



Case study 22

Using engagement to find a solution

Engagement of remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory

Power and Water Corporation

This case study showcases

how water businesses are rethinking internal processes, services and skills to better serve communities

Problem

Many remote indigenous communities in the Northern Territory rely on stressed groundwater or freshwater sources and are exposed to critical water shortages.

Communication on the importance of water conservation with these indigenous communities has been difficult. Residents of the townships retain ties to traditional culture with English as a secondary language. They are not well educated on the systems and processes of water or other utility services, i.e. where it comes from, where it goes and the governance that surrounds it. Hence they do not often make the connection between water that comes out of the tap and local issues of water stress. As they often live in public housing, there is no price signal to use less water. The communities are plagued with other social pressures such as high levels of unemployment and water efficiency is not high on the agenda for most. Power and Water in the Northern Territory hence face a strong cultural, language and distance divide in getting their water efficiency messaging across.

Solution

Through consultation with the local indigenous communities, Power and Water began to understand that effective

engagement would need to come from those with the same cultural and language backgrounds, and with understanding of community needs and values.

In 2012, Power and Water employed, mentored and trained four local indigenous Water Conservation Ambassadors to educate the remote community of Galiwin'ku on positive water behaviours and water efficiency. Power and Water worked with local organisations, Community Development Employment Program providers and Community Enterprise Australia to assist in ensuring the right community ambassadors were chosen and provide culturally appropriate training and ongoing mentoring. The program resulted in significant water efficiency and education gains.

Following the success of this program, in 2013, Power and Water took part in the Low Income Energy Efficiency Program (LIEEP), a Federal Government funded project which in the Northern Territory was trialed in six remote communities, including Galiwin'ku. The LIEEP program built upon the community engagement process used in Galiwin'ku, and also took the opportunity to leverage this funding in energy efficiency to include some water efficiency education/ services. The program involved recruiting and training 80 local indigenous community members in local languages, and preparing communications materials that spoke to the communities. Part of the training also involved more general HR activities such as experience in workplaces, with induction, timesheets, etc.

Power and Water are now leading the way to explore opportunities with other government agencies who may have the need for similar indigenous community engagement programs to pool resources and implement joint training or employment programs.

Business case

Due to the broader community benefits of this program, there has been Government funding and support to run this program.

Key drivers

Strong message from the indigenous community that Power and Water needed to engage with them in a culturally appropriate way to achieve the outcome the desired.

Drive from Power and Water to have a respectful and open dialogue with their customers

Benefit/outcome

Water efficiency outcomes –savings of up to 8% observed after household water education delivery

Upskilling and empowering remote indigenous community

Employment opportunities in a region where the unemployment rate is high.

Better relationship and understanding of the local community

Sustainable management of water.