to positively impact many more Aboriginal young people in the Kimberley than it currently does. This document:

- Outlines the current policy discourse regarding culture and wellbeing for Aboriginal youth within the State and Commonwealth Government spheres
- Demonstrates the Yiriman Project's widely recognised success and alignment with current key Government policies
- Suggests possible ways forward towards eventual significant funding for the Yiriman Project

About the Yiriman Project

Established in 2000 and auspiced by the Kimberley Aboriginal Law & Cultural Centre (KALACC), the Yiriman Project is an award-winning intergenerational, on-Country cultural program that aims to 'build stories in young people' and provides at-risk youths with pathways to improved health outcomes; training and educational opportunities; and enhanced community engagement. It is currently based out of Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia.

Developed directly by the Cultural Bosses from four Kimberley language groups – Nyikina, Mangala, Karajarri and Walmajarri – the Yiriman Project has been recommended as a key example of best practice in Aboriginal culturally-based programs and in 2012 proudly won a Reconciliation Australia Indigenous Governance Award.

Current Culture-Centred Policy Alignments for Yiriman

In early 2020, we are in the midst of a long-overdue yet promising ideological shift away from deficits discourses and towards Government policies and frameworks that recognise the primacy and centrality of Aboriginal culture while also focussing on Aboriginal empowerment.

The following three current macro policies demonstrate that, encouragingly, the State and Commonwealth attest to no longer viewing Aboriginal culture as being "both a barrier and a problem to improving outcomes for First Nations" (CAEPR p2):

- State Government development of an [Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy](#) (AES) – see also [A Path Forward: Developing the Western Australian Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy](#)
- Commonwealth Government Department of Health's [revision](#) of the [Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023](#)
- Collaboration between the Coalition of Peaks and the Council of Australian Governments on the Close the Gap Refresh, as explained in a National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) [press release](#)

Yiriman: Exemplary & Highly Recommended

A plethora of reports have recommended funding the Yiriman Project – not to mention the many positive reviews, evaluations, profiles and articles about this highly successful cultural initiative. The citations from nine major Government reports across 2008–2019 are summarised in *Appendix 1*, namely:

- [Ways Forward – Beyond the Blame Game: Some Successful Initiatives in Remote Indigenous Communities in WA](#) – WA Parliament Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee, May 2008
- [Alcohol Restrictions in the Kimberley: A Window of Opportunity for Improved Health, Education, Housing and Employment](#) – WA Parliament Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee, March 2011
- [Doing Time – Time for Doing: Indigenous Youth in the Criminal Justice System](#) – Commonwealth of Australia Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, June 2011
- *Balgo Coronial Inquest Report* – WA State Coroner Alistair Hope, October 2011
- *Fitzroy Crossing Local Implementation Plan [for Closing the Gap]* – Commonwealth of Australia & Government of Western Australia, 2012
- [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2014 Report](#) – Commonwealth of Australia Productivity Commission, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014
- [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016 Report](#) – Commonwealth of Australia Productivity Commission, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2016
- [Message Stick Report](#) – WA Parliament Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee, November 2016
- [Coronial Inquest Report](#) – WA State Coroner Ros Fogliani, February 2019

Opportunities to Fund the Yiriman Project

Below KALACC has outlined several opportunities for the Government to support the Yiriman Project:

- **July 2019 Proposal to Consolidate the Yiriman Youth Program** – which provides two options for a revised staffing matrix that would allow the Yiriman Project to consolidate its service delivery and ensure future sustainability (see *Appendix 2 – Proposed Yiriman Project Models*).
- **School collaboration** – as recommended by WA Coroner Fogliani on page 364 of her February 2019 [Coronial Inquest Report](#)
- **Redevelopment of a throughcare pathways model to support young people via interagency collaborations** – as previously provided and supported by the University of Western Australia’s Professor Harry Blagg then Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda in 2013 and 2015

KALACC Recommendations for Government Action

The Yiriman Project is an established, evidence-based cultural program. Funding it will significantly recognise community and sector wishes; enact the recommendations of nine Government reports; and deliver on the Government strategic priorities of “putting culture at the centre”, empowering Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), and investing in upstream, preventative programs.

In light of this and the above, KALACC provides the following single recommendation as a first step in what we hope will be an ongoing collaboration with the Government:

KALACC Recommendation

That the Government responds favourably to our July 2019 *Proposal to Consolidate the Yiriman Youth Program* and invests in this endeavour.

INTRODUCTION

Many organisations have long advocated the need for investment in Aboriginal culture as a key method to address the transgenerational trauma that is prevalent in communities across Australia. Encouragingly, we are in the midst of a macro State and Commonwealth policy shift that recognises the significance of culture in improving Indigenous wellbeing outcomes while also empowering communities to develop and implement self-led initiatives.

As a culturally-based initiative, the award-winning Yiriman Project has been cited by numerous State and Commonwealth Government reports as requiring and meriting funding support. It has the potential to positively impact many more Aboriginal young people in the Kimberley than it currently does.

Document Purpose

This document:

- Outlines the current policy discourse regarding culture and wellbeing for Aboriginal youth within the State and Commonwealth Government spheres
- Demonstrates the Yiriman Project's widely recognised success and alignment with current key Government policies
- Suggests possible ways forward towards eventual significant funding for the Yiriman Project

The Need for Culturally-Based Programs

According to sector experts and Australian Bureau of Statistics data, the suicide rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders has been approximately double that of non-Indigenous Australians. Furthermore, a 2016 [Medical Journal of Australia](#) article found that the suicide rate in the Kimberley Region had not only doubled in five years, but it was among the highest in the world.

In fact, the Commonwealth Government selected the Kimberley as a participating region of its National Suicide Prevention Trial because the age-adjusted suicide rate for youths was more than *six times* the national average. As stated in the 2016 [Learnings from the message stick: The report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal youth suicide in remote areas](#) (Message Stick Report):

Few incidents could represent a more desperate situation than the death of a child by suicide, and yet it is an all too frequent reality in many Aboriginal communities in Western Australia. Aboriginal children and young people represent 28 per cent of all recorded suicide deaths of children and young people, despite comprising only 3 per cent of Australia's population. This overrepresentation is even more alarming amongst children aged 13 years and under (i).

The [Message Stick Report](#) is exceptionally clear about what needs to happen in order to address the effects of transgenerational trauma, as expressed in the Executive Summary to that report:

Aboriginal youth suicide is indicative of a distressed community and effective solutions must be community focussed. Aboriginal culture and identity has been degraded by colonisation and discrimination. Restoring this culture and sense of identity has been consistently identified as a key protective factor.

Previous reports and inquiries have recommended that this can be achieved through various means, primary of which is culturally-based programs, such as on-country camps and activities. By necessity, these programs must be owned and led by local communities.

[...]

Culture is the key protective factor which must be present in all strategies, programs and services in which Aboriginal people participate, whether run by governments, nongovernment organisations or private companies (i).

At the August 2019 Working Group meeting to the Kimberley Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Regional Trial, the Hon Ken Wyatt, Minister for Indigenous Australians, invited KALACC to present him with a proposal for a significant research project around culture and wellbeing. KALACC, working with Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) presented the *Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Youth: An Outcomes Measurement Framework and Action Research Project in the Kimberley* to Minister Wyatt in December 2019. In the introduction to that proposal CAEPR writes as follows:

In recent years, the centrality and inclusion of First Nations' peoples and cultures into national policy design and frameworks have been gaining momentum, representing a significant shift in policies and thinking that previously framed culture as both a barrier and a problem to improving outcomes for First Nations. There should be no dispute that culture matters – the question that remains is 'How does culture matter in the Kimberley where revitalisation and maintenance of culture is central to the healing of the First Peoples against the backdrop of intergenerational trauma from colonisation?' The revitalisation of culture is critical in addressing an on-going trauma faced by families and communities from the high rates of youth suicide in the Kimberley – one of the highest in the country and the world (p2–3).

About the Yiriman Project

Established in 2000 and auspiced by KALACC, the Yiriman Project is an award-winning intergenerational, on-Country cultural program that aims to 'build stories in young people' and provides at-risk youths with pathways to improved health outcomes, education and training opportunities, and enhanced community engagement. It is currently based out of Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia.

Developed by Aboriginal People for Aboriginal People

It was developed directly by Cultural Bosses from four Kimberley language groups – Nyikina, Mangala, Karajarri and Walmajarri. These four language groups form their own cultural bloc, having similar cultural, geographical, language and kinship ties across a vast region of traditional lands that stretch from the coastline south of Broome, inland to the desert areas south, and just east of Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia. These ties lend themselves to the strength and success of the Yiriman Project.

The concept for the Yiriman Project arose out of the concern the Elders had for their young people, who were facing increasingly serious issues such as self-harm, substance abuse and the loss of cultural identity. The Elders saw the need for a way in which youth could separate themselves from negative influences and, through the care and guidance of older generations, reconnect with their Culture in remote and culturally significant places.

Key Cultural Activities

Believing in the power of their own Culture and of Country to heal their own young people, the Elders began taking young people out on-Country, travelling by foot, camel or vehicle to engage in traditional cultural activities and pass cultural knowledge on to the younger generations. The Yiriman Project continues all of these practices throughout its programs today, including teaching and speaking in language; visiting ancestral sites; storytelling; engaging in traditional song and dance; preparing young people for ceremony and law practices; teaching traditional crafts; tracking; hunting; preparing traditional bush tucker; and practicing bush medicine.

Beyond the transfer of knowledge and skills, Yiriman trips provide a safe and effective space for participants to cultivate relationships with others and to Country, and for communication and decision-making to occur by cultural means. In this way, cultural healing that originates from within the Culture and is guided by the Elders occurs.

The Yiriman Project's Success

Through this reconnection and the resulting sense of cultural identity and belonging, young people gain strength and resilience, and build positive stories that they then take with them back to their towns and communities to continue the benefits beyond the programs themselves.

Many challenges continue to face Aboriginal young people and communities, including increased rates of suicide; drug and alcohol abuse; health issues; increasing demands on the Elders; young parenthood; and ensnarement in the justice system. Despite these challenges, under the continued strong self-governance of the community, the founding principles at the heart of the Yiriman Project remain simple and effective, and shine through as a bright example of success in serving to address all of these issues by cultural means.

Recommended in Numerous Reports

Over the past 20 years, the Yiriman Project has been recommended in numerous reports as an example of best practice in Aboriginal culturally-based programs. Please see *Appendix 1* for the positive recommendations from nine major Government reports across 2008–2019.

2012 Reconciliation Australia Indigenous Governance Award

In 2012, the Yiriman Project proudly won the Reconciliation Australia Indigenous Governance Award in 'Category B – Outstanding examples of Indigenous governance in non-incorporated initiatives or projects'.

The Indigenous Governance Awards were launched in 2005 to recognise and promote effective, innovative, courageous and creative leadership and decision-making that show Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people determining and driving real change within their communities.

Program Testimonials

Nyaparu Hopiga, Karajarri Elder

"My brother Johnny Watson and Harry and all the old people from Fitzroy Valley came up with this little program called Yiriman to protect and look after kids. And when they was looking after kids they was looking after old people same time and looking at how to look after the Country. We still going with it."

Joe Brown, Walmajarri Elder

“Yiriman taking out kids who getting into trouble. Old people do lots of singing, get young people into language group, we tell them what skin we [are]. Get them working down there. Respecting old people. Cutting boomerang. Drive kids out looking for food, kangaroo, turkey. Learn how to find a feed. Old people been tell story, young people pick up that story. Future for culture side. Young people love it. Most things didn’t happen before are happening now.”

William Watson, Nyikina Man

“When you on Country, you walk with a spring in your step, you walk with your head high, you not afraid of anything. In order to find yourself you have to get lost. So best place to get lost is Country.”



Figure 1: Yiriman Project Directors receiving their Indigenous Governance Award, 2012

A PROMISING SHIFT THAT ‘PUTS CULTURE AT THE CENTRE’

In early 2020, we are in the midst of a long-overdue yet promising ideological shift away from deficits discourses that, in CAEPR’s words, viewed Aboriginal culture as being “both a barrier and a problem to improving outcomes for First Nations” (p2).

Instead, we are moving towards Government policies and frameworks that recognise the primacy and centrality of Aboriginal culture while also focussing on Aboriginal empowerment. In summary, the State and Commonwealth Government’s current strategic priorities are based around:

- Putting culture at the centre
- Building the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver services
- Investing in upstream, preventative programs

In this document we do not seek to canvass in detail the emerging Aboriginal Affairs policies of either the State or Commonwealth Governments. Rather, the three current macro processes outlined below are sufficient for our present purposes, namely the:

- WA Department of Premier and Cabinet’s [Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy](#)
- Commonwealth Government Department of Health’s [revision](#) of the [Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023](#)
- Collaboration between the Coalition of Peaks and the Council of Australian Governments on the Close the Gap Refresh, as explained in a National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) [press release](#)

WA Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy

As stated on [their website](#), the State Government is currently in the process of:

...developing [an Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy] to guide how it works with Aboriginal people towards better social, economic, health and cultural outcomes.

A whole-of-government strategy will provide all WA Government agencies with a clear, common direction, consistent logic and shared vision for the future. This will allow agencies to work better, and will strengthen Government accountability to the WA community.

A strategy about outcomes for Aboriginal people must be built around their views, priorities, voices and aspirations. The Government is seeking input from Aboriginal people, and a range of other stakeholders, to help shape the strategy.

AES Discussion Paper

In December 2019, the State Government published its [A Path Forward: Developing the Western Australian Government’s Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy](#) discussion paper (AES Discussion Paper) and requested community feedback by 28 February 2020. The [AES Discussion Paper](#) states the following on page 8:

Aboriginal people have consistently said the Government should focus on a positive, strength based vision, with the overall goal defined on Aboriginal people’s own terms.

Additionally, the [AES Discussion Paper Community Information Sheet](#) recognises that “Aboriginal people must be free to make their own decisions about what a ‘good life’ means and how to achieve it” (p2).

The [AES Discussion Paper](#) provides the following infographics on pages 9 and 11 respectively. *Figure 2* depicts the foundation and future components for what a ‘good life’ and empowerment may look like for different people, within the crucial facets of Aboriginal connection to kin, culture and community.

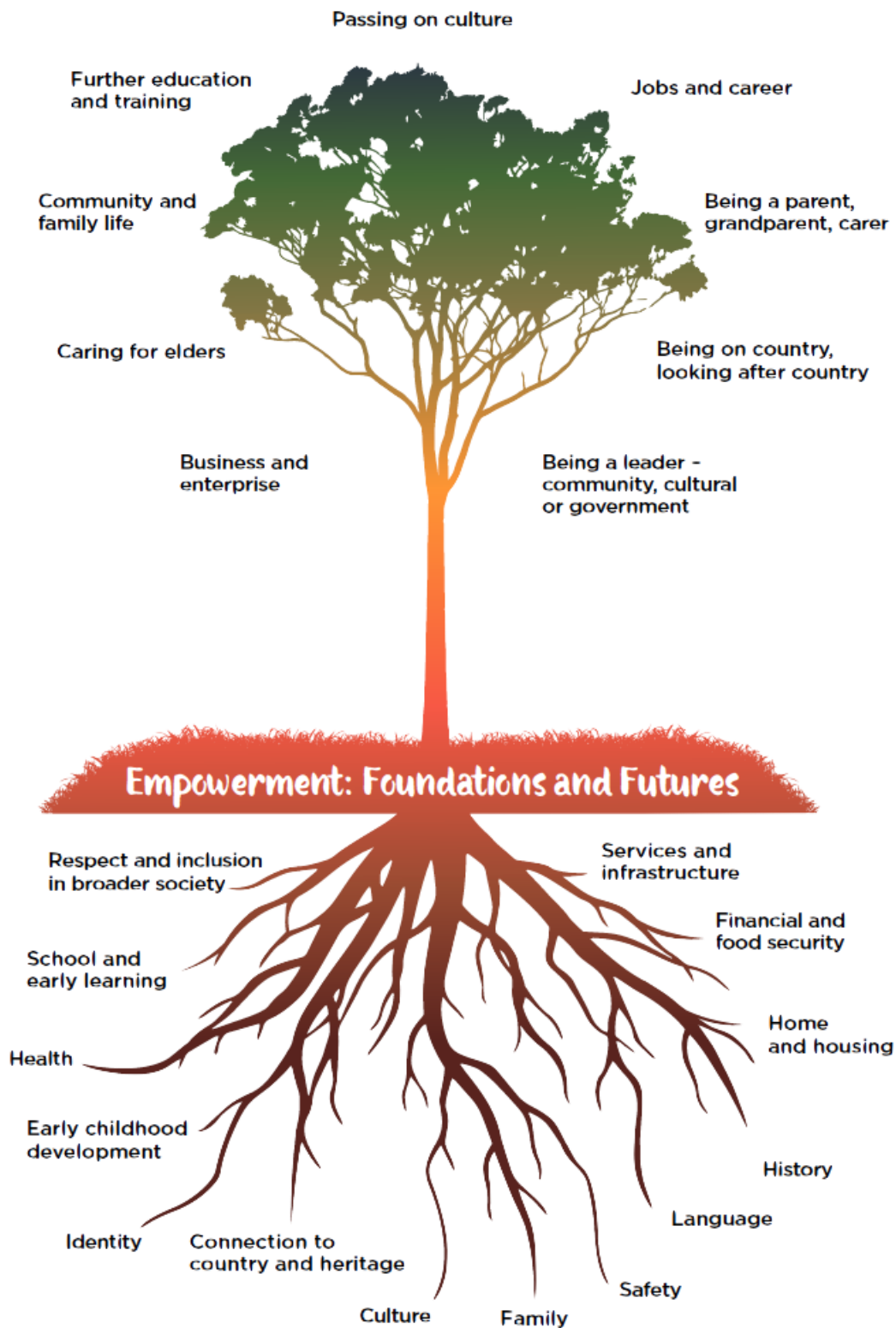


Figure 2: Empowerment – Foundations and Futures infographic from the AES Discussion Paper

Figure 3 then aptly visually represents the concept that for Aboriginal empowerment to not only take place but also be effective, Aboriginal policy must ‘put culture at the centre’ – the AES’s primary strategic element.



Figure 3: Strategic Elements infographic from the AES Discussion Paper

National Health Implementation Plan

In late 2019, the Commonwealth Government’s Department of Health commenced the [process of revising the *Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023*](#), under community consultation and to recognise the social and cultural determinants of health that were identified in the Department of Health’s [My Life My Lead – Opportunities for strengthening approaches to the social determinants and cultural determinants of Indigenous health: Report on the national consultations](#).

As part of this process, the following [Partnering Framework](#) has been developed, which expresses similar notions regarding the importance of Indigenous culture and empowerment towards health outcomes (see *Figure 4* below).

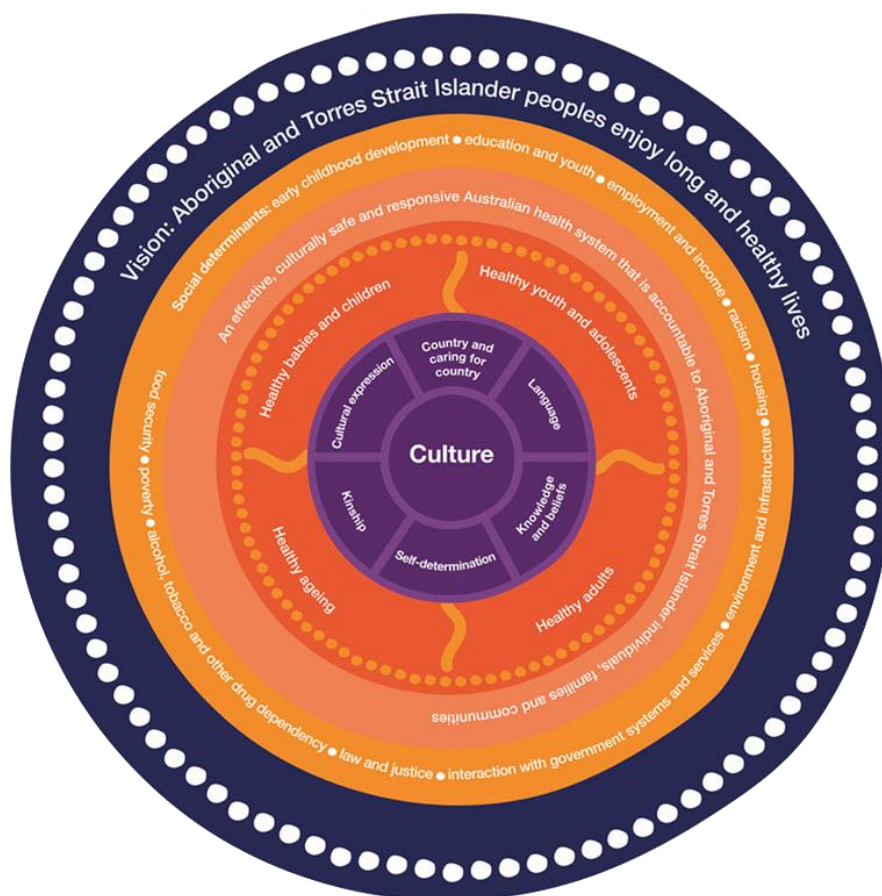


Figure 4: Partnering Framework from the Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023

National Close the Gap Refresh

Across the changing policy landscape, we now witness frequent references to ‘co-design’ processes where community stakeholders are engaged in the development stage to ensure the results are feasible and meet their needs. This is consistent with the emerging and current processes regarding the Close the Gap Refresh. A [press release](#) on the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) website puts it thus:

In an historic agreement, the Coalition of Peaks has formed a Joint Partnership with COAG [the Council of Australian Governments] in order to collaborate on the Closing the Gap Refresh process. This is the first time that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices have not only been invited to the table, but have also been empowered with shared decision-making responsibilities.

Within the Closing the Gap Refresh, the concept of a co-design approach that empowers ACCOs is recognised as integral to the process and is illustrated through the following infographic from NACCHO’s [A New Way of](#)

Working: Talking about what's needed to close the gap in life outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians – An illustrated story:



Figure 5: Closing the Gap Refresh priority area regarding ACCOs

YIRIMAN: EXEMPLARY & HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

A plethora of reports have recommended funding the Yiriman Project – not to mention the many positive reviews, evaluations, profiles and articles about this award-winning cultural initiative. The citations from nine major Government reports across 2008–2019 are summarised in *Appendix 1*, namely:

- [Ways Forward – Beyond the Blame Game: Some Successful Initiatives in Remote Indigenous Communities in WA](#) – WA Parliament Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee, May 2008
- [Alcohol Restrictions in the Kimberley: A Window of Opportunity for Improved Health, Education, Housing and Employment](#) – WA Parliament Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee, March 2011
- [Doing Time – Time for Doing: Indigenous Youth in the Criminal Justice System](#) – Commonwealth of Australia Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, June 2011
- *Balgo Coronial Inquest Report* – WA State Coroner Alistair Hope, October 2011

- *Fitzroy Crossing Local Implementation Plan [for Closing the Gap]* – Commonwealth of Australia & Government of Western Australia, 2012
- [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2014 Report](#) – Commonwealth of Australia Productivity Commission, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014
- [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016 Report](#) – Commonwealth of Australia Productivity Commission, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2016
- [Message Stick Report](#) – WA Parliament Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee, November 2016
- [Coronial Inquest Report](#) – WA State Coroner Ros Fogliani, February 2019

The more recent recommendations from the [Message Stick Report](#) and [Coronial Inquest Report](#) regarding the Yiriman Project are captured below.

2016 Message Stick Report

Released in November 2016, the WA Parliament Education and Health Standing Committee's [Message Stick Report](#) outlines 44 recommendations regarding addressing the youth suicide crisis in the Kimberley. It also contains a detailed profile of the Yiriman Project as an exemplar of best practice in culturally-based youth programs (p255–257). The introduction to this section is as follows:

A9.11 The Yiriman Project is a well-known example of a community-owned program embedded in local culture. Many witnesses and evidence to the Inquiry identified it as an example of best practice (p255).

An evidentiary submission from Dr Dave Palmer, Senior Lecturer in Community Development at Murdoch University is summarised thus:

A9.15 An evaluation of Yiriman found it contributed positively to young participants' lives, including improving their physical health, strengthening their connection to country, enhancing their cultural identity, and minimising their contact with the justice system (p256).

Additionally:

A9.16 Yiriman is a prime example of the benefits of Aboriginal-led programs [...] In 2012, the Yiriman Project won Reconciliation Australia's award for an outstanding example of Indigenous governance. Chair of the awards, Professor Mick Dodson said that Yiriman and other finalists are succeeding in providing innovative and responsive service delivery and advocacy. They are entrepreneurial and proactively creating economic development opportunities for their members and communities. Their governance models are rooted in culture, yet entirely modern in their efficiency, legitimacy and accountability. ... They are making decisions; they are getting on with their futures. They are self-determination in action.

2019 Coronial Inquest Report

State Coroner Fogliani's February 2019 [Coronial Inquest Report](#) provides the findings from her investigation into the tragic deaths of 13 children and young people in the Kimberley. In it, Coroner Fogliani calls on the State Government to take significant steps towards reducing the Aboriginal youth suicide rate in the

Kimberley and includes 42 recommendations to this end. It also names both KALACC and the Yiriman Project as meriting and requiring further Government support, with the following two specific recommendations relating to the need to fund and support the Yiriman Project:

Recommendation 16 – Expansion of Yiriman Project

That the Yiriman Project or a model akin to the Yiriman Project be extended across the Kimberley, and that consideration be given to the following matters in connection with the extension:

a. That the Western Australian government through its various health and justice branches should explore opportunities for the implementation of models akin to the Yiriman Project in other remote parts of Western Australia with priority given to those areas with high rates of Aboriginal youth suicide.

b. That funding providers for the Yiriman Project and other programs akin to the Yiriman Project should acknowledge the need for key performance indicators that are flexible and reflect the difficulty such organisations have in providing quantitative and qualitative data on the success of individual interventions with at-risk clients.

c. That the Western Australian government should consider guaranteed funding for the Yiriman Project on a longer term basis, whether through funding provided by the Department for Corrective Services for diversionary programs, through ATSIPEP funding, or funding co-ordinated through the Mental Health (p305; further details p299–305).

Recommendation 39 – Yiriman Project linked to schools

That the Yiriman Project or a model akin to the Yiriman Project be linked to schools within the Kimberley Region (p364; further details p363–364).

OPPORTUNITIES TO FUND THE YIRIMAN PROJECT

The staggering support for the Yiriman Project is well established (see *Appendix 1*) and, as outlined above, this initiative keenly aligns with current culturally-focussed macro Government policy processes. However, this award-winning initiative remains critically underfunded and therefore its reach and positive impact on Aboriginal young people and communities is currently limited.

Below KALACC has outlined several opportunities for the State and Commonwealth Governments to fund and support the Yiriman Project.

Yiriman Project Consolidation Proposal

In July 2019, KALACC presented to the State Government a *Proposal to Consolidate the Yiriman Youth Program*. This proposal captures the existing service model and includes two options for a revised staffing matrix that would allow the Yiriman Project to consolidate its service delivery and ensure sustainability into the future, while streamlining and resourcing appropriate key personnel roles (see *Appendix 2 – Proposed Yiriman Project Models*).

KALACC respectfully requests a favourable response to our 2019 *Proposal to Consolidate the Yiriman Youth Program*.

Specific Support for Schools

As previously identified, in her February 2019 [Coronial Inquest Report](#), WA Coroner Fogliani recommended:

That the Yiriman Project or a model akin to the Yiriman Project be linked to schools within the Kimberley Region (p364).

In June 2019, KALACC published the *Kimberley Schools Aboriginal Culture Program Mapping Project – Data and Analysis Report*, which was commissioned by the Kimberley Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Trial. Since then, KALACC has met with four senior officers of the WA Department of Education over the second half of 2019 and in these meetings we were informed that the school attendance rates were as follows:

- Kalumburu: mid-40%
- Fitzroy Valley: mid-50%
- Broome: mid-70%

These are the same percentages that Ms Margaret Collins, then Acting Executive Director of Teaching and Learning North with the WA Department of Education, provided in testimony to Coroner Alistair Hope in November 2007, as detailed in his 2008 *Kimberley Coronial Inquest Report*. In other words, school attendance rates have not shifted at all in the last 12 years.

KALACC is eager to develop a strategy for the Yiriman Project to work with schools, so we can expand our reach even further to help ensure positive outcomes for young people in the Kimberley. In order to do so we need Government funding.

The Throughcare Model

KALACC is currently assisting the WA Department of Justice in the co-design of the Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy. As part of this process, KALACC received an email on 20 September from Ms Lone Griffiths, Manager East Kimberley Youth Justice Services for the Department of Justice:

The provision of throughcare is integral to young people during their transition from custody into the community to ensure continuity of care and to contribute to their adoption of law-abiding, productive lifestyles. Throughcare also includes transitioning young people from one service provider to another which requires the full cooperation of all parties and the exchange of information to ensure a seamless transition with minimal disruption to the young person and their family. Throughcare requires ongoing assessment and review of the young person's circumstances and [Youth Justice Services] staff will facilitate any changes to the case management plan in partnership with the young person, their family and all service providers involved.

KALACC completely agrees with these comments from Lone Griffiths. There are no 'magic bullets' and the only approach that actually works is a seamless pathways model of throughcare to support young people (i.e. interagency collaboration). This is precisely what Professor Harry Blagg wrote in the 104-page long October 2013 *KALACC Juvenile Justice Diversion Scoping & Theoretical Framework*. It is also similar to what then Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda presented in a Youth Justice Interagency Workshop that he ran together with the Yiriman Project in Fitzroy Crossing in May 2015.

However, KALACC also notes the April 2019 *Fitzroy Valley Youth Engagement Strategy Report* from NOUS Group management consulting firm, which states on page 10:

Our consultations with local service providers reflected frustration with the disjointed funding and decision-making environment. We heard that competition for resourcing and funding uncertainty had led to a fragmented system. Stakeholders repeatedly identified that although organisations within the Valley had every intention to collaborate, the lack of resources and competition for limited funding streams was often at the forefront of their decision making. Long standing tensions between service providers, as well as services feeling saturated by challenges, compound the barriers to better systemic collaboration.

Collaborative impact is what works but, in the current funding environment, there are very few examples of where it exists at present.

Supported by Professor Blagg and Commissioner Gooda, we developed and distributed throughcare pathways models back in 2013 and 2015 and they remain unfunded. With appropriate resourcing from the Government, KALACC would be happy to further refine and develop these throughcare pathways models.

FINAL WORDS & KALACC'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The Yiriman Project is an established, evidence-based cultural program that needs to be firmly at the centre of any new State and Commonwealth Government investments.

The Government has the opportunity to fund the Yiriman Project and, in doing so:

- Significantly recognise community and sector wishes
- Enact the recommendations of nine Government reports
- Ultimately deliver on the State and Commonwealth Government priorities of “putting culture at the centre”; empowering ACCOs; and funding preventative, upstream programs

In light of this and the above, KALACC provides the following single recommendation as a first step in what we hope will be an ongoing collaboration with the Government:

KALACC Recommendation

That the Government responds favourably to our July 2019 *Proposal to Consolidate the Yiriman Youth Program* and invests in this endeavour.

REFERENCES LIST & FURTHER READING

- CAEPR (Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research) & KALACC (2019). *Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Youth: An Outcomes Measurement Framework and Action Research Project in the Kimberley*. Canberra: Australian National University.
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APPENDIX 1: REPORTS RECOMMENDING SUPPORT OF YIRIMAN

Below is a cross-section of reports that have called on State and Commonwealth Governments to fund the Yiriman Project, with their respective recommendations. Nine major Government reports across 2008–2019 are cited.

Ways Forward – Beyond the Blame Game (2008)

[Ways Forward – Beyond the Blame Game: Some Successful Initiatives in Remote Indigenous Communities in WA](#) – WA Parliamentary Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health and Education, May 2008

Finding 10

The Yiriman Project is a successful project in the west Kimberley region and has brought together various state and local government as well as academic and Indigenous organisations. It has provided a unique mix of positive social and economic outcomes (p115).

Recommendation 15

The Yiriman Project should be supported by government and used as a model for similar projects in Indigenous communities in other remote regions of Western Australia (p115).

Alcohol Restrictions in the Kimberley (2011)

[Alcohol Restrictions in the Kimberley: A Window of Opportunity for Improved Health, Education, Housing and Employment](#) – WA Parliament Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee, March 2011

Finding 5

The Yiriman program was recommended by the Education and Health Standing Committee in the previous Parliament as one that should receive additional support and be used as a model for other regions as over a number of years it had shown itself to be effective. This recommendation was accepted by the previous government, but no commitment for funding was provided as the Government went into care-taker mode, and the program remains under-resourced.

The Senate's Community Affairs References Committee's 2010 report The Hidden Toll: Suicide in Australia highlighted the successful outcomes of the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre's Yiriman program (p57).

Recommendation 9

The Government provide additional funding to allow the Yiriman program to extend their operations across the Kimberley (p57).

Doing Time – Time for Doing (2011)

[Doing Time – Time for Doing: Indigenous Youth in the Criminal Justice System](#) – Commonwealth of Australia Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, June 2011

4.73 *The Committee endorses these mental health initiatives and considers that the Commonwealth Government should direct funding to locally led and developed programs, such as Red Dust Healing, Yiriman, Balunu and Rekindling the Spirit, which help young people at risk of criminal behaviour and have a strong focus on healing and culture (p107).*

Alistair Hope Coronial Inquest Report (2011)

Balgo Coronial Inquest Report – WA State Coroner Alistair Hope, October 2011

Recommendation No. 2

I recommend that the State Government consider funding, or at least working with Aboriginal organisations such as KALACC, to provide culturally based solutions that address the issues of substance abuse and youth justice diversionary schemes.

I further recommend that consideration be given to relaxing the tendering procurement process in appropriate cases in recognition of the fact that the organisations which are capable of providing such services are very limited in number (p40).

Fitzroy Crossing Local Implementation Plan (2012)

Fitzroy Crossing Local Implementation Plan 2012–2013 – Commonwealth of Australia & Government of Western Australia, September 2012

SAFE COMMUNITIES

PRIORITY: Ongoing funding for Yiriman Juvenile Diversion Program.

Undertake consultation with possible funding sources to provide for the delivery of the Yiriman Pathway for Young people at Risk Program (p34).

Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage – Key Indicators Report 2014

[Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2014 Report](#) – Commonwealth of Australia Productivity Commission, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014

8.8 Things that work

The Yiriman Project (WA) takes young people, accompanied by elders, on trips back to country, to immerse them in the stories, song and knowledge that are their cultural heritage. This builds young people’s confidence and improves their self-worth, and is considered to have helped curb suicide, self-harm and substance abuse in the participating communities. A 2010 qualitative study of the program found that it contributed to healing of young people as they walk on country, provided an opportunity to develop and assert culture, language and bush skills, and created meaningful employment that valued and maintained culture (box 8.8.3 and section 5.4) (p49).

Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage – Key Indicators Report 2016

[Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016 Report](#) – Commonwealth of Australia Productivity Commission, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2016

Box 8.8.3 **Things that work**

The Yiriman Project (WA), auspiced by the Kimberly Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, commenced in 2000. The Project takes young people, accompanied by elders, on trips back to country, to immerse them in the stories, song and knowledge that are their cultural heritage. This builds young people’s confidence and improves their self-worth, and is considered to have helped curb suicide, self-harm and substance abuse in the participating communities (RA 2013). The Yiriman project was the winner of Reconciliation Australia’s 2012 Indigenous Governance Awards in Category B: non-incorporated projects and initiatives. Project outcomes were summarised in Palmer’s (2010) qualitative study:

- *the healing of young people as they walk on country and look after it*
- *the opportunity to develop and assert culture, language and bush skills*
- *meaningful employment that values and maintains culture (p2228).*

Learnings from the Message Stick (2016)

[Learnings from the message stick: The report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal youth suicide in remote areas](#) – WA Parliament Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee, November 2016

Yiriman Project

A9.11 The Yiriman Project is a well-known example of a community-owned program embedded in local culture. Many witnesses and evidence to the Inquiry identified it as an example of best practice.

A9.12 Developed in 2000 by Aboriginal Elders from the Nyikina, Mangala, Karajarri and Walmajarri language groups in response to concerns about their young people, the project takes youth, Elders and other community members on trips to country. The nature of trips varies – while some involve long periods of walking, others may include wild harvest work or learning language, dance or about skin and respect.

A9.13 The Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre’s (KALACC) Festival and Cultural Events Coordinator Wayne Barker explained the underlying principles of the Yiriman Project: KALACC is firmly of the belief that a strong cultural foundation leads to strong wellbeing of an individual who then becomes a strong contributing individual in society. Any elements inside of that that impairs or that leads to a knock-on effect in a negative sense, right across from culture, right to society, right to family ... is a clear resounding call of alarm.

A9.14 Some trips are aimed at young men, others at young women. Most are at risk of alcohol and substance abuse, mental health damage and suicide. But after participating in the project, many transition into community leadership roles as parents, Yiriman mentors, rangers and cultural custodians.

A9.15 An evaluation of Yiriman found it contributed positively to young participants' lives, including improving their physical health, strengthening their connection to country, enhancing their cultural identity, and minimising their contact with the justice system.

A9.16 Yiriman is a prime example of the benefits of Aboriginal-led programs. Based at Fitzroy Crossing, KALACC oversees administrative matters for the Yiriman Project but the project retains its own project governance independent of KALACC. In 2012, the Yiriman Project won Reconciliation Australia's award for an outstanding example of Indigenous governance. Chair of the awards, Professor Mick Dodson said that Yiriman and other finalists are succeeding in providing innovative and responsive service delivery and advocacy. They are entrepreneurial and proactively creating economic development opportunities for their members and communities. Their governance models are rooted in culture, yet entirely modern in their efficiency, legitimacy and accountability. ... They are making decisions; they are getting on with their futures. They are self-determination in action (p255–257)

Ros Fogliani Coronial Inquest Report (2019)

[Inquest into the 13 Deaths of Children and Young Persons in the Kimberley Region](#) – WA State Coroner Ros Fogliani, February 2019

Recommendation 16 – Expansion of Yiriman Project

That the Yiriman Project or a model akin to the Yiriman Project be extended across the Kimberley, and that consideration be given to the following matters in connection with the extension:

a. That the Western Australian government through its various health and justice branches should explore opportunities for the implementation of models akin to the Yiriman Project in other remote parts of Western Australia with priority given to those areas with high rates of Aboriginal youth suicide.

b. That funding providers for the Yiriman Project and other programs akin to the Yiriman Project should acknowledge the need for key performance indicators that are flexible and reflect the difficulty such organisations have in providing quantitative and qualitative data on the success of individual interventions with at-risk clients.

c. That the Western Australian government should consider guaranteed funding for the Yiriman Project on a longer term basis, whether through funding provided by the Department for Corrective Services for diversionary programs, through ATSIPEP funding, or unding co-ordinated through the Mental Health (p305; further details p299–305).

Recommendation 39:

That the Yiriman Project or a model akin to the Yiriman Project be linked to schools within the Kimberley Region (p364; further details p363–364).

APPENDIX 2: PROPOSED YIRIMAN PROJECT MODELS

The below diagrams have been extracted from pages 4–6 of KALACC’s *Proposal to Consolidate the Yiriman Youth Program* that was supplied to the State Government in July 2019.

Diagram 1

The Yiriman Project: Existing Model



Figure 6: Yiriman Project Existing Staffing Model (p4)

Diagram 2

The Yiriman Project: Proposed Model A

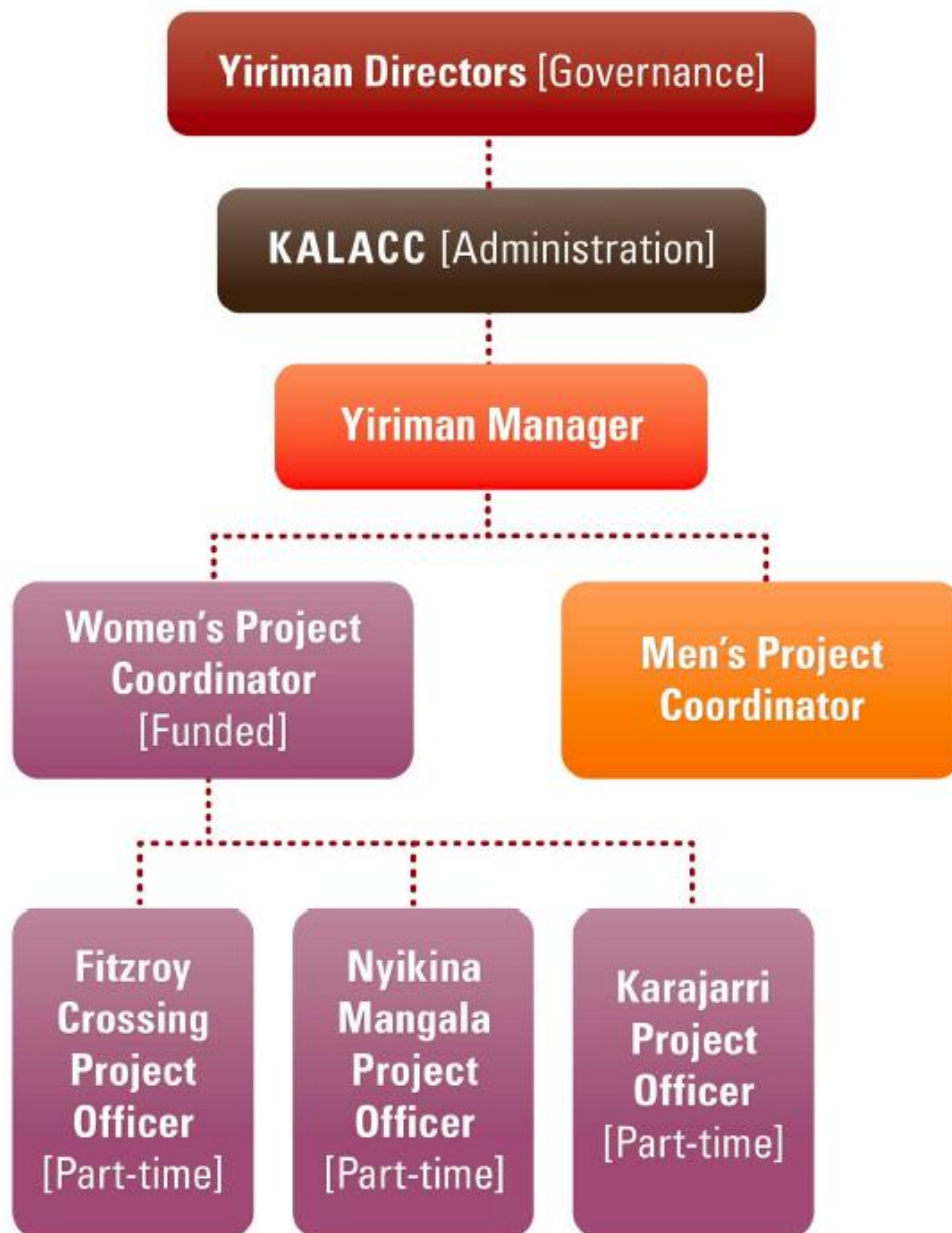


Figure 7: Yiriman Project Proposed Model A (p5)

Diagram 3

The Yiriman Project: Proposed Model B

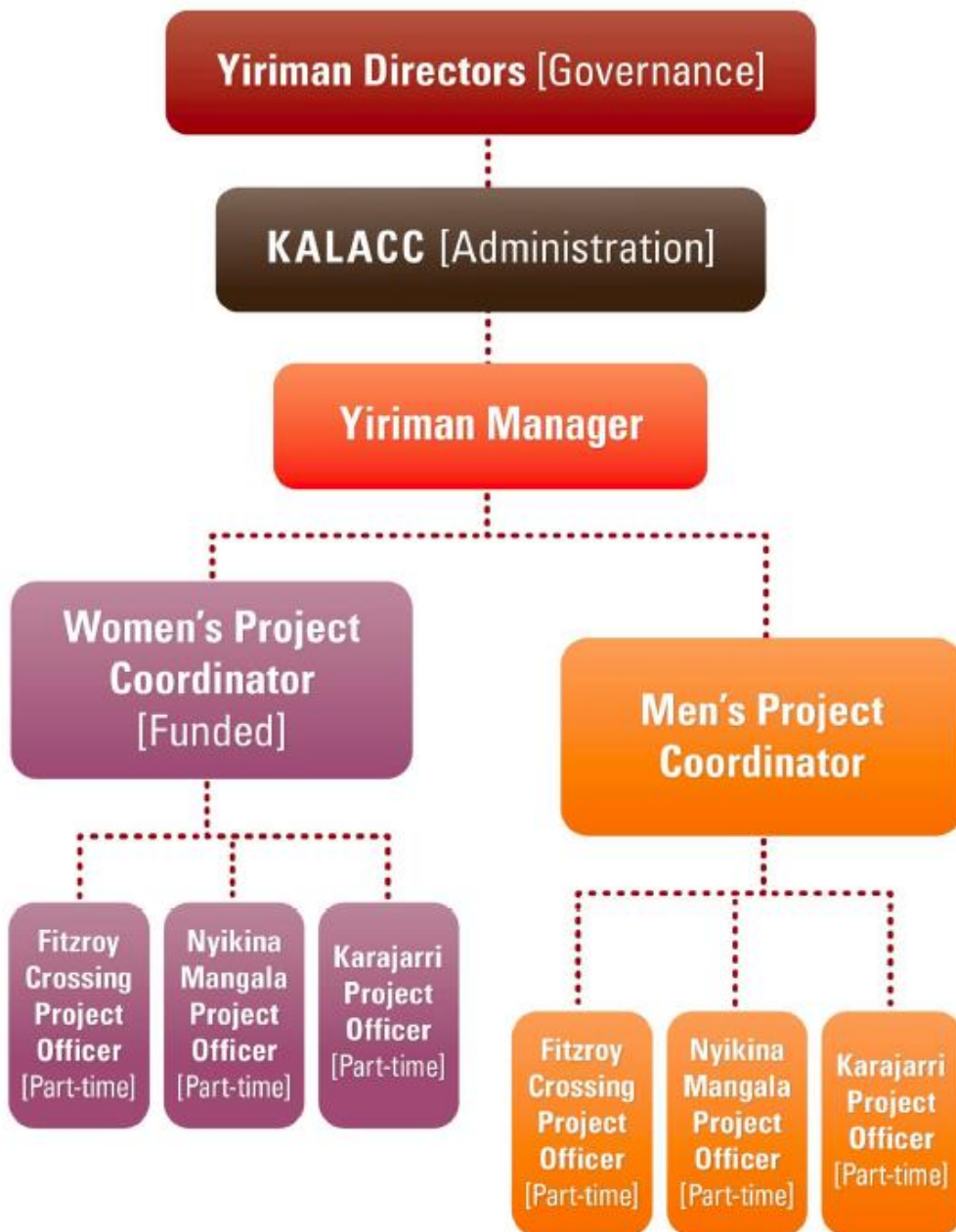


Figure 8: Yiriman Project Proposed Model B (p6)