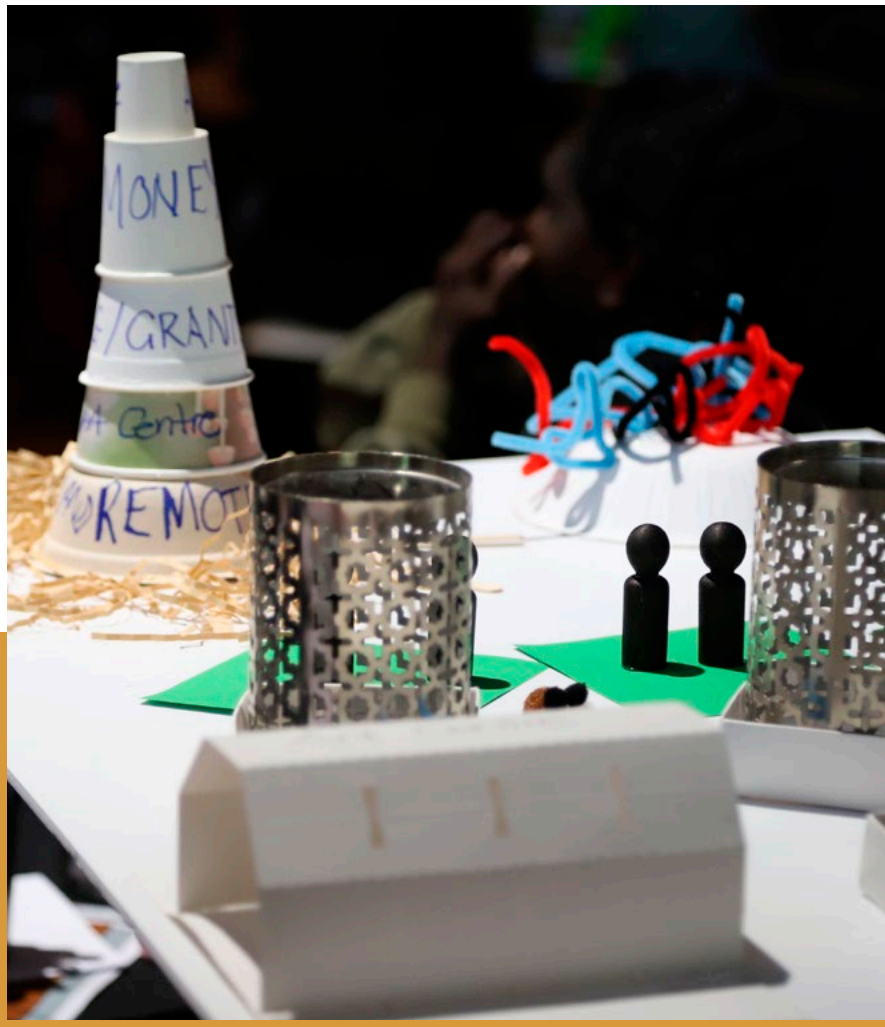
ANKA
ARNHEM, NORTHERN AND KIMBERLEY ARTISTS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION
Working together to keep art, country and culture strong

Djalkiri

SECTOR STRENGTHENING SUMMIT FOR THE REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED ART AND CULTURE SECTOR

REPORT | APRIL 2025



SUMMIT HELD AT THE VISITOR AND EVENT CENTRE
GEORGE BROWN DARWIN BOTANIC GARDENS
27–28 NOVEMBER 2024

ANKA acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community.

The ANKA board of directors and staff pay their respects to them and their cultures; and to Elders both past and present.

Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists (ANKA) Aboriginal Corporation

ANKA is a not-for-profit Aboriginal corporation governed by an elected all-Aboriginal board of directors. It is the peak support and advocacy body for Aboriginal artists and Aboriginal community-controlled art and culture centres spread across over one million square kilometres of country in the top end of the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

ANKA represents almost 50 remote Aboriginal-owned art and culture centres and more than 6,000 artists. Many ANKA members are internationally acclaimed artists, arts professionals and important community leaders. ANKA serves four regions: the Kimberley, Arnhem Land, the Tiwi Islands and Darwin–Katherine.

Working together

In April 2024, the Desart and ANKA boards of directors met in Darwin and agreed on the principles of a memorandum of understanding to support the two peak bodies working together on advocacy for the sector. The Djalkiri summit was planned and codesigned by ANKA and Desart as the first in a series of summits to advance the case for a Sector Strengthening Plan for the remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture sector.

ANKA Chairperson Dr Djambawa Marawili AM, ANKA Director Colin Puruntatameri, Cathy Ward

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The Djalkiri summit

On 27 and 28 November 2024, Aboriginal artists and arts workers together with art and culture centre coordinators from remote communities across Australia's north met in Darwin for the Djalkiri summit.

Art and culture centres are our keeping places for culture and art

The summit was organised in response to concerns about the current sustainability of the remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled art and culture sector. It was the first in what is envisaged as a series of consultations organised by the peak bodies representing the sector.

Djalkiri is a Yolŋu word meaning footsteps/footprints of the ancestors. It is used to express the idea of the foundations of culture and the concept of looking to the past to see the path to the future.

They celebrate our Country and our storylines. For our people and for the world

The summit was an opportunity for the ANKA membership and key stakeholders to come together to reimagine a strong future and think through what is needed to get there. The central goal of the summit was to identify key directions, themes and building blocks to inform a Sector Strengthening Plan.

A sustainable future for art and culture

At the conclusion of the Djalkiri summit, participants signed an urgent call for action, addressed to both sides of politics, requesting support for a Sector Strengthening Plan to be codesigned with government in alignment with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Introduction

In response to growing concerns about the sustainability of the remote Aboriginal art and culture sector, the boards of directors of ANKA and Desart – Australia's two longest-standing art and culture peak bodies, together representing 70% of art and culture centres nationally – initiated a focused advocacy agenda in 2023.

They have since been joined by peak bodies Aboriginal Art Centre Hub of Western Australia (AACHWA), Aṉanguku Arts and Cultural Aboriginal Corporation (Ku Arts) and the Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA), advocating for sector-wide change.

Despite decades of committed work, persistent structural challenges remain unresolved. These include the underemployment of Aboriginal arts workers; limited local training and career development opportunities; insecure or inadequate facilities; staff recruitment difficulties; language and cross-cultural communication barriers; and lack of recognition or remuneration for the cultural foundations that sustain the work. These issues cannot be solved through isolated project funding or the goodwill of individual managers alone. The cumulative strain has reached a critical tipping point.

ANKA Vice-chairperson Dora Griffiths

As art historian Terry Smith wrote in 2011, 'Aboriginal art is the only art produced in Australia that has a substantial presence in the world's contemporary art circuits'. While Aboriginal artists continue to gain global recognition, the remote art and culture centres that underpin this international success remain under-resourced and fragile. Without a sustainable foundation, both the livelihoods of artists and Australia's global cultural reputation are at risk.

Former ANKA director Walter Rogers (left)

Art and culture centres are often understood – and funded – primarily as places for making and selling artworks. Yet this commercial role represents only a small part of their remit. These centres are vital cultural institutions: they are archives, language hubs, schools, safe spaces and sites of intergenerational learning and healing. They foster cultural transmission, community wellbeing and self-determination. They also provide platforms that connect remote Aboriginal communities with national and international audiences.

To ensure the sector's future, funding frameworks must recognise and resource the full breadth and depth of what these centres do. A sustainable future for Aboriginal art and culture in Australia depends on it.

Mervyn Street, Arthurina Moreen and Rebekah Raymond

Summit objectives

1. Identify key directions, themes and building blocks to inform a Sector Strengthening Plan for the remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture sector codesigned with the Australian Government
2. Map what happens at art and culture centres when they are at their best
3. Track the contributions made by art and culture centres across other sectors and to community wellbeing
4. Create an image of what a sustainable future for art and culture centres looks like
5. Build a compelling case for an appropriately resourced sector

Key advocacy objectives

1. A Sector Strengthening Plan for the remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture sector codesigned with government
2. A realistic mapping of the sector ecology – including consideration of contributions to other sectors
3. A national Indigenous cultural policy (being called for by various sectors)

A map of the remote Aboriginal art and culture sector ecology

Map collectively developed by ANKA members at Regional General Meetings in 2023–24

An Appreciative Inquiry approach

> The Djalkiri summit was run on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a strengths-based approach designed to discover what 'gives life to a complex system when it is at its most effective, alive, and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms' (David Cooperrider, 1986).

The AI method seeks to listen to and learn from the lived experience of participants from all levels within a system, organisation or sector, to value their knowledge and from it generate energy for innovation.

It focuses on positive change rather than problems to solve. In the discovery phase it seeks to identify what works well within an organisation, community or sector. Building on that, it invites participants to create a powerful, positive collective vision of the future. In the design phase, the group then workshops how to achieve that vision.

An AI summit encourages participants to share their stories, imagine a desired future and explore ways to work together to achieve it.

AI was selected as a vehicle that could lift up the voices of ANKA's membership. An AI summit is not a conference, but rather a large group conversation guided by facilitators. It is made up of a series of smaller paired conversations and group discussions which are reported back to the main group; sometimes these are supported by activities such as drawing, collage and model-making.

At the Djalkiri summit, key areas of activity identified during the vision phase as vital to the future of art and culture centres became the thematic focus for the design phase, where participants collaboratively generated new ideas.

Trevor van Weeren (left) and ANKA Stand-in Director Peter Thomas (right) with group members

The three stages of the Djalkiri summit Appreciative Inquiry

Discovery – What makes us strong now and in the past? What are our core strengths?

Vision – What is our vision for the future?

Design – What do we need to do to achieve our vision?

Vision and design: ideas for sector growth and development

1. Theme: Next-generation teaching and learning

Sector strength: Intergenerational knowledge-sharing is embedded in community life

Opportunity for growth: Establishing a 'bush university of cultural knowledge' – a place-based model for transmitting knowledge to future generations

> How to support a multi-generational art renaissance and assure its continuity?

- Recognising how cultural knowledge is passed between generations
- Supporting structured, intergenerational mentoring and teaching roles for Elders and senior artists, as in mainstream art schools
- Engaging cultural advisors from the same communities the students are drawn from, to support them in their learning
- Valuing senior artists and cultural leaders as educators and paying them fairly for their work
- Creating dedicated spaces for learning and gathering, such as a bough shed
- Integrating traditional knowledge systems with contemporary education models
- Offering cultural education for Balanda/Napagi coming to work in communities
- Helping Yolŋu understand how Balanda think, so they can confidently teach Yolŋu knowledge

2. Theme: Governance

Sector strength: Deep understanding and application of traditional governance systems

Opportunity for growth: Building bridges between traditional governance and the requirements of corporate governance

> Politics between the clans and with the traditional owners can be complicated

- Developing governance models that respect traditional authority while meeting modern legal and funding requirements
- Acknowledging that art and culture centre governance operates within Balanda systems, not traditional ones
- Recognising complexities of existing clan-based governance systems
- Providing place-based governance training tailored to remote communities and their art and culture centres
- Funding practical support for managers to organise meetings – including help with paperwork and tasks like picking up directors
- Paying fair sitting fees that value board directors' time and cultural knowledge
- Supporting community-led approaches to achieving quorum and encouraging active participation by board directors

3. Theme: Job pathways

Sector strength: Indigenous arts workers bring long-term commitment, cultural authority and deep community knowledge, providing continuity, trust and leadership as others come and go

Opportunity for growth: Supporting transitions into management and leadership roles through mentoring and job-sharing initiatives

> Ongoing investment is essential to create new positions – including shared leadership and mentoring roles – so arts workers can grow into senior positions

- Planning and supporting long-term career development
- Creating roles that grow and recognise cultural strengths
- Expanding opportunities for trusted leadership roles
- Providing housing, equipment and time for development
- Funding co-leadership and two-way mentoring with managers
- Embedding business, governance and finance training into daily work
- Aligning with peak body and industry training to grow sector skills
- Establishing a new IVAIS stream for centre leadership pathways and national growth

4. Theme: Infrastructure and climate change

Sector strength: Art and culture centres reflect the unique environments and cultural values of their communities, acting as places of both traditional knowledge and contemporary creativity

Opportunity for growth: Empowering the next generation to lead the design of culturally grounded, climate-resilient infrastructure

> Meanwhile, the waves of the ocean are lapping at the older structures, including the original art and culture centre, now a dilapidated shed for the canoes

- Designing buildings that respond to local climate, Country and cultural protocols
- Building resilient structures using sustainable design principles to withstand increased flooding, cyclones, fire and high temperatures
- Creating culturally appropriate and accessible multipurpose spaces that support intergenerational making, meeting and learning
- Ensuring separate spaces for gender-specific and culturally distinct activities
- Including climate-controlled archives, keeping places and digital infrastructure to protect and share cultural knowledge
- Incorporating interpretive spaces to support education and cultural tourism
- Repurposing or retiring unsafe buildings with community leadership and consent

5. Theme: Wellbeing

Sector strength: Art and culture centres maintain vital connections to Country and cultural identity

Opportunity for growth: Expanding on-Country programs that support youth wellbeing and cultural healing

> At my art and culture centre, we take school kids out on Country and it's about health and wellbeing. It's not only for kids, for older people, for healing people to be sober and fit and healthy. When you go out bush, on Country, it's a healing for us. It builds us up, makes us feel good inside – go out bush and hunting and collecting the bush medicine and bush food – Leon Milmurru, Milingimbi Art and Culture

- Taking school-aged children out on Country to strengthen cultural knowledge and pride
- Supporting intergenerational learning and paid mentoring roles for Elders and senior arts workers to foster cultural knowledge, connection and belonging
- Strengthening partnerships with health, education and community services to support holistic wellbeing on Country
- Acknowledging art and culture centres as part of a wider community net of care, identity and resilience
- Supporting Elders and cultural bosses to strengthen physical and mental health through bush activities, cultural practices and ceremony
- Using time on Country – including bush food, medicine and physical activity – to support healing, healthy living and strong identity, including sobriety

6. Theme: Homelands

Sector strength: Artistic practice is rooted in traditional cultural and ceremonial knowledge

Opportunity for growth: Respectfully exploring the relationship between the market-based art economy and cultural and ceremonial production beyond the marketplace

Cultural and ceremonial life on homelands is the deep foundation of the art sold through art and culture centres. These ceremonies – often closed to outside audiences – are essential to place-based cultural transmission, passing knowledge, law, language and artistic authority from one generation to the next.

> Ceremonial activity and practices that keep culture strong and alive are the foundations of the art you see in art and culture centres

Despite this, contemporary cultural and ceremonial practice is largely unsupported, taking place in remote locations with poor infrastructure and no funding. To ensure its continuation, there is an urgent need to:

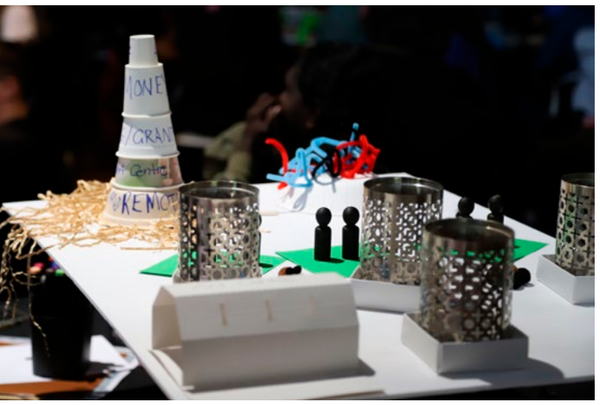
- recognise the cultural, spiritual and civic importance of cultural and ceremonial leaders as caretakers of cultural and environmental health
- recognise ceremonial practice as core to the cultural and artistic economy
- invest in infrastructure that enables cultural practice to take place on Country
- support artists to balance cultural obligations with art production
- integrate respect for ceremonial and traditional knowledge systems into sector planning and policy
- establish a funded program to recognise and support cultural leaders.

Strengthening recognition between the ceremonial economy and the art economy will support both cultural sustainability and artistic innovation.

7. Theme: The business and money story

Sector strength: Strong collaboration across art and culture centres and through peak body networks

Opportunity for growth: Developing long-term financial strategies under Aboriginal leadership



- Establishing an endowment fund, managed through a peak body, with interest used to support priority projects across art and culture centres and their regions
- Building collective impact by uniting centres to attract and manage shared investment
- Promoting strategic philanthropy that strengthens Aboriginal control over cultural and financial futures
- Supporting money skills in communities through culturally grounded education and partnerships

> What could change if centres had increased financial freedom to realise their own priorities – on their own terms?

ANKA ARNHEM, NORTHERN AND KIMBERLEY ARTISTS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION
Working together to keep art, country and culture strong

desart **Culture First.** Supporting Aboriginal Art Centres of Central Australia

Sector Strengthening Summits

for the Remote Indigenous Community-Controlled Art and Culture Sector 2024–25

CALL FOR URGENT ACTION

The Hon Tony Burke
Minister for the Arts
Parliament of Australia

The Hon Paul Fletcher
Shadow Minister for Science and the Arts
Parliament of Australia

Senator The Hon Malarndirri McCarthy
Minister for Indigenous Australians
Parliament of Australia

Jacinta Nampijinpa Price
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians
Parliament of Australia

We come together, as Aboriginal leaders – both Elders and young people – from across remote and very remote communities and homelands in Northern and Central Australia. We meet to talk about how to put the right things in place, so our art, culture and traditional knowledge is there for the next generations. So, we can look after it and continue to share it with all Australians and the world.

Our cultures, languages, patterns and designs were given to us by our ancestors. It is our responsibility to keep our culture going. Our culture goes back to the beginning of time.

Remote community-controlled Art and Culture Centres help us keep our culture strong.

The Art and Culture Centre movement in remote Aboriginal communities is more than 50 years old. We have built it up ourselves, from nothing, using our inherited cultural knowledge. The movement supports the art now appreciated by people across the world and we use it to care for our ancient cultural knowledge.

Aboriginal community-controlled Art and Culture Centres bring important social, economic and health outcomes to our communities and give meaningful jobs to our young people. They do this while achieving cultural heritage outcomes for the whole world. We need you to work with us to keep our Art and Culture Centres strong for the next 50 years and beyond.

We urgently call on all sides of government to join with us and co-design:

1. A Sector Strengthening Plan for the remote Indigenous community-controlled art and culture sector. To ensure sustainability for the next 50 years and beyond.
2. A realistic map of the remote art and culture sector – showing what Art and Culture Centres and their peak bodies do and how they contribute to remote community life and the objectives of different sectors (e.g. health, education, disability, youth, aged-care).
3. These will contribute to a National Indigenous Cultural Policy.

We cannot afford to wait for this important work; we must start now. We need to work together and plan wisely for our future.

We support this call for action.

Attendance

Art and culture centres

Anindilyakwa Arts, Groote Eylandt, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 2,800)
Artists Away from Home Program – Broome Circle, Broome, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 14,600)
Bábbarra Women's Centre, Maningrida, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 2,500)
Baniyala Homeland Art Studio, Baniyala, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 150)
Bidyadanga Artists, Bidjydanga, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 850)
Buku-Larrnggay Mulka, Yirrkala, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 700)
Bula'bula Arts, Ramingining, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 800)
Durrmu Arts, Peppimenarti, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 200)
Gapuwiyak Culture and Arts, Gapuwiyak, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 100)
Girrwarli Art & Cultural Centre, Yiyili, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 275)
Goŋ Wanhurr, Dhalinybuy Homeland, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 800)
Injalak Arts, Gunbalanya, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 1,200)
Jilamara Arts & Crafts, Milikapiti, Tiwi Islands, NT (pop. approx. 500)
Karungkarni Art and Culture, Kalkarindji, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 400)
Kira Kiro Arts, Kalumbaru, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 470)
Kulumindini Arts, Elliott, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 280)
Larrakia Nation Arts, Darwin, Darwin–Katherine, NT (Indigenous pop. approx. 13,154)
Mangkaja Arts, Fitzroy Crossing, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 1,000)
Maningrida Arts & Culture, Maningrida, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 2,500)
Milingimbi Art and Culture, Milingimbi, Arnhem Land, NT (pop. approx. 1,300)
Mowanjum Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre, Derby, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 3,230)
Munupi Arts and Crafts Association, Pirlangimpi, Tiwi Islands, NT (pop. approx. 420)
Nagula Jarndu Designs, Broome, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 14,600)
Ngukurr Arts, Ngukurr, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 1,200)
Numbulwar Numburindi Arts, Numbulwar, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 680)
Tiwi Design, Wurrumiyanga, Tiwi Islands, NT (pop. approx. 1,500)
Waralungku Arts, Borroloola, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 880)
Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 5,300)
Warmun Art Centre, Warmun, Kimberley, WA (pop. approx. 450)
Warnayaka Art, Lajamanu, Darwin–Katherine, NT (pop. approx. 610)

Art and culture peak bodies

Aboriginal Art Centre Hub of Western Australia (AACHWA)
Ananguku Arts and Cultural Aboriginal Corporation (Ku Arts), SA
Arnhem Northern and Kimberley Artists (ANKA) Aboriginal Corporation, NT and WA
Desart, NT, SA and WA
Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA), QLD

Industry and funding partners

Australian Government Office for the Arts
Australian National Maritime Museum, NSW
Indigenous Art Code (IartC)
Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT)
Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University, NT
The University of Melbourne, Vic

Independent artists

Consultants and specialists serving the sector

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