

## Family Re-Engagement Process Story

### Designing the process

In 2014, the Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC) board requested support from the Right People for Country program and Native Title Services Victoria to strengthen engagement with all their native title holders through a process of family meetings.

BGLC wanted to be confident that it is doing everything it can to look after the rights and interests of all native title holders.

BGLC also wanted to demonstrate its commitment to engaging with the broader native title group in preparation for the renegotiation of their 2005 Settlement Agreements.

In particular BGLC wanted to:

- Hear from families about what's important to them – hopes, aspirations, priorities
- Hear how families want to participate and whether there are barriers to participation
- Share information about new opportunities in native title through the proposed renegotiation under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act

BGLC requested independent facilitators to facilitate meetings with each family. The facilitators worked with BGLC to design the family meeting process.

### Family meetings

Over a period of seven months, Right People for Country facilitators held 16 family meetings with 67 participants. These meetings were organised through key family contacts and were held at a time and place chosen by each family. Families were able to tell their stories in a comfortable space and in their own voice. After each meeting a summary was sent back to each family to review. These summaries were then de-identified and collated into one Family Re-Engagement Report.

'Doing all those family meetings, giving people the chance to review the meeting summaries and identify priorities, collating all the feedback for the board to hear – it worked really well. People really appreciated the opportunity to engage. It helped to change people's perceptions of BGLC,' reflects Jennifer Beer, BGLC board member.

'What worked was being really open and transparent. BGLC was able to hear the reasons why people aren't involved, and receive ideas to address those issues. At the same time, BGLC was able to let people know that we don't have anything to hide' says Janine Coombs, BGLC board member and chairperson at the time of the family meetings. 'A personal highlight was that Traditional Owners living off Country, in Melbourne, felt included.'

## Family Re-Engagement Report

The Family Re-engagement Report summarises the advice and feedback from all the family meetings. The facilitators workshopped this Report with the BGLC board.

Jennifer Beer reflects: 'The facilitators helped me to be able to hear the negative feedback but also to focus on the constructive suggestions for improving things and to find the common ground. I learnt how to put aside my own garbage and be able to have a conversation with people about the solutions.'

One of the facilitators describes the workshop with the board as a turning point in the process: 'In discussing the Report, the board saw that their hopes and aspirations and the community's hopes and aspirations are the same, that they are aligned. There was a shift from 'us and them', to 'us' with different parts of 'us.'

## Regional Forums and Implementation Plan

The BGLC board held three regional forums for families to discuss the findings of the Report and prioritise what was most important for them.

BGLC board and staff then developed an Implementation Plan drawing on the advice and feedback from the Family Re-Engagement Report and the Forums. The Plan is a working document to guide BGLC in continuing to strengthen: communication and engagement, safety and managing conflict, governance, training and skills building, and the renegotiation of the 2005 agreements.

## Outcomes

'BGLC has realised that we need to be more active in the way we listen to people when they raise issues,' says Michael Stewart, BGLC Executive Officer. 'We also understand that we need to communicate in a way that catches people's attention and we need to send out information in multiple ways. We have changed one of our staff roles to focus more on community engagement, to make it a part of our everyday business.'

'I think community perception is slowly changing, we have got more families getting involved, and we are all trying to keep BGLC on track to look after the community's interests. We are using the same engagement process with our Country planning ... because we know it works. We have formed an interim negotiation team and are engaging with families to involve them in preparing for boundary agreement making,' says Jennifer Beer.

'At the end of the process, I think people are feeling more included, but I also think that the BGLC board needs to maintain the momentum with the Implementation Plan,' says Janine Coombs. 'It was a really good process but there are still some difficult things that are going to need more time. We need to keep working at it ... It's like one of my kids says: it's a marathon not a sprint.'

For more information about the Right People for Country program visit:  
[www.aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au/right-people-country-program](http://www.aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au/right-people-country-program)