



Australian
National
University



A SURVEY OF REMOTE JOBS AND
COMMUNITIES PROGRAM(ME)
PROVIDERS: ONE YEAR IN

L. FOWKES AND W. SANDERS

Centre for
Aboriginal Economic
Policy Research
ANU College of
**Arts & Social
Sciences**

CAEPR WORKING PAPER NO. 97/2015

Series Note

The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) undertakes high quality, independent research to further the social and economic development and empowerment of Indigenous people throughout Australia. For over 20 years CAEPR has aimed to combine academic and teaching excellence on Indigenous economic and social development and public policy with realism, objectivity and relevance.

CAEPR is located within the Research School of Social Sciences in the College of Arts & Social Sciences, at The Australian National University (ANU). The Centre is funded from a variety of sources including ANU, Australian Research Council, industry and philanthropic partners, the Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and State and Territory governments.

CAEPR maintains a substantial publications program. CAEPR Working Papers are refereed reports which are produced for rapid distribution to enable widespread discussion and comment. They are available in electronic format only for free download from CAEPR's website:

caepr.anu.edu.au

As with all CAEPR publications, the views expressed in this Working Paper are those of the author(s) and do not reflect any official CAEPR position.

Dr Robert G. (Jerry) Schwab
Acting Director, CAEPR
Research School of Social Sciences
College of Arts & Social Sciences
The Australian National University
January 2015



A survey of Remote Jobs and Communities Program(me) providers: one year in

L. Fowkes and W. Sanders

Lisa Fowkes is a PhD candidate and **Will Sanders** is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Research School of Social Sciences, College of Arts and Social Sciences, The Australian National University.

Working Paper No. 97/2015
ISSN 1442-3871

ISBN 0 7315 4996 1

An electronic publication downloaded from <caepr.anu.edu.au>.

For a complete list of CAEPR Working Papers, see <caepr.anu.edu.au/publications/working.php>.

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
Research School of Social Sciences
College of Arts & Social Sciences
The Australian National University

Abstract

On 1 July 2013, a new labour market and community participation program—the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP)—started operating across remote Australia. It replaced several other programs, most importantly Job Services Australia (JSA) and the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme. JSA has in recent years been Australia's principal 'mainstream' labour market program in which all unemployment payment recipients in Australia who are able to work are expected to participate. CDEP is a much longer-standing program, originally designed to provide some form of paid work to Indigenous people living in remote communities. RJCP was presented by the Gillard Labor government as offering services that would be locally flexible, be delivered in partnership with communities and have a strong focus on getting people into work. Its dual focus—on community participation and on jobs—was reflected in arrangements for its administration, jointly managed by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. However, a change of government in September 2013 brought RJCP into the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The new Abbott Coalition government was critical of RJCP and immediately included it in a review of Indigenous employment and training programs, led by Andrew Forrest.

This working paper reports on a survey of provider organisations conducted almost one year into the implementation of RJCP. It is part of a larger research project on the implementation of RJCP during its first three years, with funding support from the Australian Research Council and Jobs

Australia (Linkage Project 130100226). The project aims to understand how RJCP is developed from a general policy idea to specific grounded practice, at the community, regional and jurisdictional levels. This survey report includes findings about basic arrangements and characteristics of provider organisations; ideas about joblessness in remote areas and welfare conditionality; provider perceptions of the government officials with whom they work; operational details (staffing, money and administrative challenges including information technology (IT) systems); and broader influences on the shaping of program delivery, like Community Action Plans and community perceptions. A second survey in 2015–16 will track developments in these areas over time.

Keywords: Indigenous employment, community participation, new government program and policy, remote areas

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the assistance and support provided by Jobs Australia, the industry partner in this research project. Our thanks go, also, to the senior managers in organisations that have been contracted to deliver RJCP who have given their time and attention (both of which are in high demand) to complete this survey.

Acronyms

CAP	Community Action Plan
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
CDF	Community Development Fund
DEEWR	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DES	Disability Employment Services
FaHCSIA	Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
EOI	expression of interest
IPP	Individual Participation Plan
IT	information technology
JSA	Job Services Australia
PA	Participation Account
PM&C	Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
RJCP	Remote Jobs and Communities Program(me)

Contents

Series Note	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Acronyms	iv
Introduction	1
Program antecedents	2
Survey method and report structure	2
Part A: Provision arrangements	3
Organisations responding to the survey	3
Stand-alone providers and groups	5
Respondents' backgrounds	6
Part B: Ideas about joblessness and welfare conditionality	7
Causes of joblessness	7
Strategies to address joblessness	7
Responsibility for taking action	8
Part C: Working with government	10
Relationship with government officials	10
Providers' influence over program direction	11
Part D: Operational challenges	12
Financial dependence and revenue adequacy	12
Early implementation challenges	13
Staffing profile	14
Staffing: relevance of JSA experience	16
Staff turnover	16
Allocation of employee resources	17
Case load size	17
Allocation of management attention	17
Part E: What is shaping delivery?	18
Community Action Plans	18
Views about Indigenous organisations	20
Perceptions of influence on priorities and activities so far	20
Concluding observations	21
Notes	22
References	23
Appendix A: RJCP regions	24

Tables and figures

Table 1. Type of organisation responding to survey	4
Table 2. Past experience of organisations responding to survey	4
Table 3. Size of organisations responding to survey	4
Table 4. Delivery arrangements of RJCP provider groupings	5
Table 5. Main reasons for providers to enter into a group arrangement	5
Fig. 1. Roles of organisations in their RJCP service region(s)	5
Fig. 2. Attitudes to group arrangements	6
Table 6. Length of time with this employer	6
Table 7. Related experience of respondents	7
Fig. 3. Causes of joblessness in remote regions	8
Table 8. Effectiveness of strategies to address joblessness	9
Table 9. Views on responsibilities of government and individuals in relation to employment and welfare	9
Fig. 4. Views about dealing with government officials in relation to RJCP	10
Table 10. Providers' approaches with ideas for change	11
Fig. 5. Views about local PM&C staff working on RJCP	11
Table 11. Revenue dependence and anticipated financial result	12
Table 12. Comments on adequacy of RJCP funding	13
Table 13. Adequacy of funding for activities	13
Table 14. Top three challenges in implementing RJCP	14
Table 15. Level of local Indigenous staff involvement in RJCP delivery	14
Fig. 6. Implementing RJCP—IT and administrative processes	15
Fig. 7. Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees working on RJCP	15
Table 16. Barriers to recruitment of local Indigenous staff	15
Table 17. Importance of staff having JSA experience	16
Table 18. Reasons for staff turnover	16
Fig. 8. Allocation of employee time across activities	17
Table 19. Allocation of management attention	17
Fig. 9. Reported average case loads	17
Table 20. Major influences on CAP development	18
Table 21. Impact of CAP on community influence	19
Fig. 10. Views about CAPs and the CAP process	19
Fig. 11. Views about Indigenous organisations	20
Fig. 12. Perceptions of influence on priorities and activities during the first 10 months of RJCP	21
Fig. A1. Map of the 60 RJCP regions	24

Introduction

During 2011, the Gillard Labor Australian Government conducted a review of 'remote participation and employment servicing'. The review included consideration of four existing 'participation and employment services' then operating in remote areas: Job Services Australia (JSA), Disability Employment Services (DES), the Indigenous Employment Program and the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program. The discussion paper framing the review, entitled 'The future of remote participation and employment service arrangements', argued that services under existing programs were 'fragmented' and 'their goals...not always aligned'. They were also said to be 'inflexible and unresponsive to community needs and aspirations' and 'confusing for the communities and the people living in them' as a result of being 'delivered by several different providers'. In summary, it was argued, 'current market-driven employment services' were 'suited to urban and regional Australia' and did 'not adequately address the issues specific to remote Australia' (Arbib, Macklin & Ellis 2011: 6–7).

In April 2012, after a public consultation process, the new Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) was announced to replace the four existing programs (Macklin, Shorten & Collins 2012a). From 1 July 2013, RJCP would provide 'a more integrated and flexible approach to employment and community services for people in remote areas' through a 'single provider' in each of 65 'remote service regions'. Other features of the new program were described as 'personalised support for job seekers', a 'Community Action Plan linked to the operation of the employment and participation service', a 'Community Development Fund to help communities build the strong social foundations that lead to better economic opportunities' and a 'new Remote Youth Leadership and Development Corps to help young people transition successfully from school to work and build foundation and vocational skills'. This change was needed, it was argued, because, while there are 'economic opportunities in remote Australia, communities still have high unemployment rates and limited access to services' (Macklin, Shorten & Collins 2012b).

In October 2012, a call was issued for expressions of interest (EOIs) in becoming an RJCP provider in each of 59 identified regions, to be lodged during November 2012. Organisations were invited to 'participate', either as 'individual providers or in partnership with other organisations'. But it was specifically noted by the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, that the government

wanted 'to see as many local Indigenous organisations delivering the new program as possible' and that to this end \$15m was available 'to help build the capacity of potential providers'. The government had 'also made it a requirement of the selection process, that applicants demonstrate their connection to communities in the regions, as well as their capacity to deliver the services required' (Macklin, Shorten & Collins 2012c).

Successful providers of RJCP in what ended up as 60 remote regions¹ were announced progressively from April to June 2013. This was later than proposed in the Australian Government's own 'indicative timeline' set out in the EOI documents, but did not alter the goal of having RJCP up and running on 1 July 2013 (DEEWR 2012:iii). The complexities around the procurement process may have been compounded by the involvement of three ministers and the two departments jointly administering RJCP: the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). Collapsing four existing programs into one meant that the emergence of RJCP was also a challenging exercise in collaboration between Australian Government departments and ministries.

These dynamics around the establishment of RJCP changed with the election of the Abbott Coalition Australian Government in September 2013. The new government had a declared policy of transferring responsibility for 'Indigenous programmes' to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) as part of Abbott's desire to have both a 'Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs and a dedicated Indigenous Affairs Minister' (Loughnane 2013: 2). While RJCP was technically a remote-area program rather than an 'Indigenous programme', its high relevance to Indigenous people saw it moved into PM&C. Personnel from the two previous departments were brought together, and RJCP gained two extra letters in its unabbreviated name to become a 'Programme'. In addition, the Coalition foreshadowed a 'review into Indigenous employment programmes', headed by miner and founder of the Australian Employment Covenant Andrew Forrest, to take place during the first six months of an Abbott government (Forrest 2014; Loughnane 2013: 5). Even before that review had started, the new Coalition Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion, was reported as describing RJCP as 'a complete disaster' (Karvelas 2013). The first year of RJCP was destined to involve even more changes and challenges than the program(me)'s designers might have anticipated.

Program antecedents

While presented as a new approach, RJCP has retained many elements of the programs that preceded it, particularly JSA and CDEP. These two antecedents have quite different policy histories, which have been shaped by different bureaucratic structures and providers, and characterised by different types of policy debates. One of the intentions of the survey reported here was to identify the extent to which some of the people, behaviours and ideas that characterised these different policy pasts are shaping the way that RJCP works in practice. For this reason, before reporting survey findings, it may be useful to provide a brief account of these two principal program antecedents.

JSA is the latest iteration of a radical experiment in the application of market-style logic to delivery of human services.² Australia was a world leader in privatising the provision of employment services in 1998. At the time, it was anticipated that this shift would both lower the cost of provision and harness the entrepreneurialism of a range of contracted providers (Productivity Commission 2002: iv). By 2010, the new quasi-market had achieved the former, but, in the view of several analysts, there was little evidence of entrepreneurialism or innovation (Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2011; Fowkes 2011; OECD 2012: 91). Instead, it was marked by increased concentration of providers, erosion of skills at the frontline and increased convergence of practice (Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2011). While this quasi-market system operated in principle in remote Australia, it was not until after 2006 that contracted providers established a substantial presence. When they did, it was alongside CDEP, an Indigenous-specific program of much longer standing.

CDEP was first established in 1977 as an alternative to the widespread payment of Unemployment Benefits in remote Indigenous communities. Indigenous organisations were given grants roughly equivalent to the Unemployment Benefit entitlements of local community members in order to provide them with part-time employment. Building the resources and authority of local Indigenous organisations, CDEP was very popular and spread to regional and urban areas from the late 1980s. At its height in the 1990s, CDEP had 35,000 participants and accounted for one-third of the budget of the Australian Government's Indigenous statutory authority and elected representative body, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. From the late 1990s, with the development of a general Work for the Dole scheme, CDEP became drawn closer to the general social security system. CDEP participants were given Centrelink customer reference numbers and paid

an equivalent of the Work for the Dole supplement, while still remaining employees of their CDEP provider. From 2004, with the dismantling the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, CDEP was transferred first to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and then, from late 2007, to FaHCSIA. Reviews of CDEP during these years saw it restricted back to remote areas and participant numbers falling. From July 2009, new participants were no longer employees of CDEP providers, but became Newstart Allowance recipients undertaking activities (Sanders 2012).³

By the time of the Gillard Labor government's review of 'remote participation and employment servicing' in 2011, participant numbers in CDEP were down to 10,500, less than half of whom were in employment on wages. By contrast, registered job seekers in remote areas had grown to 32,000 in JSA, 85 per cent of whom were Indigenous, with another 1,200 in Disability Employment Services (DES) (Arbib, Macklin & Ellis 2011: 7). While CDEP was still very important in remote areas in 2011, it no longer dominated as completely as it had until 2006. Change had preceded the emergence of RJCP, but would be taken further by it. In 2014, some 3,000 CDEP participants are still employed on wages within RJCP and can remain so until 2017. However, CDEP as a program in which participants are employed by community organisations is now dead (Sanders 2012).

Conceptually, RJCP is an adaptation of JSA in which job seekers on income support undertake activities, fulfilling obligations under the *Social Security Act 1991*. RJCP retains many of the key elements of JSA, including mandatory client assessments, minimum monthly appointments, funding based on activities and outcomes rather than grant funding, and a requirement that providers enter into and monitor Individual Participation Plans (IPPs) with each client. The main adaptations from JSA in urban and regional areas are RJCP's single provider in each remote region (i.e. lack of direct provider competition), the Community Action Plans (CAPs) and the Community Development Fund (CDF).

From CDEP, RJCP has continued a pattern of year-round weekly activities of 15–20 hours per week—albeit applied to a larger proportion of the population. In other parts of the country, this 'mutual obligation' activity requirement applies only to those unemployed for more than six months, and then only six months in each year.

Survey method and report structure

This working paper reports on a survey of provider organisations conducted almost one year into the

implementation of RJCP. It is part of a larger research project on the implementation of RJCP during its first three years, with funding support from the Australian Research Council and Jobs Australia (Linkage Project 130100226). The project aims to understand how RJCP developed during those years, from a general policy idea to specific grounded practice at community, regional and jurisdictional levels.

This first survey asked senior managers within RJCP provider organisations to reflect on experiences during the first year of operation. Generally, the survey presented groups of statements to these managers probing various aspects of RJCP that had emerged from policy statements, public debate, exploratory interviews and existing knowledge. Respondents were asked to rank statements in importance or to indicate how strongly they agreed/disagreed or were positive/negative about statements (using a five-point scale). Occasionally, questions were more open ended or elicited information that respondents supplied.

This working paper largely works through the survey in the order presented to respondents. First, it covers basic arrangements and characteristics of provider organisations. Second, it explores ideas about joblessness in remote areas and welfare conditionality. Third is some probing about provider relationships with government officials. Fourth is a focus on program delivery and details about money, staffing and operational challenges, such as the focus on information technology (IT) and compliance. Fifth, we turn to broader influences on the shaping of program delivery, like CAPs and community perceptions.⁴

Part A: Provision arrangements

The remote areas of Australia covered by RJCP have been divided into 60 regions (refer to the map in Appendix A). These new regions replace different, overlapping, service areas that had been established by DEEWR and FaHCSIA to deliver JSA, DES and CDEP. In the areas now covered by RJCP, 21 organisations had been delivering JSA,⁵ while 55 organisations delivered CDEP (11 delivered both). The implementation of the new 'single provider' arrangements required consolidation of providers and, in many cases, existing JSA and CDEP providers in a region both expressed interest in delivering RJCP.

CDEP providers had in the past been almost exclusively Indigenous organisations, while JSA was predominantly delivered by non-Indigenous organisations—both private and non-profit. In recent years, however, as some CDEP

providers ventured into JSA, some non-Indigenous providers, such as local governments, ventured into CDEP. By the time of the call for EOIs in delivering RJCP, there was a mix of Indigenous organisations, non-Indigenous non-profits, local governments and private for-profit providers operating in this field.

Throughout the purchasing process, the government strongly encouraged group tendering and delivery, contracting a large accountancy firm, KPMG, to provide advice on arrangements. The configuration of RJCP providers reflects this, with a range of new joint venture organisations, sub-contracting arrangements and servicing agreements across the group. This has meant that the characterisation of RJCP 'providers' as organisational entities is not straightforward. A single organisation may operate in one region as part of a joint venture and in another as a sub-contractor. Named sub-contractors may deliver the full range of RJCP services or only the occasional project. To make sense of the survey, this paper uses the term 'unique grouping' to refer to a specific configuration of organisations contracted to deliver in one or more regions. A single organisation may be part of more than one unique grouping—for example, it might operate as part of a consortium with one provider in one region, and as a lead contractor with a completely unrelated provider in another.

Published information about successful providers at the time of the survey enabled identification of around 44 unique groupings delivering RJCP.⁶ This information showed that most providers deliver RJCP in one or two regions. However, four private organisations (My Pathway, Jobfind, Max Employment and Complete Personnel) deliver across more than 20 regions between them—often in some form of group delivery arrangement with local organisations. So, while nearly 60 per cent of providers are Indigenous organisations, they deliver services in less than half of the 60 RJCP regions.⁷

Organisations responding to the survey

Online surveys (via Survey Monkey) were sent to every organisation that was identifiable as a lead provider (i.e. an organisation operating on its own or with sub-contractors) or a consortium partner in RJCP. Large multi-region providers were given the option of passing the survey to their regional managers. Multiple responses from a single organisation were only included where each related to different service regions.

In total, 45 organisations responded, with 49 responses in all. These organisations deliver services across 58 of the 60 regions. Some organisational responses relate

to more than one region (often adjacent). In a small number of regions, two organisations in a group delivery arrangement each responded.

Survey instructions asked for completion by a senior staff member with a good knowledge of RJCP. In their responses, survey participants identified themselves as holding senior roles ranging from chief executive officers to managers responsible for delivery in a single region.

Table 1 analyses all responses by organisation type. Thirty-two (65%) were from Indigenous, non-profit organisations. Among the non-Indigenous organisations, 10 out of 17 (just under 60%) were non-profits (which includes non-government and local government organisations).

TABLE 1. Type of organisation responding to survey

Type of organisation	Responses	
	%	No.
Indigenous non-profit	65.3	32
Non-Indigenous non-profit	16.3	8
Non-Indigenous for-profit	14.3	7
Local government	4.1	2
Total	100.0	49

Most respondents reported that their organisation had past experience delivering one or more employment or related programs (Table 2). This included a substantial majority that had delivered CDEP (61%) or JSA (57%).⁸ Twenty respondents (41%) reported that their organisation had experience with both CDEP and JSA. While 11 respondents reported that their organisations had not delivered any of these programs, this included some joint-venture organisations established to deliver RJCP where one or both of the partners had been CDEP and/or JSA providers. So, while there is considerable continuity in service provision from CDEP and JSA—and a significant group that had been delivering both—there is also diversity and a small group of new entrants—a rarity in the wider employment services market (OECD 2012: 76).

The diversity of organisations delivering RJCP is also evident in Table 3, which shows size of respondent organisations. Larger organisations include national and multinational organisations (e.g. Mission Australia and Max Employment) and some regional organisations, including local government and multi-functional Indigenous service providers.

TABLE 2. Past experience of organisations responding to survey

Past experience	Responses	
	%	No.
CDEP	61.2	30
JSA/Job Network	57.1	28
Both CDEP & JSA/ Job Network	40.8	20
Disability Employment Services	20.4	10
Indigenous Employment Program	34.7	17
None of these	22.4	11
Total		49

Note: Multiple responses allowed.

TABLE 3. Size of organisations responding to survey

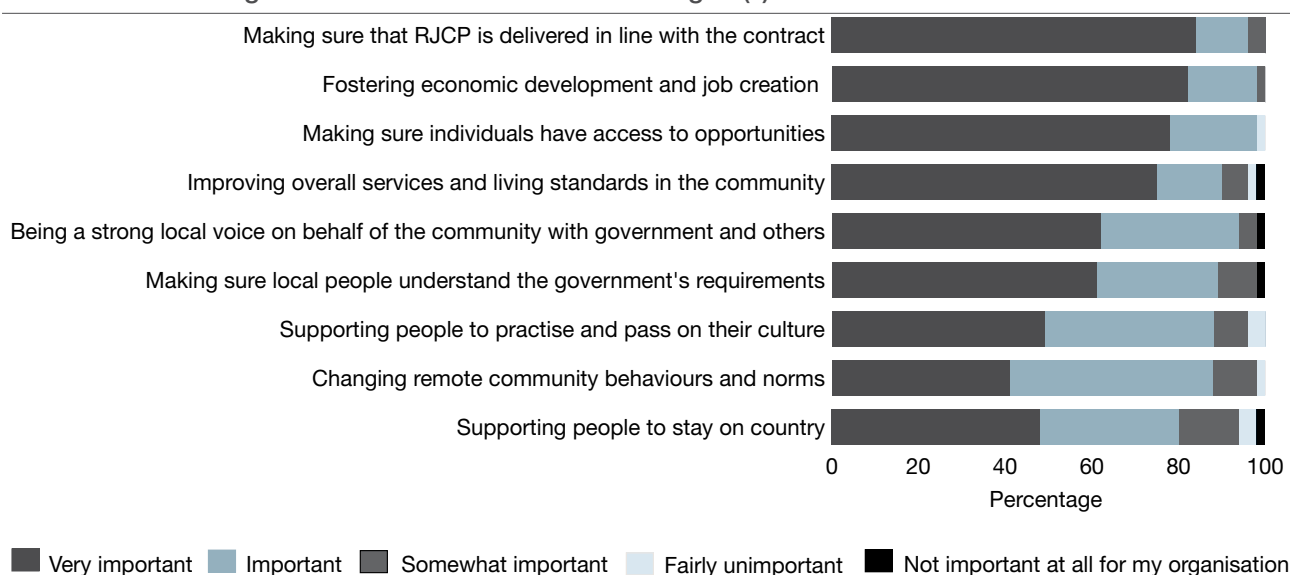
Total employees of organisation	Responses	
	%	No.
Fewer than 20	11.1	5
20–49	28.9	13
50–99	17.8	8
100–499	28.9	13
500 or more	13.3	6
Total	100.0	45

Note: Organisations have been included only once, even if they reported on a regional basis.

The majority of organisations that responded to the survey (56% of the 45) had their head office in their RJCP service region. But, if we count by region, services in more than 60 per cent of RJCP regions are delivered by organisations with head offices outside their RJCP region(s) (a map of RJCP regions is in Appendix A).

While diverse in scale and experience, respondents across the group were quite consistent in their identification of important roles that their organisation plays in RJCP regions (Fig. 1). Respondents were given a list of possible roles and asked to identify the level of importance of each from 'very important' to 'not important at all for my organisation'. The most frequently identified important roles were those that relate directly to the RJCP contract and to employment creation. But advocacy, supporting people to remain on country, and 'changing remote community behaviours and norms' were also identified as important or very important by more than 50 per cent of the respondents. There was little variation in selection of important roles across types of respondent organisations.

FIG. 1. Roles of organisations in their RJCP service region(s)



Note: n = 48

Stand-alone providers and groups

As noted above, the development of group servicing arrangements was promoted by the Australian Government during the purchasing process—both before and after organisations had put forward their EOIs. Only half of respondents identified their organisation as a stand-alone (or sole) provider in their region, while others were part of various forms of group arrangements (Table 4). Within the sole provider group, five respondents (one-fifth) said they had been asked to consider group arrangements, but had rejected this proposal.

TABLE 4. Delivery arrangements of RJCP provider groupings

Which of the following best describes the arrangements that your organisation has in place to deliver RJCP?	Responses	
	%	No.
Sole provider for whole RJCP region	51.0	25
Part of a joint venture or consortium formed to deliver RJCP	24.5	12
Lead organisation with one or more sub-contractors performing a significant portion of the work	14.3	7
Sub-contractor to another organisation	10.2	5
Total	100.0	49

Most respondents identified improvements in community outcomes as a key motivator for entering into group arrangements (Table 5). But here, too, the Australian Government has been influential in fostering new configurations, with six of those in group arrangements saying that they had been asked to consider partnering after the submission of the EOI and three others indicating that they felt they had to partner to win the contract.

TABLE 5. Main reasons for providers to enter into a group arrangement

Which of the following best describes your main reasons for entering into an arrangement with others to deliver RJCP?	Responses	
	%	No.
We believed that, with the other organisation(s), we could better achieve community outcomes	65.2	15
We were asked by the government to consider partnering with another organisation after the EOI had been submitted	26.1	6
We did not have the skills and capabilities to deliver on our own	13.0	3
We believed that we had to partner to be successful in the EOI process	13.0	3
We needed another organisation to cover the whole region	8.7	2
Total respondents		23

Note: Multiple responses allowed.

The 24 providers in group arrangements were asked to rate the success of the arrangements across a number of areas (Fig. 2). Respondents were positive about them in most areas, although not very strongly so. The most negative responses were in the area of financial viability. The impact of group arrangements on ‘getting up and running quickly’ was most mixed, with both very positive and very negative assessments from four respondents each. Comments in the survey from organisations with multiple sub-contractors reflected different levels of challenges in engaging with different organisations. They also identified a substantial cost associated with building these relationships, particularly those formed during the EOI process. Two sub-contractors commented on their lack of steady work and/or expressed disappointment in their level of involvement in delivery.

Indigenous organisations in group arrangements (13 respondents) were less positive than non-Indigenous organisations (10 respondents). Indigenous organisations expressed slightly more negative views in the areas of staff support, financial viability and independence.

Respondents’ backgrounds

Respondents ranged from chief executive officers to regional managers. Around 70 per cent of respondents had been with their organisation or another in the ‘group’ for more than a year—in other words, since before RJCP began (Table 6).

TABLE 6. Length of time with this employer

How long have you worked for this organisation (or one of the organisations in your group)?	Responses	
	%	No.
Less than 1 year	28.6	14
1–2 years	18.4	9
Between 2 and 5 years	26.5	13
More than 5 years	26.5	13
Total	100.0	49

FIG. 2. Attitudes to group arrangements

How successful have the arrangements been in each of the following areas:



Note: n = 24

Even if they were new to their own organisations, a substantial majority of respondents (92%) had experience in one or more relevant programs (Table 7). Most (71%) had experience in either JSA or CDEP. Just under two-thirds of respondents reported experience in more than one employment program. Just as the RJCP provider organisations have a history in earlier programs, these managers also bring their experience in working in one or more of these earlier policies and programs.

TABLE 7. Related experience of respondents

Have you, personally, worked in any of the following:	Responses	
	%	No.
JSA/Job Network	55.1	27
CDEP	42.9	21
DES	14.3	7
Other remote programs	42.9	21
Other Indigenous employment programs/initiatives	55.1	27
None of the above	8.2	4
Total		49

Note: Multiple responses allowed.

Eleven respondents identified themselves as of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background, of whom nine worked in an Indigenous organisation. Most respondents (73%) identified themselves as non-Indigenous. The proportion of Indigenous people in this senior group (22%) is well below the much larger representation reported for all RJCP staff (66%) (see 'Staffing profile').

Part B: Ideas about joblessness and welfare conditionality

In any program, there is a set of underpinning ideas about the nature of the policy 'problem' and strategies to address it, which may be more or less explicit. RJCP providers must make decisions about allocation of resources and attention between types of strategies to achieve employment outcomes—those that emphasise participant activity/compliance and human capital investments, or those aimed at broader economic development. One of the factors that might influence this decision making—and therefore the way the program operates on the ground—is the views of program providers on the underlying causes of joblessness and what might help overcome it, as well as views about who should take responsibility for action. These issues were explored through a number of questions in the survey.

Causes of joblessness

Fig. 3 sets out responses when respondents were asked to assess the importance of a list of suggested possible causes of joblessness in the RJCP region(s) in which they work. The 'possible causes' were derived from interviews with people involved in the sector and from key arguments in public debates about unemployment in remote areas. They have been grouped to reflect different types of explanations:

- local labour market conditions (particularly local labour demand)
- social norms and/or behavioural causes
- workplace microeconomic factors, such as discrimination.

Lack of jobs in the RJCP region was identified as 'most important' or 'very important' by 82 per cent of respondents. Sixty-seven per cent (33) identified the unaddressed health issues as most or very important, and 59 per cent identified 'lack of investment'. While these local labour market factors were most frequently ranked as most important, some factors in the 'social norms and behaviours' group were also seen as important by more than 50 per cent of respondents—particularly factors related to family, motivation and 'being too used to getting welfare for doing nothing'. 'Government not being tough enough on welfare recipients' and refusal to consider options outside the community attracted the least agreement and most disagreement in this grouping. Fewer respondents saw discrimination in workplaces or lack of support to move as very important causes of joblessness.

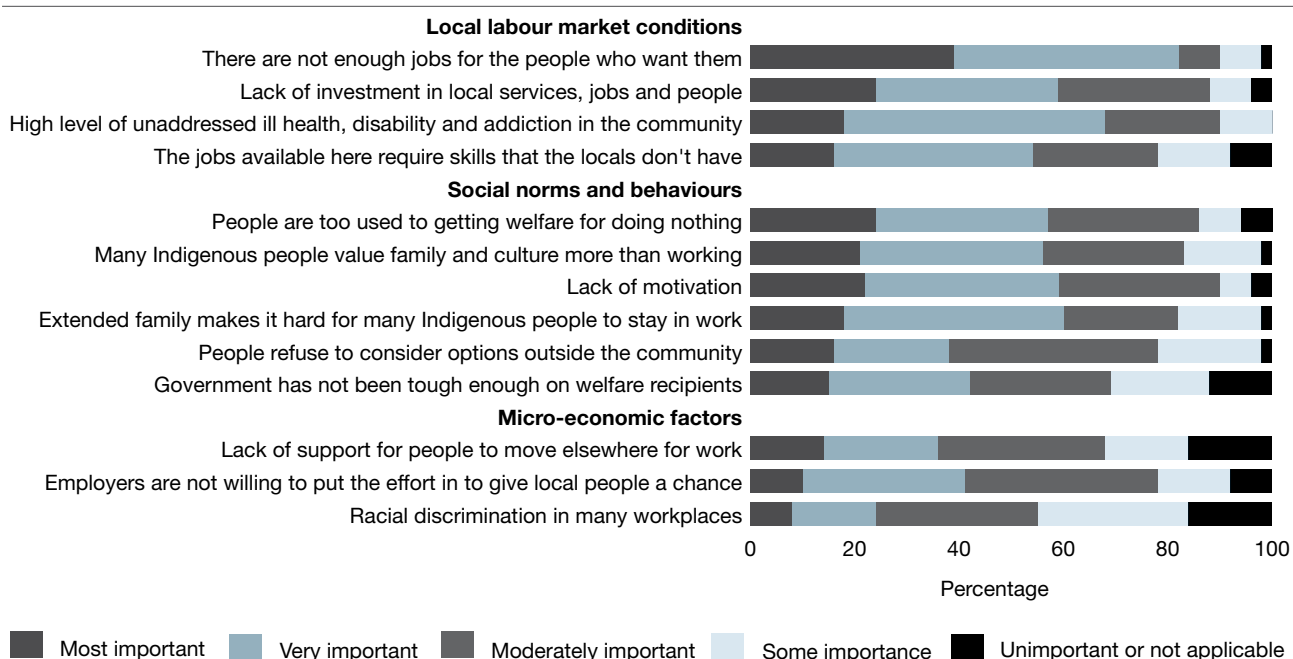
Strategies to address joblessness

Respondents were presented with a range of possible strategies that could be employed to address the problem of joblessness in their RJCP region(s) and asked to rate these in terms of their efficacy, with 0 meaning 'no difference' and 5 meaning 'the most difference'. Table 8 shows the average and the distribution of respondents choosing 0–5 for various strategies. Possible strategies reflected suggestions made in preliminary interviews, as well as those that emerge from public debate, and have been grouped into three categories:

- individual/behavioural
- demand creation
- human capital investment.

Overall, demand creation and human capital strategies were rated as more effective than attempts to change individual

FIG. 3. Causes of joblessness in remote regions



Note: n = 49

behaviour through welfare conditionality. ‘Requiring weekly activity’ was the most highly ranked of behavioural measures, while ‘increased job search’ was ranked as the least likely to make a difference. ‘Abolishing CDEP wages’ appears to be a polarising topic within the group, with respondents from former JSA providers most likely to see this as effective, and former CDEP providers least likely. On the other hand, ‘paid work experience on community projects’ was assessed as more likely to be effective—suggesting that it is something specific to CDEP, rather than all paid work programs, that polarised respondents.

Responsibility for taking action

Table 9 sets out a series of possible views of the balance of responsibility between individuals and government for taking action in relation to unemployment. Items C, G and H also attempted to elicit views about the extent to which Indigenous culture has been or should be accommodated.

Items A–E in Table 9 attracted the strongest agreement, with 90 per cent agreeing that ‘where there aren’t other jobs available locally, government should have programs that allow people to do paid work that benefits their communities’, and 75 per cent agreeing that ‘government is too focused on getting individuals to comply and not focused enough on community development’. At the other end of the scale, there was 77 per cent disagreement with item J—the idea that people should be required to ‘move or lose income support’ if they cannot find work in their own community. Views on other items, including the accommodation of culture (G), were more mixed. A majority of respondents supported both greater flexibility in participation requirements (D) and that these be enforced more rigorously (E), but, in each case, a significant minority were opposed to or neutral about the idea.

TABLE 8. Effectiveness of strategies to address joblessness

Thinking about the region(s) you operate in, rate the following in terms of how likely each would mean more local people getting and keeping work:	Responses (no.) ^a						Total	Average rating
	0	1	2	3	4	5		
1 Creating additional jobs in the community (D)	0	0	0	1	16	32	49	4.63
2 Developing jobs in culturally based enterprises (D)	1	0	2	5	19	22	49	4.14
3 Improving literacy and numeracy (HC)	1	0	0	12	13	23	49	4.14
4 Paid work experience on community projects (D)	2	1	4	10	20	12	49	3.65
5 Addressing personal and health factors that impact on work (e.g. domestic violence) (HC)	2	3	3	11	17	13	49	3.57
6 Making sure the unemployed do activities every week (I/B)	1	2	5	16	11	14	49	3.55
7 Vocational training in skills shortage areas (HC)	2	0	7	15	13	11	48	3.46
8 Employers changing their hiring practices (D)	3	3	4	12	21	6	49	3.29
9 Actual suspension of income support (I/B)	7	6	4	12	12	8	49	2.82
10 Offering support to people to leave the community (I/B)	3	7	10	14	7	8	49	2.80
11 Abolishing CDEP wages (I/B)	10	4	6	10	7	11	48	2.69
12 Income management (I/B)	8	6	6	12	8	9	49	2.67
13 Threat of suspension of income support (I/B)	8	5	8	19	1	8	49	2.49
14 Increased job search requirements (I/B)	14	7	11	9	5	3	49	1.86

D = demand creation (white); HC = human capital investment (grey); I/B = individual/behavioural (light grey)
a 0 = no difference; 5 = most difference

TABLE 9. Views on responsibilities of government and individuals in relation to employment and welfare

How strongly do you agree with the view that:	Responses (%)					Total (no.)
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
A. Where there aren't other jobs available locally, government should have programs that allow people to do paid work that benefits their communities	42	48	6	4	0	48
B. Government is too focused on getting individuals to comply and not focused enough on community development	30	45	17	9	0	47
C. Cultural and family obligations are frequently used to avoid reasonable participation obligations	23	35	25	13	4	48
D. More flexibility is needed in what people can do to meet their participation obligations	22	39	16	20	2	49
E. Government should be tougher on people who fail to meet their participation obligations	21	35	27	10	6	48
F. Participation requirements of people in remote communities are often unrealistic given their circumstances	18	41	18	18	4	49
G. Participation obligations often fail to take enough account of Indigenous peoples' cultural and family obligations	19	35	21	23	2	48
H. Government should provide funding to enable some people in community to earn a living practising their culture	13	46	29	10	2	48
I. Government has a responsibility to make sure that everyone has access to paid employment at a reasonable wage	13	48	27	10	2	48
J. If people can't find work in their own community, they should be required to move or lose income support	0	2	21	48	29	48

Part C: Working with government

In the call for EOIs in delivering RJCP, the Australian Government stated that:

The RJCP is based on community ownership and involvement; it will encourage and promote a collaborative, community driven approach to conducting employment and participation activities (DEEWR 2012: 1).

For this to occur, providers must be responsive to community needs and aspirations, and the relationship between government and providers must enable providers to respond.

The survey explored provider views of working with government officials—in relation to RJCP in general and with local PM&C staff in particular.

Relationship with government officials

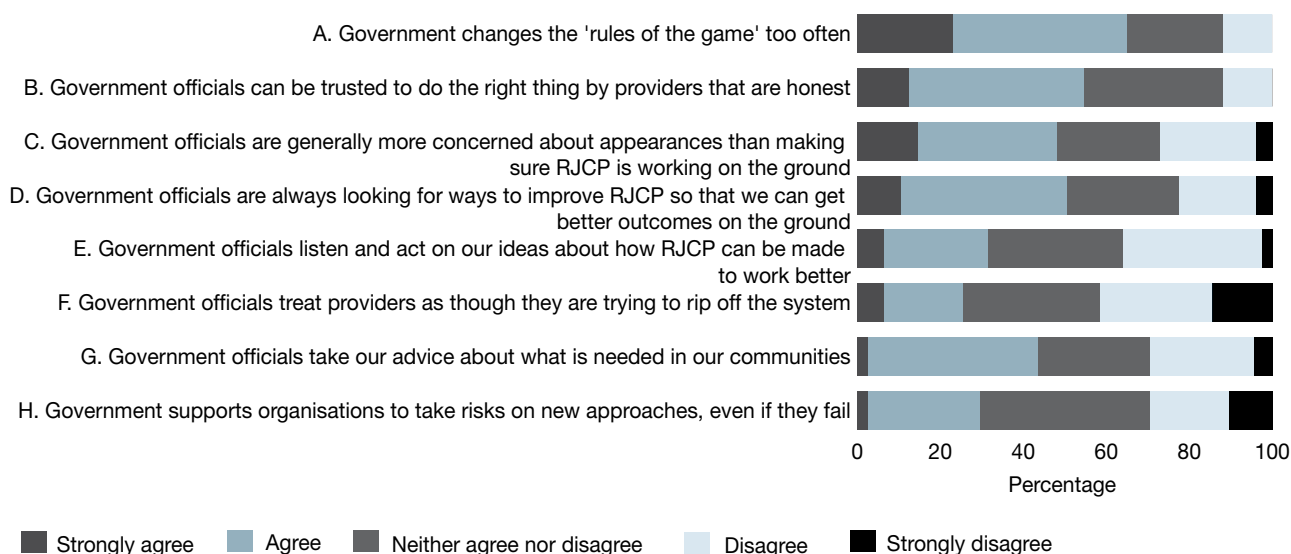
Fig. 4 examines views of providers about general dealings with government officials in relation to RJCP. The item that elicited the strongest agreement was that ‘government changes the rules of the game too often’, with which 31 respondents (two-thirds) agreed. Elsewhere, Considine, Lewis and O’Sullivan (2011) have drawn a link between the anticipation that rules may change (in particular, to increase scrutiny) and implementation of standardised processes by providers

to mitigate risk. Responses here suggest that this could emerge as an issue in RJCP.

Across most other items in this question, providers expressed more varied views. While a small majority of respondents agreed that government officials can be trusted to do the right thing by providers that are honest (B), many also agreed that government officials are more concerned with appearances than making things work on the ground (C). Fairly low levels of agreement with statements E and G suggest that many providers feel that they have limited influence on the ongoing development of the program. Responses to F suggest that, for the most part, providers do not feel that they are negatively viewed by government.

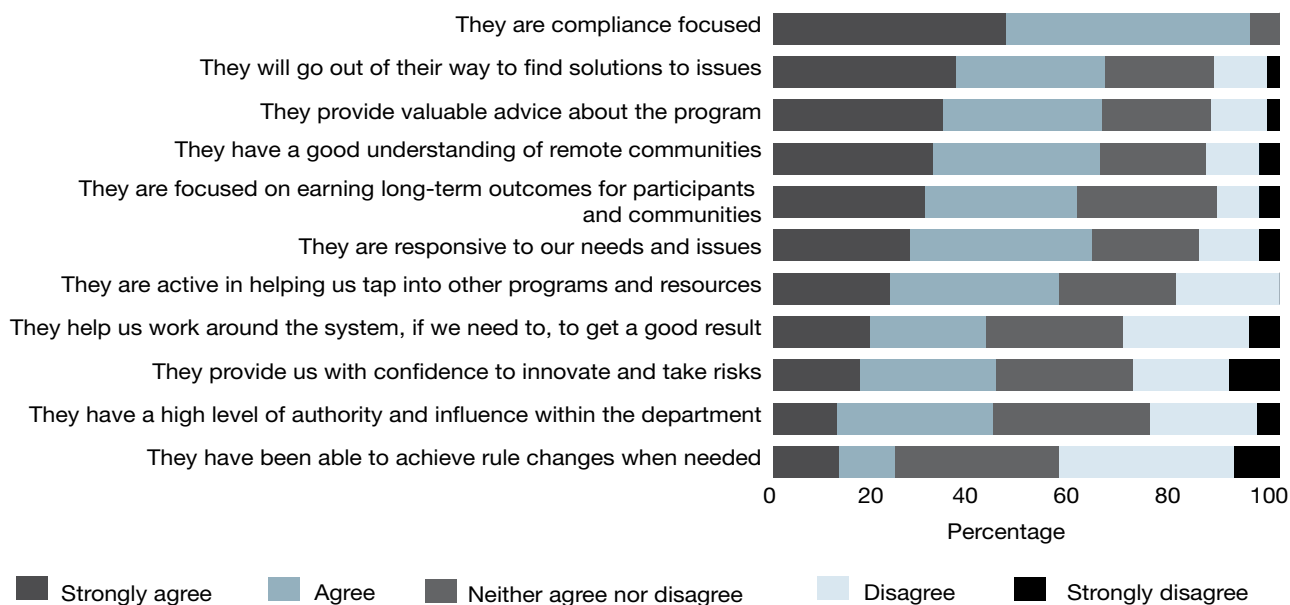
Fig. 5 sets out responses to statements about local PM&C staff. What stands out is overwhelming (90%) agreement that they are compliance focused. Most providers also agreed that PM&C staff were helpful and responsive (e.g. going ‘out of their way to find solutions’ and that ‘they provide valuable advice about the program’). However, in each case, there was also a small group who disagreed. Responses to questions in relation to the ability of local PM&C officials to secure rule changes, their influence in the department and their ability to provide ‘confidence to innovate’ suggest that many providers view local officials as lacking the required level of authority to move beyond contract monitoring and administration to a partnership approach.

FIG. 4. Views about dealing with government officials in relation to RJCP



Note: n = 48

FIG. 5. Views about local PM&C staff working on RJCP



Note: n = 48

Providers’ influence over program direction

Just over half of respondents (23) reported that their organisations had put forward proposals to government for change to RJCP since it began. Of those that said that their organisation had not put forward a change (13), most (8) indicated that they were ‘too busy trying to deliver the program’, while another 5 agreed that they were ‘happy with the program at this stage’.

All but two of the organisations that provided information about advocacy strategies (22), indicated that they had used more than one approach. The most common was a direct approach to government staff at the State or local level, and the next most frequent was a direct communication with the Minister or his office (Table 10). Twelve organisations had used a peak body such as Jobs Australia or the National Employment Services Association (or, in one case, both).

An open-ended question asked respondents to ‘comment on the outcome (if any) of your advocacy’. Thirteen responded, of whom nine (70%) said that there had been no change, three reported changes at the margins, one said that they had received clarification of existing guidelines and one received CDF funding. The following was typical of the comments of those reporting no change in response to representations:

Nothing has changed at all despite our efforts. So far ... [it] seems to be that change within the contractual framework is simply not possible.

TABLE 10. Providers’ approaches with ideas for change

Who providers approached with ideas for change	Responses	
	%	No.
Direct approach to government staff at State or local level	77.3	17
Communication with Minister for Indigenous Affairs or his office	72.7	16
Submission to Forrest review	63.6	14
Direct approach to government staff at national level	45.5	10
Representations through the National Employment Services Association	45.5	10
Representations through Jobs Australia	13.6	3
Total respondents		22

Note: Multiple responses allowed.

Part D: Operational challenges

Financial dependence and revenue adequacy

This survey was conducted over May and June 2014—close enough to the end of the financial year for respondents to have a sense of the full year result. In Table 11, only one response is reported for each organisation. Of 41 organisations, only one expected a significant surplus from RJCP. Nearly 80 per cent expected to break even or end up with a small surplus or deficit. Table 11 also shows the estimated proportion of total revenue that RJCP represents for organisations. Nearly half reported that RJCP was likely to make up less than 20 per cent of total revenue, with nearly one-third of these less-dependent organisations expecting a significant deficit from RJCP. Three organisations with relatively high revenue dependence on RJCP (50–79% of total) also stated that they expected a significant deficit. Organisations expecting a significant deficit included those operating on their own and in group arrangements, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations.

TABLE 11. Revenue dependence and anticipated financial result

RJCP revenue as per cent of total	Prov. (no.)	Sig. deficit (no.)	Small surplus/deficit or break even (no.)	Sig. surplus (no.)
Less than 20%	18	5	13	0
20–49%	6	0	5	1
50–79%	9	3	6	0
80–100%	8	0	8	0
Total	41	8	32	1

prov. = providers; sig. = significant

Respondents were asked to comment on the adequacy of RJCP funding. Thirty responded, with comments ranging from a few to a couple of hundred words. These comments were coded by major themes/key points, with eight broad topics emerging. Table 12 summarises themes and numbers of responses.

Specific comments by respondents included:

The economic model with limited funds in the Activity Account puts restraints on the number of staff that can be employed to run the program. This results in case loads for consultants far in excess of

what they can manage. Negative impact on clients. The intensive, micro-management of Participation Account and compliance monitoring instils a feeling of mistrust and trepidation about drawing down on PA to reimburse activity costs.

Our experience is that we have the resources to do potentially more (program activities and capacity building), but are being hamstrung by the complex administration that surrounds access to the PA account. If management and oversight of the PA account could be managed more directly through agreements negotiated between the RJCP provider and their PM&C relationship manager ... it would provide flexibility and free us up from the nightmare of the administrative red tape that hampers our usage of the PA funding resource. Funding is adequate for covering operational costs but accessing funds from the CDF for equipment and buildings is almost impossible!

Difficult to create meaningful activities when all we can afford are the basic set-up costs.

RJCP funding does not take into account the cost of service delivery in the remote areas that need to provide housing, etc. for employees, freight, etc.

The survey probed two more specific issues relating to resourcing activities (Table 13). Nearly half (46%) agreed that lack of resources has meant that they had to stop running some activities that communities valued, while 51 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that ‘there are enough resources in the program to enable us to create quality activities for everyone’.

There is not a sense of crisis in relation to funding adequacy across these responses. What emerges, instead, appears to be a concern that there may not be adequate funds in the long term to provide the level and quality of activities that might be needed, and to invest in larger-scale projects that might enable job creation. While funds are available for some of this work from Participation Accounts, the complexity of accessing these seems to be a barrier for many. At the time of writing, many participants had yet to be engaged in any activity, suggesting that this issue has yet to play out.

TABLE 12. Comments on adequacy of RJCP funding

Theme	Responses (no.)	Key points
Identifies funding adequacy challenges	16	Just over half of comments referred to some type of significant funding challenges in RJCP, particularly in activities.
Lack of funding for activities	11	Specific concerns related to the need for ‘quality, supervised activities’, ‘innovation’, lack of funds for vehicles or large equipment, concerns about capacity to maintain activities over the long term, and the sustainability of the model given a large disadvantaged case load.
Funding is adequate	9	Five of these added a qualifier—e.g. that there was considerable risk or that caution was required, or mentioned specific issues like funding for language, literacy and numeracy training.
Overall funding is inadequate	5	General comments about funding inadequacy, with 2 of these commenting on a lack of understanding of cost impact of remoteness.
Costly to access	7	The most detailed responses related to this area. References are made to ‘administrative red tape that hampers our access to the Participation Account funding’, the cost (in staff time) of claiming, and the risks associated with having to repay money.
Risk and the need to be cautious	8	While not describing funding as inadequate, respondents referred to the need to be cautious with funding and the risk that the funding may not be enough for future years. Two suggested that funding is too reliant on outcomes.
Mention of CDF	3	Mentioned lack of access to CDF as a key barrier to addressing lack of assets or community priorities.
Job creation or infrastructure	2	Mentioned lack of funding for job creation and infrastructure.
Start-up costs	2	Mentioned the need to establish new sites or organisations, and that funding was not adequate to cover this. This included establishing new group arrangements.

TABLE 13. Adequacy of funding for activities

Statement	Responses (%)				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Lack of resources or equipment has meant that we have had to stop running some activities that communities valued	24	22	30	17	7
There are enough resources in the program to enable us to create quality activities for everyone	4	17	28	30	21

Note: $n = 47$

Early implementation challenges

Respondents were presented with a list of 12 items and asked to rank them from those that had been the most to the least difficult for their organisation since the beginning of the contract. There was capacity to mark issues as not applicable. Table 14 shows the frequency with which respondents ranked specific items in their top three challenges. ‘Not enough notice that we had the contract’ received by far the highest number of first rankings

(18 of 47) and featured in the top three challenges for nearly half of respondents.

The responses suggest that many of the most substantial early implementation challenges have arisen out of either government decisions (delay in provider announcements without delay in program start date) or program design (heavy reliance on IT or administrative complexity).

Respondents were presented with a series of more specific statements about the practical operations of RJCP,

TABLE 14. Top three challenges in implementing RJCP

Challenge	Respondents ranking this item in the top 3	
	%	No.
Not enough notice that we had the contract	48.9	23
IT connectivity/IT infrastructure	42.6	20
Need to learn new systems and program rules	34.0	16
Availability of housing for staff	34.0	16
Availability of staff with administrative/computer skills	39.8	14
Availability of equipment and assets for use in activities	27.7	13
Availability of staff with 'people' skills	19.1	9
Cash flow/financial viability	17.0	8
Lack of local services (e.g. mental health, literacy/numeracy training)	14.9	7
Internal governance issues	12.8	6
Lack of support or antagonism from within the community	10.6	5
Lack of motivation of local people to get jobs	8.5	4
Total respondents		47

Note: Multiple responses allowed.

which included some issues about the role of both IT and administrative tools like Individual Participation Plans (IPPs). Responses are set out in Fig. 6. Items A and B highlight the centrality of IT in structuring the day-to-day activities of frontline workers. They echo the findings of Considine and colleagues in relation to JSA workers, where 50.4 per cent of frontline workers agreed that 'our computer system tells me what steps to take with job seekers and when to take them' (Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2011: 10). In this survey, nearly 80 per cent of respondents agreed that 'most staff spend their day in front of a computer' (A), and 75 per cent that IT 'guides a lot of our day-to-day work' (B). Interestingly, the statement on the efficiency of the IT system in managing the case load was one of the most polarising in the survey (C).

Statements D–G attempted to shed light on the balance of emphasis and effort between performing specific administrative processes (often geared to compliance) and achievement of client outcomes. Seventy per cent of respondents agreed that much of their work with clients is 'about compliance, not what they want or need' (D), although providers report that they have significant flexibility within the rules around participation (E). Statements F and G, focusing on the usefulness of letters and IPPs, elicited lower (minority) levels of agreement and some significant disagreement. Both formal letters to participants and the written IPPs underpin the administration of income support recipient obligations under the Social Security Act and, ultimately, the application of breaches. These responses suggest a disjunction between the formal process and what is meaningful for participants and providers.

Staffing profile

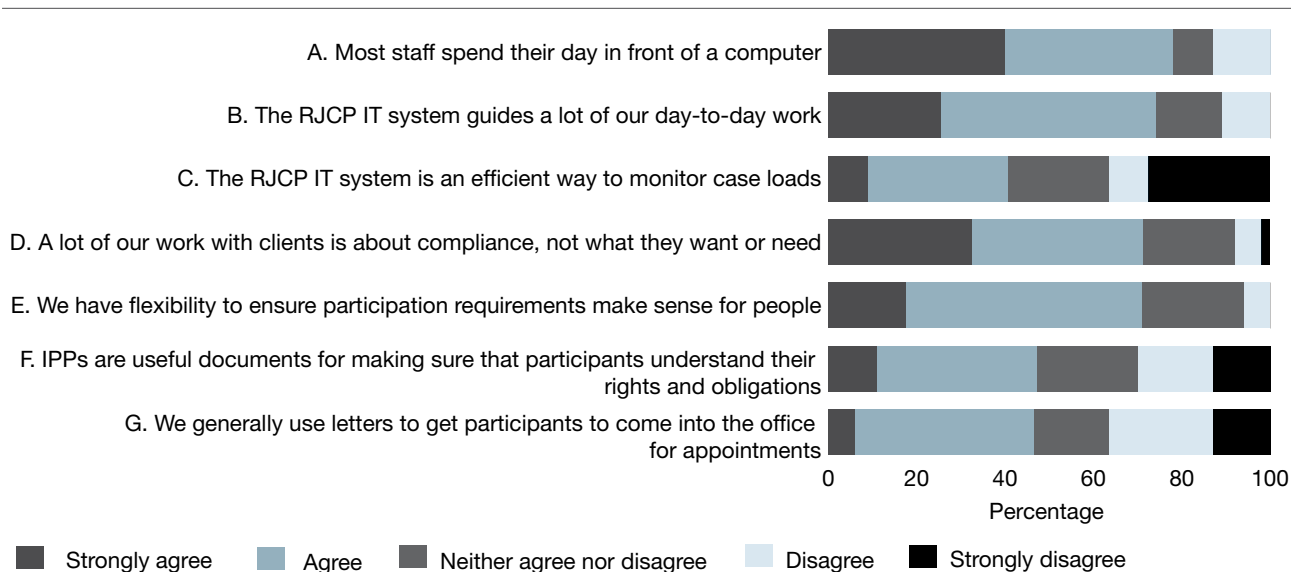
Forty respondents provided staffing information for employees working on RJCP. This represents 56 regions, with a total of 1,101 staff. Overall, 66 per cent of staff were reported to be Indigenous people, with over half of those working on RJCP being local Indigenous people (Fig. 7).

On average, Indigenous organisations had a higher proportion of staff who were local Indigenous people than for-profit organisations (58% and 53%, respectively), and a higher rate of total Indigenous employment (72% and 61%, respectively). Almost two-thirds of respondents viewed the level of local Indigenous staffing in their organisation as 'about right', while one-third said that it was 'too low' (Table 15). Of the 1,101 staff, 92 per cent were reported as being based in the service region.

TABLE 15. Level of local Indigenous staff involvement in RJCP delivery

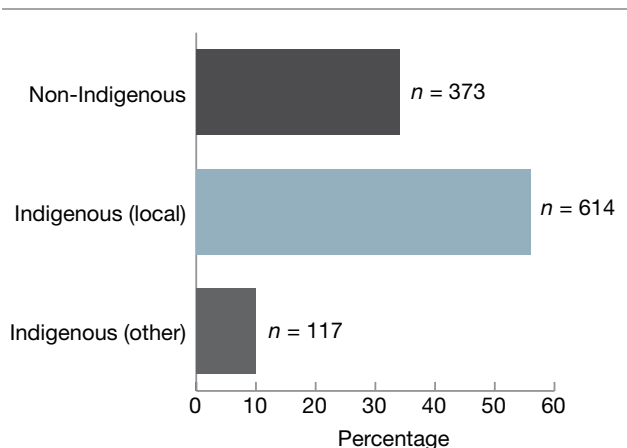
In your view, is the level of local Indigenous staff involvement in RJCP delivery across your region(s):	Responses	
	%	No.
Too high	2.2	1
Too low	34.1	15
About right	63.6	28
Total	100.0	44

FIG. 6. Implementing RJCP—IT and administrative processes



Note: n = 47

FIG. 7. Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees working on RJCP⁹



Respondents were asked to identify ‘the major barriers to employing local Indigenous people to deliver RJCP services’. Seven barriers were identified through reviewing and grouping responses and these are set out in Table 16. More than three-quarters (77%) identified a lack of required skills as a key challenge. The most commonly mentioned skills required were IT and high-level administrative skills, followed by general literacy and numeracy. Other skills gaps identified included lack of knowledge of available services and/or employment opportunities. Four respondents said that there was inadequate funding for the level of training, mentoring and supervision that was needed to enable more local Indigenous people to be engaged. Two respondents commented on the particular problem of lack of IT and administrative skills among older, respected members of

the community who had more authority to implement the compliance regime—for example, ‘respected elders etc. who are recommended as supervisors often have little to no literacy/numeracy and building capacity in them is taking time’.

TABLE 16. Barriers to recruitment of local Indigenous staff

Barrier	Responses	
	%	No.
Skills (all)	77.1	27
IT and high-level administrative skills	25.7	9
Literacy and numeracy skills	22.9	8
Challenge in enforcing job seeker compliance	20.0	7
Culture/family (e.g. sorry business, feuding)	20.0	7
Work ethic or interest in the work	14.3	5
Lack of funds for training and supervision	11.4	4
Total		35

Note: Multiple responses allowed.

Staffing: relevance of JSA experience

Respondents were asked to comment on the importance of JSA experience in their recruitment process. Responses are presented in Table 17.

TABLE 17. Importance of staff having JSA experience

How important was it to you to have JSA experience in your RJCP team?	Responses	
	%	No.
Essential	9.1	4
Very important	20.5	9
Important	18.2	8
Somewhat important	38.6	17
Unimportant	13.6	6
Undesirable	0.0	0
Total	100.0	44

Respondents were asked to comment on why, and 33 respondents gave reasons. Around one-quarter said that they felt that RJCP was based on JSA. For example:

The RJCP database is an abridged version of the JSA system and as such familiarity with the system was critical (and still is) in understanding how the new system works. The contract management framework and program assurance are all modelled on JSA systems. The biggest variation is the community element of the program, which is very Work for the Dole like and as such was adaptable.

One-quarter said that the importance that they attached to JSA experience related to the need to have people who understood the compliance system. For example:

The RJCP program is extremely compliance and administratively burdened compared to the CDEP program. CDEP staff did not understand the compliance framework or refused to utilise it as we are required to under RJCP contracts.

Relevant experience was not always available:

Not enough people have RJCP experience so you go with people with the best computer skills and adequate literacy levels.

Two respondents thought that JSA experience brought case work experience or an understanding of how to move people towards work. But four felt that those with JSA backgrounds might not bring the right approach:

Too much experience in government programs tends to lead a person to be too focused on reports to government, and not enough on the clients' needs and wants.

Nine respondents (27%) suggested that people skills were the most important thing, and that other skills could be learned:

System knowledge vs local knowledge has always been the problem. I have found it better to train local people in use of systems than bring people with system knowledge into the region.

But three noted that late notice of the contract had prevented this, forcing them to recruit for existing systems knowledge, while two said that they did not have the capacity to do the required training.

Staff turnover

Forty respondents (91%) reported staff turnover in the first 10 months, with 12 (27%) reporting substantial turnover. Respondents who reported turnover were asked to describe the main reasons it occurred. Thirty-eight comments were received and categorised, as reported in Table 18.

TABLE 18. Reasons for staff turnover

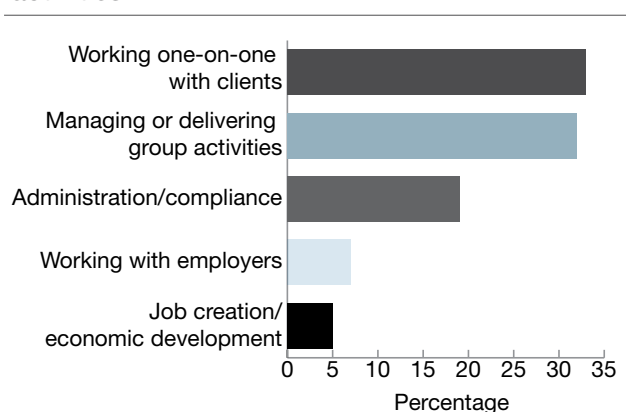
Reasons for staff turnover	Responses	
	%	No.
Performance of staff member/poor fit	26.3	10
Left town	23.7	9
Personal/family reasons	23.7	9
Overwhelmed by new contractual requirements and changes to contract	23.7	9
Too much administration or information technology skills	21.1	8
Lack of start-up time for contract, time to recruit and train staff	15.8	6
Conditions of work, including workload and need to compete with other employers	13.2	5
Got another job	13.2	5
Redundancy due to lack of funding through the contract	7.9	3
Total		38

Note: Multiple responses allowed.

Allocation of employee resources

Respondents were asked to provide an estimate of how much employee time is spent on key activities across RJCP. Respondents who indicated that their organisation does not provide all RJCP services were excluded from analysis. Fig. 8 represents responses from 34 organisations and is an estimate of full-time equivalent staffing based on information provided. Administration/compliance may be underestimated, as some respondents were unable to separate these from overall duties. For example, one respondent commented that ‘overall, a bit more than half of staff time is data entry, compliance and administration’.

FIG. 8. Allocation of employee time across activities

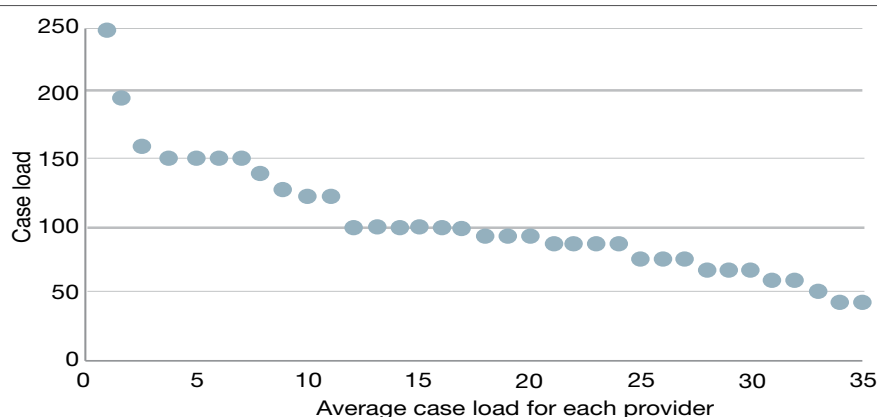


Note: n = 34

Case load size

Respondents were asked to provide an estimate of the average case load of their staff who work one-on-one with clients. The average case worker:client ratio across 35 relevant respondents was 1:101. Reported case loads ranged from less than 40 to 250 (see Fig. 9).

FIG. 9. Reported average case loads



Note: n = 35

Allocation of management attention

Respondents were asked to report on how often they had performed certain tasks over the preceding week, using a range of intensities from ‘many times each day’ to ‘not in this week’. A summary of responses is shown in Table 19.

TABLE 19. Allocation of management attention

Management task	Frequency task was performed			Orientation
	Daily (%)	Weekly (%)	Not this week (%)	
Monitored RJCP IT system	69	25	6	Government /provider
Dealt with logistics issues	67	22	11	Provider
New initiative/ approach	61	33	6	Community
Met or talked with clients	58	28	11	Community
Internal reports	58	39	3	Provider
Met community leaders	56	42	3	Community
Report for government	53	33	14	Government
Communication with PM&C	44	39	17	Government
Met employers	42	47	11	Community
Staff meeting	33	50	14	Provider
Communication with DHS (Centrelink)	22	56	22	Government
Communication with other provider/ consultants	25	47	25	Provider

DHS = Department of Human Services

Note: n = 36

Activities have been notionally identified as oriented towards government, provider (internal, learning) or community. More frequent engagement might suggest both greater attention and opportunities to be influenced (e.g. by government, by community members or by other providers). Overall, respondents reported engagement with a wide range of activities and people over the course of the week. Contact with PM&C was reported to occur daily or weekly in most cases. But the activity that emerged as that most intensely engaged in was monitoring activities through the RJCP IT system. Sixty-nine per cent reported daily monitoring, with 31 per cent reporting that they access the system many times through the day. By contrast, while 67 per cent of respondents reported dealing with logistics issues daily, only 11 per cent said that they did this many times each day. The activity that came closest to 'monitoring the IT system' in intensity throughout the day was 'met or talked to clients', where 25 per cent reported doing this many times each day.

Part E: What is shaping delivery?

In framing RJCP, the Gillard Labor government emphasised the importance of it being community driven and locally flexible. The government made clear that it saw the involvement of Indigenous organisations as also contributing to RJCP's community focus. Questions about CAPs, Indigenous organisations and overall program influences relate to these issues.

Community Action Plans

The CAP process is essential to RJCP's characterisation as community-driven:

Through the CAPs communities must have a central role and a strong voice in setting out a strategic vision for each remote region. The CAPs will guide delivery of the RJCP in line with the needs and aspirations of communities (FaHCSIA 2013).

CAPs were required to be submitted by 28 February 2014 and are to be reviewed each year. Under the guidelines, CAPs are to be made available to the public after ministerial approval, which at the time of writing has not yet happened (November 2014).

Survey respondents were asked to briefly identify the main steps they took to develop the CAP. Respondents mentioned community meetings, surveys, reviewing other plans, establishing a steering committee and a range of other steps. Most sub-contracted organisations said they had either not been involved in the development process or had little to do with it.

Respondents were asked to identify which people or groups were most influential in the CAP process. Responses are in Table 20.

TABLE 20. Major influences on CAP development

Which of the following were most influential in development of your CAP?	Level of influence (no.)				Responses (no.)
	Very	Somewhat	Minimal	None	
Elders and influential individuals	33	7	3	1	44
RJCP participants	22	14	5	3	44
Employers	15	25	4	0	44
Existing community plans	13	20	7	4	44
People in other agencies in the communities	12	22	10	0	44
Our board	12	11	15	6	44
Our staff	10	15	15	3	43
Stated national government priorities (e.g. truancy, community safety)	6	26	7	5	44
Input from local PM&C staff about the issues in our communities	4	14	19	4	41

Respondents identified elders and influential individuals, and RJCP participants as having the most influence over their CAPs. Local PM&C staff were seen as least influential. While ‘stated national government priorities’ were not often identified as very influential, they appear to have had some weight for most respondents (73%), despite the stated intention that the CAPs reflect local community issues. Only five respondents said that national priorities had no impact at all. Taking notice of national agendas has proven to be a good move, as providers have been advised that CAPs are on hold as the government considers the potential impact of the national review of Indigenous jobs and training (Forrest 2014).¹⁰

Responses in relation to the CAP process and the role of the CAP suggest a level of ambivalence about its importance. Most respondents (67%) agreed that the CAP would be one of the major things driving their activity, although this may reflect its likely inclusion in performance assessments rather than a view of its intrinsic value (Fig. 10). The positive statements about CAPs grouped at the top of Fig. 10 generally elicited higher levels of agreement than the more negative statements grouped at the bottom, but not strongly so.

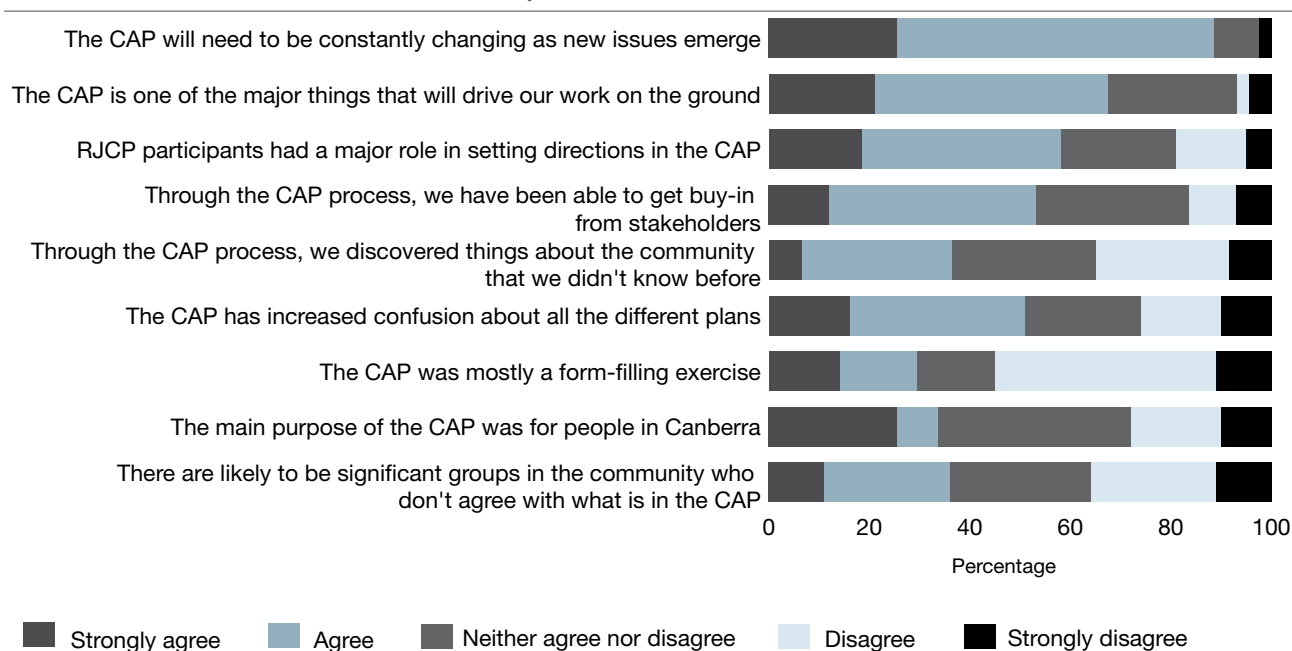
A significant group (not a majority) held the view that the CAP was mainly for Canberra or a form-filling exercise. This ambivalence is also reflected in the 45 per cent of respondents who said that the CAP development process made no difference to community influence over their direction (Table 21).

TABLE 21. Impact of CAP on community influence

Compared with your previous engagement in these communities, has the CAP development process:	Responses	
	%	No.
Increased community influence over your direction a lot	25.0	11
Increased community influence over your direction a bit	27.3	12
Made no difference	45.5	20
Decreased community influence over your direction	2.3	1
Total	100.0	44

There were no significant differences between different organisation types, or organisations with different program experience or head office location across these responses.

FIG. 10. Views about CAPs and the CAP process



Note: n = 43

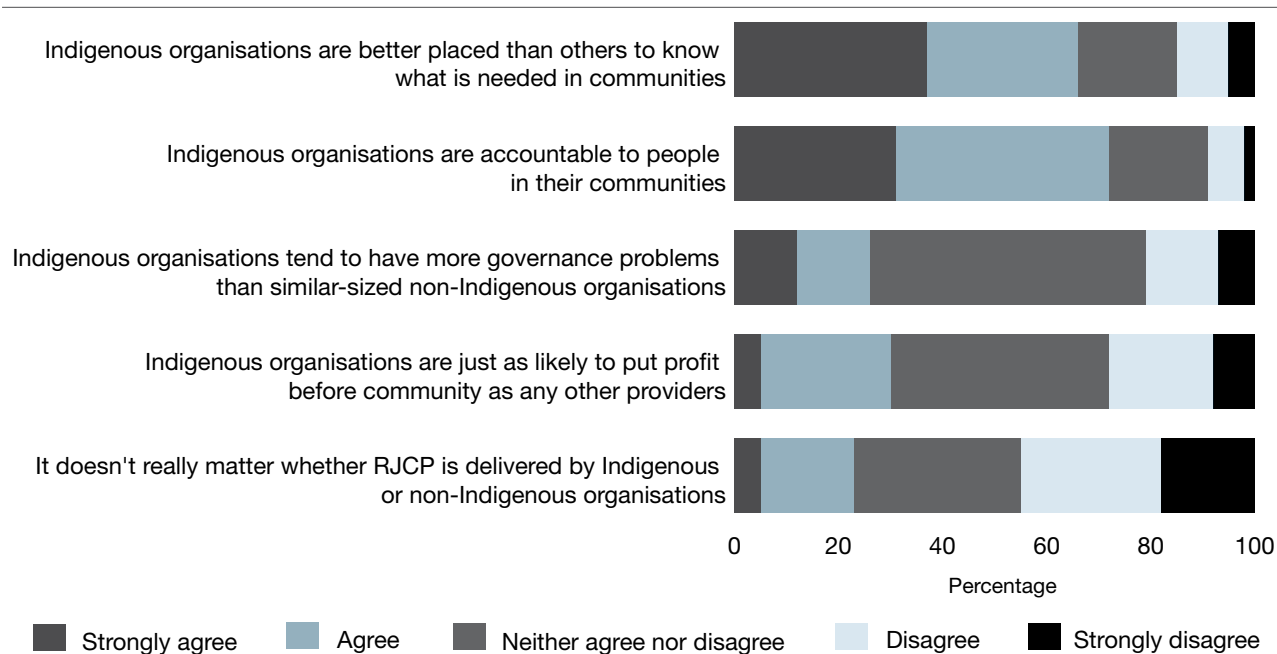
Views about Indigenous organisations

A set of statements in the survey probed views about Indigenous organisations and their role in RJCP (Fig. 11). Strong majorities of respondents agreed that Indigenous organisations ‘are better placed than others to know what is needed in communities’ and ‘are accountable to people in their communities’. Conversely, only a minority of respondents agreed that Indigenous organisations ‘have more governance problems’ or ‘are just as likely to put profit before community’ as similar-sized, non-Indigenous provider organisations. Similarly, only 23 per cent of respondents agreed that ‘it doesn’t really matter whether RJCP is delivered by Indigenous or non-Indigenous organisations’. Overall, respondents seemed to view Indigenous organisations as appropriately and effectively playing a strong role in RJCP.

Perceptions of influence on priorities and activities so far

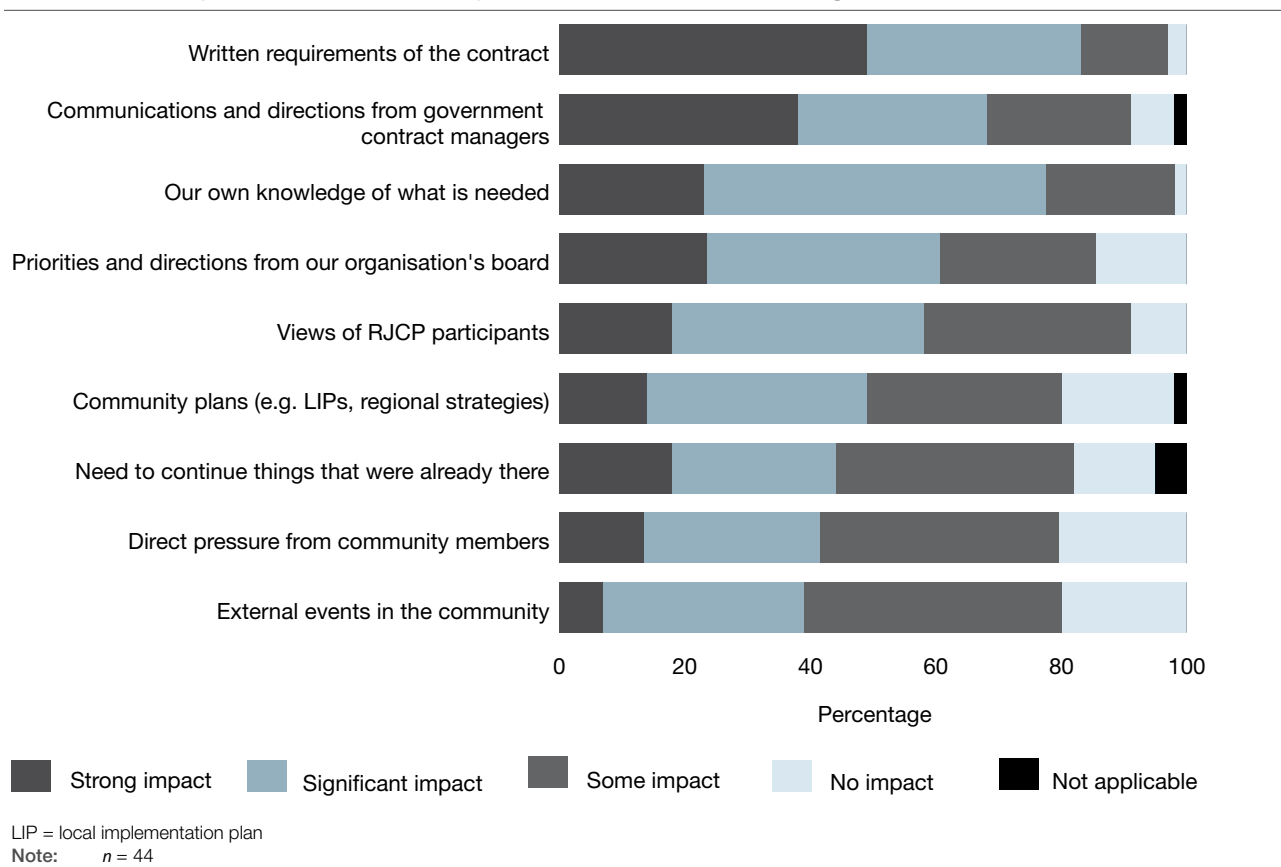
Finally, respondents were asked to identify which of a number of suggested factors had the most influence on their activities and priorities during the first 10 months of the contract (Fig. 12). Here, the strongest influences are clearly identified as ‘written requirements of the contract’ and ‘communications and directions from government contract managers’. The more community-oriented factors (e.g. community pressure, community plans) were less likely to be seen as having an impact than the provider’s ‘own knowledge of what is needed’ or the priorities of the organisation’s board. This may reflect the initial challenge of implementing a new program with different arrangements, or it may be that the arrangements themselves are driving this focus. This is likely to become clearer in future survey work.

FIG. 11. Views about Indigenous organisations



Note: n = 42

FIG. 12. Perceptions of influence on priorities and activities during the first 10 months of RJCP



Concluding observations

This survey sought to provide an initial insight into the landscape of RJCP from the point of view of providers. The survey covered a period of rapid and substantial change. New systems had to be learned, people recruited, premises and equipment secured, and more than 35,000 participants signed up to the new program. At the same time, a new Australian Government was elected and program management (with many staff) was moved to a new department. The fact that arrangements are new and in flux may explain the high level of uncertainty or ambivalence across many areas of the survey—reflected, for example, in fairly high numbers of respondents electing to ‘neither agree nor disagree’. The next survey will attempt to capture whether some of these views have firmed, and in what direction.

However, there are some findings and themes that emerge from responses at this early stage:

- Most RJCP provider organisations, and the staff that lead them, are veterans of previous programs and their governing arrangements. Despite the very different histories of these previous programs, there is little evidence of systematic differences in the views of providers drawn from these groups.

- Overwhelmingly, RJCP providers saw the lack of jobs for people who want them as the most important cause of joblessness in their areas. Consistent with this, job creation, development of new culturally based enterprises, and paid work experience on community projects were identified as strategies most likely to have an impact.
- There is majority support for ensuring that people participate in activities while on unemployment payments, and a view that non-compliance should be addressed. However, most people did not see application of penalties or income management as very effective in helping people gain or retain work. While views on the efficacy of applying welfare conditions in reducing joblessness were mixed, a large proportion of providers reported that they spent most of their time on compliance rather than what participants want or need.
- Local Indigenous people are strongly represented in the overall workforce delivering RJCP, but staff turnover is a big challenge. Administrative complexity and compliance activity emerged as factors contributing to high turnover and limiting the capacity to employ local staff.

Perhaps there are indications of the presence in RJCP of some of the drivers of convergence that have characterised marketised employment services more generally (Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2011). Some survey questions that elicited the most unified responses related to the central role of IT in structuring daily work, the contract itself as central to activity, and a sense that the government officials who providers deal with on a daily basis are—above all—compliance focused. Balanced against this is evidence of considerable engagement with local community members and a positive view of the relationship with local departmental officials.

In our second survey during 2015–16, we hope to better understand which of these issues were a feature of early implementation and which are likely to be embedded features of RJCP. In the meantime, the recent report of the Forrest review and the current development of a new Indigenous Advancement Network within PM&C suggest that wider institutional changes and political debates are set to remain an important feature of the operating environment, with uncertain implications for RJCP providers.

Notes

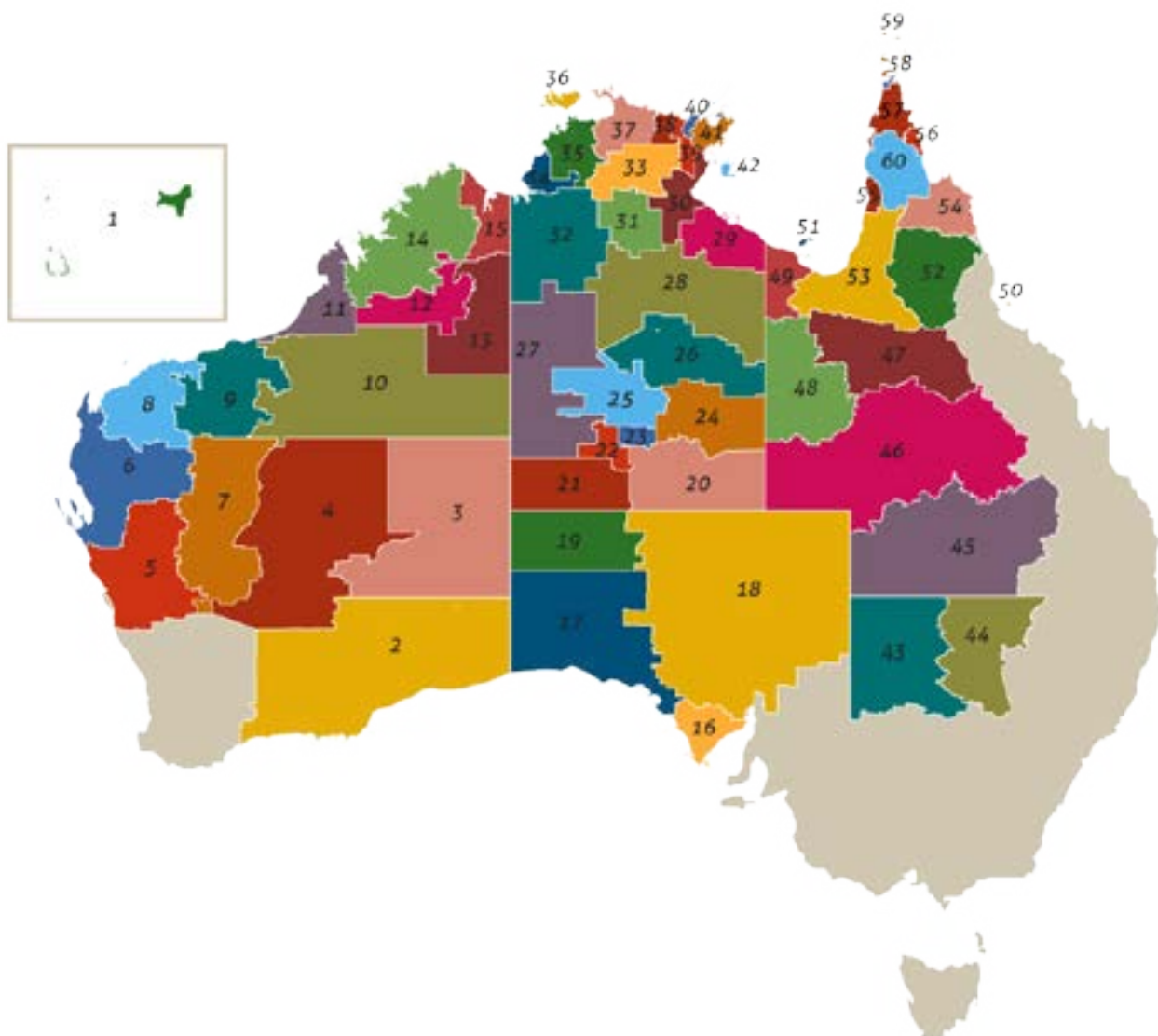
1. A 60th region encompassing the Cape York Welfare Reform communities was excised from another and added during the EOI process.
2. At the time of writing, a new employment services program has been announced—although it is as yet unnamed—which will start in mid-2015.
3. Newstart Allowance became the new name for Unemployment Benefit when the Social Security Act was rewritten in 1991.
4. Since the completion of this report, significant changes to the RJCP have been put forward by the government. These include changes to activity requirements so that most RJCP participants will be required to work 25 hours per week, 5 days per week, 12 months a year; cessation of CDEP wages from 1 July 2015; removal of requirement for Community Action Plans or Workforce Development Strategies; removal of the Participation Account; and removal of outcome payments for educational achievements for most participants
5. One of these organisations, Job Futures Ltd, subcontracted delivery to nine local organisations—most of which were Indigenous.
6. Found at <<https://employment.gov.au/remote-jobs-and-communities-program-providers>> (viewed 10 September 2014), but note that this list does not completely describe either the number of group arrangements or the degree to which these are operating in practice.
7. Based on analysis of list of providers published at <<https://employment.gov.au/remote-jobs-and-communities-program-providers>> (viewed 10 September 2014).
8. The question referred to experience in JSA or Job Network (the program that preceded JSA). In the text, 'experience in JSA' includes both for ease of reference.
9. Excludes people on CDEP wages and school attendance offices engaged by RJCP providers under the Remote Schools Attendance Scheme. The latter was launched in December 2013 to enable the engagement of local Indigenous people to promote school attendance. It is delivered in selected communities—generally, but not always—by RJCP providers.
10. In December 2014, providers were advised that the Minister would not be formally approving CAPs and that they would no longer be required under the contract.

References

- Arbib, M., Macklin, J. and Ellis, K. 2011. 'The future of remote participation and employment service arrangements: discussion paper', Australian Government, Canberra.
- Considine, M., Lewis, J. and O'Sullivan, S. 2011. 'Quasi-markets and service delivery flexibility following a decade of employment assistance reform in Australia', *Journal of Social Policy*, 40 (3): 811–33.
- DEEWR (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) 2012. 'Call for expressions of interest for the conduct of the Remote Jobs and Communities Program 2013–2018', Australian Government, Canberra, viewed 12 November 2012, available at <<https://www.tenders.gov.au/>>.
- FaHCSIA (Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) 2013. *RJCP Community Action Plan Guidelines, May 2013*, Canberra.
- Forrest, A. 2014. *The Forrest Review: Creating Parity*, Australian Government, Canberra.
- Fowkes, L. 2011. 'Rethinking Australia's employment services', *Perspectives* 6, Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney, Sydney.
- Karvelas, P. 2013. 'Aboriginal jobs program a complete disaster says Nigel Scullion', *The Australian*, 18 October.
- Loughnane, B. 2013. *The Coalition's Policy for Indigenous Affairs*, September, Barton.
- Macklin, J., Shorten, B. and Collins, J. 2012a. 'Media Release—Jobs and sustainable communities for people in remote Australia', Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; Minister for Disability Reform; Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations; and Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development, 26 April, Canberra.
- Macklin, J., Shorten, B. and Collins, J. 2012b. *Remote Jobs and Communities Program: Jobs and stronger communities for people in remote Australia*, Australian Government, Canberra.
- Macklin, J., Shorten B. and Collins, J. 2012c. 'Media Release—Call for providers to deliver new \$1.5b remote jobs program', Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; Minister for Disability Reform; Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations; and Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development, 2 October, Canberra.
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) 2012. *Activating Jobseekers: How Australia Does It*, OECD Publishing.
- Productivity Commission 2002. *Independent Review of the Job Network*, Inquiry Report No. 21, Productivity Commission, Canberra.
- Sanders, W. 2012. 'Coombs' bastard child: The troubled life of CDEP', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 71 (4): 371–91.

Appendix A: RJCP regions

FIG. A1. Map of the 60 RJCP regions



Source: NESAJRCP Meeting Place (www.rjcpmeetingplace.com.au), 2013

CONTACT US

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
Research School of Social Sciences
ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences

Copland Building #24
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200
Australia

T +61 2 6125 0587

W caepr.anu.edu.au

ANU CRICOS Provider Number: 00120C