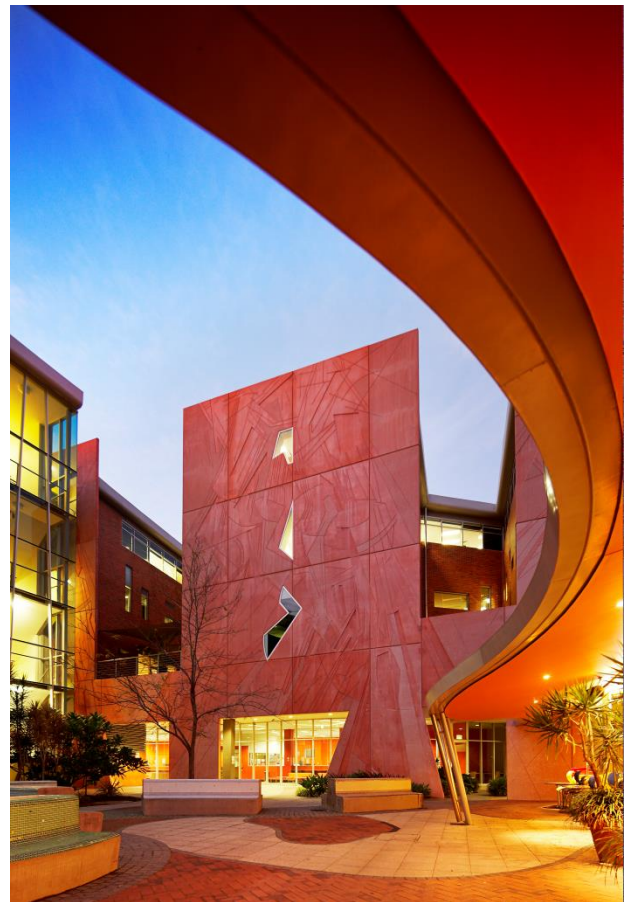# Diversity in place, Unity in service:

The Effectiveness and Impact of Changes to the Western Australian Community Resource Network

Draft report to the Department of Regional Development

November 2016

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- Build a body of up-to-date, Australia-specific knowledge that can be used to inform policy and practice within government, the Not-for-profit Sector and the broader community with a view to enhancing policy outcomes to the greater benefit of all communities in Australia.

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Key Findings

1. Community Resource Centres (CRCs) have very high levels of community awareness and use. In a survey of 2,400 randomly chosen households in regional WA, around 90% of households were aware of CRCs and almost three quarters (74%) had accessed their CRC at some stage in the past two years. One third accessed a CRC at least monthly.

2. Most respondents visited a CRC for personal use, but a significant minority also cited business use. Most services used were printing or photocopying, computer and internet use, access to government services, social events and computer training. However there was a range of other usage reported including library, newsletters, health services, banking, and postal services.

3. Respondents indicated that CRCs provided excellent service with good staff, and were regarded as essential to retain in the community.

4. Feedback from interviews with community members and local businesses reinforced the findings of the randomised survey, with strongly positive views being expressed. In addition to access to services, CRCs acted as a community hub, providing news and information, support for sporting and social clubs, social and wellbeing benefits and places of learning, at reasonable cost and supported by friendly and capable staff.

5. Businesses used CRCs for promotion, to attend business events, training, utilise office space and equipment. Despite this, many CRCs have found the focus on business development in the new contract arrangements to be either inappropriate or excessive.

6. Local governments are important partners of CRCs, often providing cheap or free rental and utilities, and value their role in the community.

7. Commonwealth and state government agencies use CRCs to varying degrees to provide access to services. Access to Centrelink services through the *myGov* website is a particularly important role played by many CRCs.

8. There is considerable potential for State government agencies to use CRC facilities more strategically.

9. Access to technology (specifically ICT) and printing and publishing facilities continues to be a key role for CRCs, reflecting the continued inadequacies in telecommunications and internet access in regional WA.

10. The involvement of Linkwest in supporting the program has been welcomed, but the full potential of the network has not yet been realised.

11. Fee-for-service has increased and generally been accepted by communities.

12. Determining the real cost of service delivery is impossible utilising current accounting infrastructure. It is also unwarranted, given the diversity of CRCs, the inapplicability of

unit costing, and the cost-benefit of conducting a comprehensive costing and pricing exercise.

13. Each CRC responds to local need as it manifests and each locality is diverse in terms of key priorities. However, the fundamental operational arrangements of CRCs are broadly uniform and would benefit by their strategic outcomes being connected to regional strategic plans.

14. The current contract is too activity and output driven and does not adequately link these to strategic outcomes.

Recommendations

1. Given the widespread recognition and utilisation of CRCs and the positive feedback from community and business users, **the CRN program should be continued**.

2. **DRD should remain the lead agency** for the delivery of the CRN program.

3. **A third party should be engaged in order to more fully realise the benefits and opportunities presented by the network functions of the CRN**, such as: business development, co-governance, learning, network support and advocacy and peak representation. This party would work with DRD, the Association of WA CRCs and individual CRCs to establish a CRN strategic framework that would then drive local goals and seek to prioritise those goals according to regional and state priorities. This strategic framework may also consider CRC location and primary focus areas in the medium to longer term. Advantages of engaging such a party include:

   a. They would be an independent driver of outcomes;
   b. They would develop a comprehensive knowledge of the CRN and be in a position to develop State-wide strategies with CRCs; and
   c. This would lead to better outcomes based planning practice and more effective, strategic prioritisation of objectives.

4. **The process for developing future procurements should commence with a clear statement of the overall identity, strategic direction and purpose of the CRN.** A core part of the rationale for CRCs should continue to be community development, along with service provision for individuals, families, groups and businesses. Outcome and output measures would then be driven by the strategic purpose of the CRN program and developed with each CRC to reflect the needs and circumstances of the communities in which each CRC operates. To assist with performance and contract management, groupings of similarly-situated CRCs should be identified in terms of community demographics and service needs/gaps. These groupings should be regionally-sensitive and enable like-for-like comparisons where possible. However, they may also be problem-centric in that some CRCs—regardless of their regional location—may have similarities in terms of service priorities which may see them more logically grouped in this way rather than by geography.

5. **Procurements should be driven by community need**, which is most appropriately measured by mapping information about existing service provision (by governments and NFPs), population size, demographic characteristics, isolation, economic activity, employment etc., and prioritised at the CRN level. This will assist in determining where service gaps (and overlaps) exist, where the needs are greatest, and where resources ought to be directed for best outcome across the State's priority areas.

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6. **A working group of key service agencies from State and local governments, and Not-for-profit organisations, should be formed to assist DRD in undertaking this mapping process**, in order to prioritise support for existing and new CRCs. This will allow DRD to take into account the plans of other agencies and NFP service providers in each regional community. This will likely impact service types, service resourcing and CRC location over the medium to longer term.

7. **A two-tier funding approach for the CRN should be considered**, consisting of:
   a. Block funding to provide the basic service delivery platform infrastructure for each CRC (venue, meeting and training rooms, government information, videoconferencing facilities, etc.); and
   b. Additional funding for service provision as determined in negotiations between DRD and each CRC, based on community need, realistic service outcomes and CRN priorities, as informed by the needs-based analysis undertaken through Recommendations 5 and 6.

8. **There is a need to develop and deliver sector-specific financial management training capacity** in order to refine and enhance the financial decision making capacity of the CRCs which would then allow them to more effectively manage resource allocation and efficiency development.

9. Building on recommendation 8, the **adoption of the National Standard Chart of Accounts (NSCOA)**, as mandated by the WA Department of Finance, would allow for better financial data to be developed and for better financial assessment of sustainability and efficiency.

10. **A communications plan aligned with DRD's strategic objectives for the CRN program should be instigated.** This would assist in removing the instances observed in this study where miscommunication resulted in misinformation being reported by a number of interview participants.

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1. Background

The Western Australian Department of Regional Development (DRD or the Department) is responsible for supporting the development of thriving towns and communities in regional Western Australia.[1] In part, DRD funds Community Resources Centres (CRCs), which have been established throughout the state, in order to support this objective. In 2013, a major review of the Community Resource Network (CRN) was undertaken by the WA Regional Development Trust (WARDT, 2013). This review resulted in a number of changes being implemented across the CRN, including in particular a shift to a contract funding model for most CRCs, in line with government policy for contracting services from Not-for-profit organisations (excluding the 12 smaller, remote CRCs now funded directly by DRD). In addition, support was provided for the provision of services, such as human resources management, industrial relations and governance, to the CRN through Linkwest, acting on behalf of the Association of Western Australian CRCs (AWACRC)—the industry peak body. Amongst other things, this report examines the effectiveness and impact of the CRN in light of these changes. The list of CRCs making up the CRN is provided at Appendix One.

Additional to this central purpose, the Department also sought advice and recommendations about the likely future need for CRC services, the role of DRD itself as principal, and a way forward relating to possible activities and the outcomes that might underpin any such procurement decisions related to the CRN.

The current CRN is effectively a third generation network, following the establishment of what were originally Telecentres in 1991. The transition to CRCs in 2010 was largely funded by the WA Government's Royalties for Regions (RfR) policy framework.[2] Following the review by the WARDT, the CRCs have transitioned from a grant to a contract model of funding, consistent with the State Government's *Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy*, or DCSP Policy (Government of Western Australia, 2011). This evaluation undertook an assessment of how this new model has been working and suggests improvements, in preparation for the next budget cycle.

Typically, individual CRCs are Not-for-profit organisations incorporated under the Western Australian Associations Incorporation Act (1987).[3] Therefore, these organisations are community-based, locally governed and locally staffed. CRCs utilise volunteers, contribute resources (including donations) and have strong relationships with other entities within their communities including local government and other business and community groups.

The longevity and relative ubiquity of CRCs across regional WA means that any analysis or recommendations about their future are sure to be watched with keen interest by stakeholders and local communities. Therefore, it is important to note up front that there are many views and expectations which are complex because:

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[1] See corporate website for further information regarding the Department's purposes and initiatives: http://www.drd.wa.gov.au/about/our-department/Pages/default.aspx

[2] See DRD's corporate website for further information regarding this policy framework: http://www.drd.wa.gov.au/rfr/Pages/default.aspx

[3] This Act has now been repealed and replaced by the *Associations Incorporation Act 2015* which commences on 1 July 2016 and increases the regulatory requirements to be met by those CRCs falling under this legislation including in relation to their constitutions and the roles and responsibilities of those charged with governance.

- CRCs appear to have developed and focused their objectives in response to local needs and expectations;
- The regions across Western Australia are, of course, incredibly diverse in terms of economic capacity and development maturity, community capacity and inherent opportunities for advancing economic, community and other local interests; therefore
- The CRN is a diverse group of organisations structured within a unitary funding model but facing and responding to a myriad of local economic and community conditions.

Having said that, significant state government funding of the Network (currently more than $10 million per year) means there is an imperative for the community to receive the best possible value for money from its investment in these organisations, and that they operate as professionally and as effectively as possible.

This project has reinforced for the Curtin team the significance of the CRN to regional WA, the potential of the Network in terms of local community development, and also to the potential sensitivities involved. Therefore, our research strategy and approach was designed to be inclusive, open and independent.

The balance of this document constitutes Curtin's final report responding to each of the questions put by DRD and making recommendations and observations that the research team believes will enhance DRD's objectives and strengthen the purpose and capacity of the CRN itself.

2. WARDT 2013 Review Outcomes

It is important to review the outcomes of the WARDT Review as this project and its findings constitute the starting point for our work. The review resulted in the provision of a substantial report to government in 2013 which found, amongst other things, that:

- The CRN's contribution to economic, business and community development varied according to the CRC being considered;
- In terms of economic and business development, this variation extended along a spectrum from negligible to minor to modest;
- In terms of social regional development and/or community development, this variation extended from negligible to modest to significant;
- In more rural and remote communities, CRCs had become the vital link between community and government;
- CRCs seem to be well-placed to undertake more Local Government-type service delivery in locations where a local government presence was not extent;
- The CRN is fundamental social infrastructure that enables local communities to build their capacity; and
- There was, at the time of the report, no co-ordinated approach to utilise the CRN across all relevant agencies for government service delivery.

In all, the WARDT made ten recommendations. The recommendations responding to the broader findings and key recommendations pertinent to this review are highlighted below:

- The need for the preparation of a plan for the better integration of CRCs into local government and the RfR programs;
- The need for better definition of the role of the CRN and its relationship with government;
- The need to segment CRCs by capacity, type, service and potential;
- The development of strategies to better measure the performance, effectiveness, reach and community need relative to each CRC;
- The need for a Fee-for-Service funding regime to be introduced; and
- That the business model used by CRCs be adapted to ensure it is outcomes-based.

The Department reports that it has either implemented or is in the process of implementing the recommendations that flowed from the WARDT 2013 review. Indeed, the Department accepted all recommendations and the following constitute the major pieces of work undertaken, the effectiveness of which is the central focus of this research project:

- **Funding Model:** the Department has worked to transition its procurement arrangements with 93 of the 105 CRCs from the original grant-based funding framework to a funding framework that meets the requirements of the DCSP Policy.[4] This has meant that the funding arrangements in place now:

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[4] The balance of CRCs (12) are predominantly located in remote areas where the government has determined to continue to provide grants funds due to the context within which the CRCs operate.

- constitutes a contracting-style procurement method;
- that has resulted in a tightened focus with respect to services procured; and
- is intended to see the government purchase outcomes rather than outputs in the fullness of time.

- **Outcomes Guidance:** The contracted CRCs are guided in their work by four overarching Community Level Outcomes, being:
  1. Development of Vibrant and Sustainable Regional Communities.
  2. Individuals, Businesses and Other Organisations Have Improved Access to Government and Community Information they need.
  3. Individuals are Engaged in Appropriate, Targeted Services that Build Their Capacity.
  4. Businesses and Other Organisations are Engaged in Appropriate, Targeted Services that Build Community Capacity and Improve the Community's Economic Health.

- **Service Level Outputs:** Individual CRCs contribute to the achievement of these Community Level Outcomes by their pursuit of the following Service Level Outputs for which they are contracted:
  1. Professional governance and service provision.
  2. Improved access to government and community information and services for rural and remote community members.
  3. Economic and business development initiatives.
  4. Social development initiatives.

- **Support Provision:** A third party (Linkwest) has been contracted by the Department to provide support services to the CRN which were previously provided by DRD.

DRD also reports that it regularly monitors and evaluates the performance of individual CRCs in the context of the contractual arrangements established under the new arrangements.

3. Scope of Work

This project constituted a research program focused on answering a number of questions posed by the Department. Those questions are examined below in more detail. However, at this point it is important to acknowledge the purpose of the project and the broad requirements identified by DRD and examined by the Curtin team.

Initially, this project constituted a follow-up of the WARDT 2013 report and the recommendations identified and implemented as a result of the work undertaken. However, the evaluation process also included four additional areas for examination. These were related to the role and relationship DRD has with the CRN, how the Department might procure services from the CRN in future, what the real cost of delivering services is to individual CRCs, and what outcomes ought to form the basis of future procurements in the context of the *Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy*.

These questions have been answered via a research program comprising six distinct stages, each using a different research method designed to triangulate data as well as meet the empirical needs in answering the questions posed by the Department. Emphasis has been placed on providing an opportunity for stakeholders to make known their views, to make suggestions, and to inform subsequent elements of the research program.

The research stages were:

(i) Documentary and Data Analysis: Desktop documentary and data analysis of key background documents and sources to build an understanding of the background and context to the changes being undertaken to the CRN and their implementation so far;

(ii) Community Survey: Undertook a community survey, via a randomised telephone survey process using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), in order to ascertain the views of those who do and do not use the CRN;

(iii) CRC Interviews: Held on location at 33 CRCs and including individual and focus group stakeholder consultations designed to gather views from staff, management and community members who work in, volunteer for and are clients of CRCs. CRCs visited are listed in Appendix Two;

(iv) CRC Survey: Undertook a Qualtrics electronic survey of the senior-most individual available in CRCs not included in the CRC site visits. This survey was designed to ensure that those organisations not included in the CRC Interview stage were still able to contribute to the data collection process and provide financial data. This enabled the research team to apply more evidence to the findings. In all, 33 CRCs responded.

(v) Broader Stakeholder Interviews: 45 interviews, email and web-based surveys were conducted or sent to a range of people in regional communities (including local government), government departments and other organisations about the contribution made by CRCs, the impact of the recent changes, and their organisations' future needs;

(vi) Broad Financial Review: Undertook a broad financial review, which arrived at a general and high level total cost of services estimate based on an income and a key direct and indirect cost data collection process. After establishing a uniform income and cost descriptor and data collection tool, the team collected and analysed financial data collected in the research activities.

For completeness, a matrix showing the relationship between the Key Questions asked, the research methods adopted and the evidence sought is provided at Appendix Three.

3.1   Key Questions Asked

The Key Questions asked by the Department were based on its requirement for a report that brings together the results of an evaluation process and the recommendations developed by the research team as a result of the findings. Therefore, the requirements identified by the Department were based on the need for a report that:

1.   Evaluates the effectiveness and impact of the changes to the CRN, with the implementation of the (WARDT) review recommendations, specifically:
     a.   CRN provision of access to, and delivery of government services to their local communities;
     b.   CRN services to build human capacity to support communities – specifically in terms of contracted social and business development services;
     c.   CRN connectedness with broader government agenda and the alignment of CRN services with the objectives of the Royalties for Regions Act 2009;
     d.   Community and key stakeholder feedback regarding value and impact of CRN program; and
     e.   Community and key stakeholder perceptions of future needs in terms of CRN services.

2.   Provides comment on DRD's role and relationship with the CRN, including an assessment of the appropriateness of DRD to continue as the lead agency for the delivery of the CRN program with exploration of alternative options for oversight of the program delivery;

3.   Provides DRD a way forward to develop future procurements, with a strong understanding of the sector as well as community needs;

4.   Provides an analysis of the real cost of delivering the range of services currently contracted by DRD; and

5.   Provides an evaluation of community need to provide recommendations about the Community Level Outcomes DRD should consider underpinning the future procurement of services from the CRN (aligned to the Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy).

3.2   Project Phasing

The project was commenced in July 2015 with a draft report transmitted to the Department at the end of 2015. Subsequent discussions and interaction with the Department have been undertaken prior to the submission of this final report. However, we confirm that any resultant amendments were limited to correcting factual errors or providing further information, and that the analysis, findings and commentary are our own. A project timeline and outline of the phases is provided at Appendix Four. Broadly, the project phasing plan was adhered to with no material discrepancies in the lead-up to the submission of the draft final report. However, four CRCs did not make themselves available for site visits and one CRC withdrew following the Curtin team visit; all for a variety of reasons. We consider these exceptions to be immaterial to the findings and efficacy of the research process undertaken.

3.3   Deliverables

This research project resulted in the development of this report. This report addresses each of the questions identified by the Department in the Statement of Requirements. Prior to forwarding this final report, a draft report was provided to the Department and the project lead, Professor John Phillimore has been in contact with the relevant Department personnel throughout the project. An interim meeting was held with Mr Rob Leicester, Ms Celia Loot and Ms Anna Dixon on 16 June 2015 with Professor John Phillimore, Professor David Gilchrist and Dr Amma Buckley.

3.4   Outline of Report

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology used in this research.

Chapter 5 provides a brief description of initiatives and organisations similar to the CRN that are found in other parts of Australia.

The rest of the report is then structured around the five primary research stages, some of which are themselves broken down into a more nuanced analysis of stakeholder views.

Chapter 6 provides the results of the randomised survey of 2,400 households in regional WA.

Chapter 7 looks at the views of CRC coordinators and management committee members. These were obtained by a combination of interviews during visits the research team made to the CRCs, as well as the findings of an online survey of CRC managers who were not visited in person.

Chapter 8 describes the results of interviews with local stakeholders, based on interviews held during the research team's visits to CRCs. Three groups of stakeholders were interviewed:

- Local businesses
- Community members

- Local governments

Chapter 9 describes the results of interviews with external stakeholders closely related to the CRC program, namely:

- Decision-makers in the Regional Development portfolio, including from the Department, the Minister's Office and the Trust;
- Key government agencies such as the State Library, Department of Local Government and Communities, Department of Sport and Recreation, Small Business Development Corporation, Tourism WA;
- The board of the Association of WA CRCs, and Linkwest.

Chapter 10 provides the findings of the financial review of the CRCs based on data provided by CRCs during our visits as well as in the online survey.

Chapter 11 then discusses the main findings from these research stages, in response to the evaluation undertaken in addressing items 1 (a) – (e) in the Statement of Requirements for the study, as well as recommendations for consideration in addressing items 2 - 5.

Several Appendices are also provided giving more details about the different research stages.

4. Methodology

As already identified, this research project adopted a mixed methods approach in order to ensure the research outcomes had high efficacy. Originally, the Curtin team intended to undertake a four-stage research approach designed to both increase the data catchment possibilities and to triangulate findings in order to build on the reliability of findings. However, following Stage I and in planning, it was decided to expand this work to identify two additional stages: (1) to separate the broader stakeholder interviews (e.g. in relation to other departments, local government etc.) from the CRC interviews and focus groups (Stage II); and (2) to add an additional data gathering technique consisting of a Qualtrics (web-based) survey of CRCs not included in the visiting schedule (the survey is reproduced at Appendix Five). As such, in order to achieve the outcomes required of this project, the Curtin team determined to undertake the required research using a six-stage approach. Stages were undertaken concurrently if possible and various members of the team undertook numerous aspects of the research process in order to provide the project deliverables within the time frame required.

In undertaking the evaluation, Curtin was also cognisant of the *Evaluation Guide* published in February 2014 by the Program Evaluation Unit in the Department of Treasury, and considered these principles in the context of the research team's combined substantial experience and in the context of Curtin's ethics requirements discussed below.

4.1   Household Survey

In our submission to the Department, we proposed to engage a survey research company to undertake a telephone survey using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). We received quotes from two accredited members of the Australian Market and Social Research Society, for a CATI survey of 2,400 randomly chosen households, of 10 minutes duration, where the potential households have been identified by postcode and pre-determined demographics. For instance, we included: sex, age, and so on. *Ask Australia* was successful in their quote and were sub-contracted to undertake the telephone survey at the same time as other stages were being undertaken. The questions put were initially developed by the research team and then nuanced by *Ask Australia* to conform to CATI protocols. The question schedule is available at Appendix Six while the response data is reported at Appendix Seven.

4.2   Documentary and Data Analysis

The desktop analysis was designed to inform and supplement stakeholder consultation processes and the community survey. It also provided a context against which to interpret survey findings and stakeholder and community views. Documentation for analysis included the 2013 Review by the WARDT, the WA Government's response to this Review (DRD, 2013), the 2004 review of the Telecentre Network (DLGRD, 2004), relevant annual reports, Association of WA Community Resource Centres (AWACRC) and CRN publications and website, CRC newsletters and relevant open-access documentation sourced through CRN

stakeholders. Importantly, all documentation reviewed was provided by the Department, by CRCs or accessed by CRN webpages. We did not seek documentation from broader sources nor did we consider academic or semi-academic literature or other "grey literature".

It was, of course, also important that the project obtain basic data about the Network including service provision, finances (including pricing), infrastructure, governance, human resources and partnerships, so that progress achieved since the 2013 Review could be identified.

4.3 CRC Interviews

The CRC consultation process was central to the evaluation and included both interviews and focus group discussions with the most appropriate people involved in the governance, management and staffing of the CRCs as well as customers or service users of centres. Interviews with the broader stakeholder group, including government departments and local government, were undertaken as part of Stage III.

Each selected centre (listed at Appendix Two) was contacted to inform them of the project, and as an invitation to provide comments on recent changes and future needs. Telephone and email contact was then made with relevant CRC coordinators to identify a suitable date and to arrange meetings with management, business and community stakeholders, who were the subject of Stage III consultations below. Each of the selected CRCs organised interviewees according to a suggested visit schedule.

In total, 33 CRCs were visited, at least one in each Regional Development Commission area by at least two members of the research team. This visitation schedule was in excess of that required by DRD, as this was considered necessary to address the mix of types and locations which could only be undertaken via an expanded interview target group. As a result, the reliability of the results is enhanced by selecting a more representative group for inclusion in the sample.

This included 12 separate trips. Each of the nine regions included a representative sample reflecting the particular context of a region, the number of CRCs in the region, and the need to ensure a variety of CRCs were included in the sample. Further, aspects used to select the sample included town size, Indigenous population, level of operations of the CRC and physical relationship to local government and to other CRCs. The 12 trips were undertaken from August to November 2015 involving 29 Curtin personnel days spent in consultations during this stage. In total, 92 interviews were undertaken.

All discussions with stakeholders were conducted in accordance with Curtin University Ethics Committee guidelines and approvals, and were recorded with the consent of participants.

4.4 Web-based (Qualtrics) Survey of CRCs not visited

Running concurrent with the interview stages, the research team developed and deployed a web-based survey instrument using Curtin's Qualtrics survey system. The survey questions are

available at Appendix Five. The survey instrument was based on the question schedule used in interviews with CRC management stakeholders and was designed to capture information from CRCs not included in the sample visited. Subsequently, the survey link was provided to 61 CRCs with instructions for the most senior person involved in the management or governance of the CRC to respond, with the intention that only one response was received from each CRC.

In total, 33 responses were received of which 25 were completed and eight (8) were partially completed. The results from the Qualtrics survey confirmed, in broad terms, the findings from the interview stage and, interestingly, the CATI survey. This allows us to have confidence in the broader reported findings.

4.5   Broader Stakeholder Interviews

The list of broader stakeholders developed as the project developed and it became evident that the team needed input from certain sources. Generally, the types of organisations targeted for this additional input included various state government departments, the WA Regional Development Trust, the CRN peak body - the Association of WA Community Resources Centres (AWACRC), Linkwest, relevant regional development commissions, relevant local authorities, local business leaders, and business associations. Given the requirement for us to maintain the anonymity of contributors, we are unable to disclose the names of people interviewed at this stage.

The stakeholder consultations were used to gain local information about the CRN, and they involved in-depth one-on-one interviews, group interviews and, in some cases, follow-up emailed responses to questions from the research team. Specific questions were tailored to each stakeholder group. Interviews were semi-structured and combined a series of open questions followed by more specific questions depending on responses to the open questions. Some interviews were simply free-flowing discussions which were undertaken by the research team in order to identify or confirm particular findings.

All discussions with stakeholders were conducted in accordance with Curtin University Ethics Committee guidelines and approvals, and were recorded with the consent of participants. In total, there were 243 interviewees involved in discussions about the CRCs.

4.6   Procedure

Data collection associated with the range of methods previously outlined in this report occurred over a period of four months from August to November 2015.

Visited CRCs

Management from the sample of selected locations were initially invited to be involved in the evaluation, and CRCs therefore opted in or out of the process. Sites agreeing to participate were then requested to recruit local business and service user participants. Local government

representatives were approached independently by the Curtin team. Semi-structured group interviews were conducted with management, business and service users, mostly face-to-face, and on occasion, by telephone. Local government interviews were largely one-on-one. All interviewees completed and signed consent forms prior to interviews as per Curtin's ethics requirements.

External stakeholders

Senior officials from a number of stakeholder organisations were approached by email. The organisations were those with a known connection to CRCs and who were likely to have views about how the program had developed in recent years and might evolve in the future. Where possible, face-to-face interviews were held, but for some organisations, emailed responses to questions were provided. All face to face interviewees completed and signed consent forms prior to interviews as per Curtin's ethics requirements.

Analysis

Interview recordings were largely transcribed verbatim and then analysed using NVivo qualitative research management software. Transcripts were independently reviewed and coded by several members of the Curtin research team. Coded data was then compared and contrasted for dominant themes and relationships including similarities, differences, subtleties and complexities. The dominant themes emerging from analysis form the basis of the report of findings. Throughout the report, thematic summaries are supplemented with direct quotes to capture the sentiment expressed by interviewees and to add authenticity to the findings. All data in this report has been de-identified and care has been taken not identify an interviewee or a location.

4.7   Financial Review

In order to assess the prospects for alternative arrangements for the government's role in the delivery of the CRN, it was first necessary to assess the cost structure, sources of alternative income and the resources applied to the program by the CRCs themselves. This element comprised three stages:

- We developed a data collection tool which was designed to allow each CRC to provide key financial data associated with the delivery of the service and include data associated with contributed income. The tool was developed using a uniform nomenclature and definition set and it was be piloted with a sub-group of CRCs prior to forwarding to all CRCs in the sample group. This set of questions was also used in the Qualtrics survey identified in Stage IV above.

- The data was returned by the CRCs in the sample group and analysed for outliers and key profit and loss sustainability indicators.

- The data was then evaluated at an aggregate level, and at a sub-sector level taking into account operating localities. Key financial metrics were analysed which allowed us to identify key cost-of-service data for the whole sample and for key sub-groups. Unfortunately, as discussed below, the relative lack of complexity of accounting arrangements meant that an output level costing process was unable to be undertaken. This is not necessarily to criticise CRCs by suggesting they have less than appropriate accounting reporting systems, but rather to identify that the realistic prospects for individual service level costings for CRCs are low. There is a cost to such systems in managing them and allocating resources to them and it is questionable as to whether the expense is of value at an individual CRC level or to the Department. Arguably, funding would be better spent elsewhere.

The survey questions relevant to the financial aspects of the data collection are provided at Appendix Eight.

4.8   Ethics

Curtin University complies with and endorses the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007). As such, prior to commencing this research, the research team applied to the Curtin Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for permission to proceed. This process includes the assurance over protections designed to mitigate or reduce sub-optimal outcomes for the participants or their organisations. The HREC provided permission for the team to proceed in accordance with its submission and the approval number is HR163/2015. This number should be quoted to Curtin in relation to any aspect of the ethics status of the research process.

4.9   Confidentiality and Data Retention

Research involving external parties and related to funding or other aspects of an organisation's operations as well as research involving interviews and questionnaires is often conducted and reported in a way that preserves the confidentiality of the organisations and individuals that participated. This is done because it reduces the potential for tension or concern in relation to the process itself or outcomes that may be realised if identification can be made; it allows for more in-depth and personal or specific questions to be raised that may not be able to be raised if confidentiality in terms of responses was not maintained; and it increases the prospect of fuller or more honest responses if people participating are able to remain anonymous.

This research program has been carried out under these principles, and so the following attributes apply to this report:

- No individuals are specifically identified;
- Where possible, no specific organisational responses or data are identified;

- The order in which organisations are listed in the various appendices or quotations does in no way respond to how data is discussed or introduced in the main body of the report;
- The report has been written in such a way as to, as far as possible, avoid inadvertent identification of participants or their organisations; and
- We have tried to retain anonymity where small (by number of CRCs) regions are discussed.

The electronic data collected in the pursuit of this research will be retained in password protected system files within Curtin's IT system for at least seven years with access only available to the research team. Paper-based data will be retained for seven years before being destroyed. It will remain in a locked cupboard until destruction with access only available to the research team leaders

5. Similar centres elsewhere in Australia

As noted in Chapter 1, the CRN is in essence the third generation of a network of centres spread throughout regional WA and devoted to serving their communities with an initial focus on providing access to technology. Other states and territories initiated comparable networks, although not to the extent initiated in WA. In this Chapter, we briefly outline how these have developed in order to provide a point of comparison with the situation in WA.

In 1997, the Australian Government in partnership with each state/territory government implemented *Networking the Nation,* a national initiative designed to address the digital divide in regional, rural and remote Australia. Programs and activities were funded to provide people with the opportunity to use technology to enhance participation in the emerging digital media and communications environments. Across the states and territories, the key players included government departments and agencies with responsibility for education, rural development, industry development, and consumer affairs.

For some states and territories, such as South Australia (SA) and Victoria (Vic), programs focussed on integrated state-wide policies to create online opportunities and respond to changes brought about by information and communication technologies. In Queensland (Qld), the Northern Territory (NT) and Tasmania (Tas), public libraries played an important role in providing access and training in the use of digital media through library systems. For rural, regional and remote communities in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), New South Wales (NSW), Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia, community technology centres or telecentres were the main means of providing training and service delivery to communities. Chiefly, this was provided via access to internet-enabled computers and basic ICT skills. For these five states and territories adopting a technology centre approach, the following Chapter provides an overview of their current status, with the exception of WA which is the key focus of this report. In compiling this information, the research team undertook a desktop review process and also spoke to relevant officers in Tasmania, NSW and Queensland.

5.1   Australian Capital Territory - Community Technology Centres

In the ACT, a Community Technology Centre (CTC) approach was established in six community organisations, providing access and training in information and communications technologies. While the CTC initiative was wound up in early 2005, the program was acknowledged to have provided positive effects in promoting participation in the digital economy and social inclusion (Australian Communications and Media Authority 2009).

There is currently no available evidence to confirm that CTCs currently operate in ACT.

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5.2 New South Wales - Community Technology Centres

In regional, rural and remote NSW, Community Technology Centres (CTCs) are hubs providing a technology platform for programs and services, internet access, training, venue hire, telework opportunities, and economic and community development. With the growth of services and opportunities delivered or accessible online, CTCs make a significant contribution to the infrastructure of country NSW (Tibben 2010). In NSW, CTCs were established in small rural and remote communities – with populations less than 3,000 – to assist community members to normalise digital technologies, particular computers and the internet.

Accordingly, NSW CTCs offer the following services:
- Communication services: internet, email, fax, videoconferencing, webcasts, podcasts and other online services and information;
- Community education, community consultation, and community engagement;
- Online government and e-government solutions for all tiers of government: labour/work participation schemes such as Work for the Dole, telehealth and telelaw;
- Education and training service: basic ICT training, accredited training courses, TAFE and vocational training, industry and business training, online training facilitation and support;
- IT services: technical support, computer maintenance, website development, and desktop publishing;
- Economic development: business skills training, ecommerce, business assistance, marketing material, job creation and volunteer training;
- Social development services: support programs for youth, children, the aged and people with disabilities; and
- Community development services: community newspapers, bulletins, tourist and heritage information, library services. (CTCA 2014)

Despite being identified in the *Joint Commonwealth and New South Wales Community Technology Program: The Final Project Report*, as 'highly successful social enterprises' with an acknowledged inability to develop sufficient income opportunities to support ongoing operations (NSW DoC, 2004, p. 3-4 cited by Tibben 2010), neither the Commonwealth or state government extended their commitment to the NSW CTC Program which ended in June 2005. Following the cessation of initial government funding, the CTC Association (CTCA) was established to co-ordinate funding opportunities for the CTCs. The CTCA continues as the peak organisation for CTCs.

Currently the CTCA lists 43 CTCs on its website: 34 remain active and nine are currently undergoing review (CEO CTCA, personal communication, 13 May 2016). The reported approximate annual income for each CTC is $20,000, funded from a range of activities including membership contributions. However, CTCs have had greater success in securing funding grants for technology infrastructure. According to the CEO, the CTCA is currently focussed on rebranding the association to Community Connect Services as a means of promoting the coordination of support services that current CTCs provide (CEO CTCA, personal communication, 13 May 2016).

5.3   Queensland - Learning Network Queensland (LNQ)

Learning Network Queensland (LNQ) was the first state-wide system set up in regional Australia to harness digital learning technologies for people in regional and remote Queensland. Established in 1989, LNQ's role was to expand education and training opportunities while working alongside the TAFE and University sectors supporting students in regional locations. As part of *Networking the Nation* funding, the Queensland State Library and LNQ partnered to provide access and training in computer skills, including training to library staff. These programs were delivered through the state-wide public library system and Learning Centres in rural, regional and remote communities.

Centres varied in the services they offer, however, most provided:
- training and communication facilities for community members, distance education students, local, state and national businesses and organisations;
- information, availability and enrolment procedures for LNQ courses;
- examination supervision;
- facilities for quiet study, web conferencing, video and teleconferencing;
- information on courses available through Australian educational institutions;
- internet and printing access; and
- non-academic mentoring for centre users. (Australian Communications and Media Authority 2009)

By 2008, LNQ become a Registered Training Operator (RTO) with 34 learning centres that:

- delivered State and Australian Government funded programs to marginalised learners;
- offered 'fee-for-service' courses and mobile technology for training across Queensland;
- gave referrals and information on education and training for communities; and
- offered University bridging programs by distance across Australia and overseas. (LNQ 2008)

Despite extensive searches and conversations with the Queensland State Library, Rural Libraries Queensland, Queensland Information Network and TAFE sector, there is little current information about LNQ centres but it is believed that they have largely been subsumed into public libraries.

5.4   Queensland - Indigenous Knowledge Centres

Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) are owned and operated by Indigenous Local Governments (LGs) with financial support provided by the State Library of Queensland. The first council-operated Indigenous Knowledge Centre was established in 2002. Participating LGs provide the physical infrastructure, staffing and manage the day-to-day operations of their IKC. The State Library of Queensland contributes financial support to LGs for operational costs as well as collections of library materials and professional development. There are currently 25 centres managed by 12 LGs mostly located in the Cape York region and the Torres Strait. In many locations, IKCs provide public internet access for their communities (State Library of Queensland 2016). Services provided by IKCs include:

- Library lending
- Public access to IT and devices
- Promotion of programs that capture and retain traditional knowledge, culture and language
- Family history research
- Preservation of materials

Interestingly, the Northern Territory Library has run a similar service to its communities since 2007 and has adopted the appellation "Knowledge Centre".

5.5   Tasmania - LINC

The Tasmanian Communities Online (TCO) network, comprising 66 Online Access Centres (OACs) across rural and regional Tasmania, was initially established in 1998 with funding from the Australian Government's *Networking the Nation* program. Co-location was seen as a key sustainability strategy and 80 per cent of OACs opted to operate in a Tasmanian government school or library, gaining access to rent-free dedicated premises and a shared internet connection at no cost to the community (Norris 2004). While this collocation strategy offered a measure of self-sustainability to OACs, Haskell (1999, cited in Norris 2004) found that thin markets in small rural communities and the conflict between commercial activity and providing a social service made ongoing financial support critical to the centres' viability. Haskell concluded that most Tasmanian OACs in small rural communities would be unable to generate more than 20 per cent of their annual operating budgets.

In recognition of the need for ongoing financial support, the Tasmanian Government, through the Department of Education, remains the primary sponsor of the Tasmanian Communities Online network which was restructured and rebadged as LINC Tasmania in 2010. Within the past five years, 37 OACS have merged into LINC library services, alongside adult education services. The 23 remaining community-managed OACs have remained staunchly independent and continue to receive recurrent funding as a grant from the Department of Education, administered and managed by LINC Tasmania. According to a LINC Tasmania source, the current OAC funding arrangement is being reviewed for the first time in almost 20 years with a competitive grant process the most likely outcome (LINC Tasmania representative, personal communication, 25 May 2016). This representative acknowledged that there were a variety of considerations associated with future OAC funding. Impacting factors included: OACs' location (vis-à-vis remoteness), community size, current service capacity and the availability or 'saturation' of other services within a given community. However, the political sensitivities associated with OAC funding were identified as the greatest barrier to any funding rationalisation.

Currently these centres provide low-cost access to computers and the internet as well as one-to-one assistance and training in their use for online learning, finding online government information and supporting local community development initiatives. According to the LINC

representative, the demand within OACs has altered in the past two years towards providing greater community assistance to accessing online portals for Commonwealth and State services as well as commercial transactions (for example, from Centrelink through to airline bookings). The demographic profile of service users, while not explicitly captured, was seen to be broadly representative of the Tasmanian community, providing 'across the board' services (LINC Tasmania representative, personal communication, 25 May 2016).

5.6   Conclusion

This Chapter has provided a summary of the current status of Commonwealth and state governments' funded programs arising from 1990s investments in digital literacy. Both Tasmania and NSW continue to maintain technology based centres similar to the WACRN. Of these examples, Tasmanian centres share the similarity of funding being largely dependent upon state government grants, with Tasmania looking at shifting to a competitive model in the future. While no plans for growth were identified, these centres continued to operate as both in-house library and community services. NSW centres, while struggling to secure ongoing funding, most closely resemble WA CRCs as community-based technology hubs. Both of these examples are actively considering plans to review or rebadge themselves to retain their relevance.

6. Household Survey

This component specifically targeted identified communities and their catchments where there was an operating CRC. These CRCs, of which there are 93, are identified in a list provided by the department (see Appendix Two). The researchers used a random survey guided by locational specifications. The rationale for taking this path includes that:

- There is greater likelihood that an increased awareness of CRCs exists in communities that have a CRC.
- This approach provides the opportunity to randomly canvas the perspectives of households that both access and do not access CRCs to gauge usage, perceptions and barriers to usage.
- Other types of surveying—such as online or postal—have been identified as having a low return rate and (in the case of postal surveys) are also very expensive.

Following the collection and provisional sorting of data by *Ask Australia*, Curtin analysed the data and extrapolated quantitative findings and qualitative themes for this aspect of the evaluation. The remainder of this chapter reviews the survey results in two parts: Chapter 6.1 discusses the process and demographics related to the respondents while Chapter 6.2 focuses on the findings in relation to the CRCs themselves.

6.1 Process and responses

A random community survey using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) was conducted by *Ask Australia Fieldwork Services* in October 2015, yielding 2400 respondents across the nine WA regions. Sampling was confined to those locations (and surrounding districts) with a CRC. *Ask Australia* reported that the 'actual' number of participants completing the telephone survey (2400) represented 90 per cent of the 'ideal' total quota (2712) based on the populations of selected primary postcodes. Respondents from the Kimberley and Pilbara regions were under-represented in the sample (Table 1) according to this 'ideal' quota.

Table 1: Ideal quota and actual numbers by region

Regions	Ideal	Actual
Gascoyne	19	19
Goldfields-Esperance	152	105
Great Southern	355	341
Kimberley	306	110
Mid West	200	192
Peel	339	299
Pilbara	10	0
South West	550	536
Wheatbelt	800	798
TOTAL	2712	2400

Source: Ask Australia Fieldwork Services (2015)

A copy of the CATI survey questions is included in Appendix Six. Full results for each question are given in Appendix Seven. Below we provide highlights from the survey.

Demographics

Regional distribution

Almost one-third of survey respondents were from the Wheatbelt, which has by far the largest number of CRCs by region (40 of a total 93). The proportion of regional representation in the total survey responses (illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 2) mostly corresponded with the proportion of CRCs established in each region, with the exception of Peel which has fewer CRCs but a higher percentage of survey respondents and Goldfields-Esperance which had more CRCs but fewer respondents. Such results are most likely related to population density in these locations.
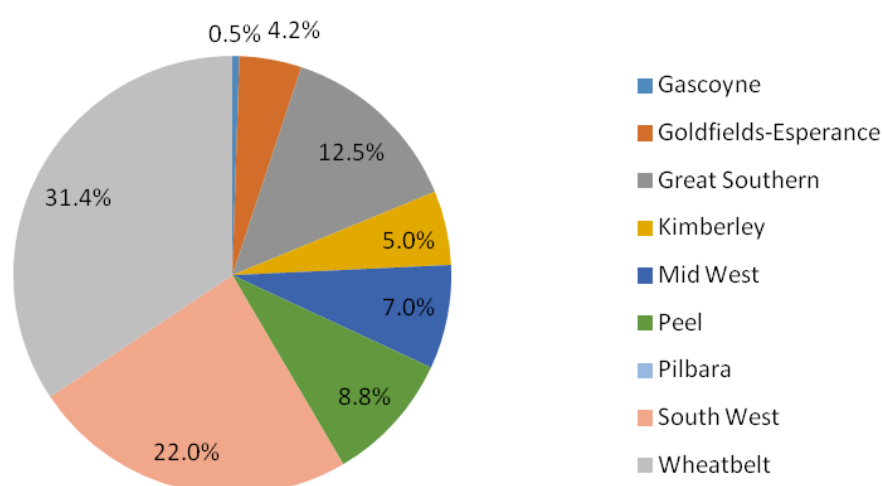
Figure 1: Nine regions and percentage of respondents to telephone survey of the 2400 total

Table 2: Comparison by region, number of CRCs and frequency and percent of respondents

Region	No. of CRCs per region	% of total	No. of survey respondents per region	% of total
Wheatbelt	40	43.0	798	31.4
South West	13	14.0	536	22.0
Great Southern	11	11.8	341	12.5
Peel	4	4.3	299	8.8
Mid West	10	10.7	192	7.0

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Kimberley	3	3.2	110	5.0
Goldfields-Esp	8	8.6	105	4.2
Gascoyne	2	2.1	19	0.5
Pilbara	2	2.1	0	0.0
Total	93		2400	100.0

Age and sex
The majority of survey respondents were aged over 50 years and female (43%). These results correspond with descriptions of the dominant profile of CRC users provided during regional visits. Twenty (20) per cent of survey respondents were male and over 60 years. There was limited representation in the sample of males under 40 (3%) and females under 30 (2%).

Income, type of work and occupation
The majority of survey respondents indicated that their annual income was less than $40,000 (27.5%), which is not surprising given that 46.5 per cent of respondents reported being retired or engaged in part-time work. Of those in paid work, one in five respondents (20.5%) indicated being self-employed. The dominant occupation for survey respondents was related to farming or agriculture (19.8%), followed by professionals working in a range of settings including education and health (15.5%).

Household composition and children
As may be expected given the age and occupation descriptions above, household composition was mostly couples without children (46%), followed by couples with children (28.8%). Of those with children in the household, most had children in primary school (41.2%), followed by high school (38.1%).

Indigenous status and language spoken at home
Less than two per cent (1.6%) of survey respondents identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The majority of survey participants spoke English at home (95.9%) indicating that few respondents were from a non-English speaking background.

Time in current location
Most survey respondents (70.5%) had lived at their current location for more than 10 years, indicating a stable rather than transient sample.

6.2   Survey Findings

Awareness of and location of nearest CRC

The vast majority of survey respondents (90.0%) indicated that they were aware of the CRC in their town. This was further confirmed by data matching the survey respondents' locations and their identification of the nearest CRC, which corresponded for 85.6% of respondents. Some respondents (7.5%) indicated that their nearest CRC was in another town, both within and outside of their shire of residence. A smaller percentage of respondents (5.5%) who were unsure of the location of their nearest CRC were mostly located in larger towns (e.g. Broome, Pinjarra or Denmark).

Accessing CRCs and types of use and awareness of available services

Data from a multiple response question indicated that 74 per cent of survey respondents or three-quarters of household members had accessed a CRC in the past two years. Of this sub-sample, this was most likely to have occurred on a monthly basis (47.9%). Therefore 825 respondents or 35 per cent of the total random survey sample were regular users of their local CRC. Most survey respondents used the CRC for personal use (55.2%) while close to one-third used the service for a mix of personal and business purposes (33.8%) and the remainder for business use only (7.9%). The services with the greatest levels of use and awareness by survey respondents included printing/photocopying, followed by computer and internet use, access support to government services, social events and computer training. Most of these activities would be considered to be fairly traditional services offered by the CRN. However, regularly reported and less traditional services identified by survey participants included: library and/or book exchange, local newspaper/newsletter, health services, banking branch or access point and post office.

Service improvements

The most identified area by survey respondents for service improvement was related to better advertising and promotion of CRC services, particularly more detailed information about specific services. For others, suggestions included extending current opening hours. Greater access to workshops and training, specifically with computer and technology content attracted a similar level of support. Other improvements of note included a desire for better customer service and increases in expertise of staff, particularly around technology.

Reasons for not accessing CRCs and additional services that would promote greater use

Approximately 600 survey respondents or 25 per cent of the sample did not currently access the CRN. The most cited reason was not needing the services offered by CRCs—a response indicated by approximately 70 per cent of this subset. Another major reason (12.9%) included being unfamiliar with the services offered by CRCs. A variety of other reasons were cited including: the facility is not wheelchair or access friendly; not useful facilities; needing more advanced computing skills; the CRC was too far away; CRC staff under-skilled; and opening hours unsuitable. Of the subset of survey respondents who did not access the CRN, suggested ways to better promote CRCs included advertising in the local paper (276 responses), social

media (118 responses), promotional posters in prominent places (106 responses) and radio promotion (101 responses). However, during visits to the sample of CRCs across WA, it was evident that the local newspapers/newsletters are mostly produced by or housed within CRCs and the majority maintain social media profiles.

Responses to Ideas of user-pays

There was a similar pattern of responses relating to what participants were willing to pay for and services they were currently accessing. Services such as printing/photocopying, laminating, binding, media conversion, community events and internet had similar levels of response. There were occasional comments wanting more free services, however, these were comparatively marginal.

Access to VAST and Westlink TV

The majority of respondents (58.3%) indicated that they did not have access to Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST). Of those who did have access to VAST (887), the majority of these respondents (80.7%) were currently not Westlink TV viewers.

Role of CRC supporting local business

The majority of survey respondents (74.5%) were of the view that the CRC supported local business.

Social capital

The survey asked respondents to identify their contribution to the community as a volunteer. More than half of respondents (54.2%) indicated that they volunteered. Most indicated that this was in relation to sporting events and teams, followed by participating as committee members of local organisations, including CRCs. Other areas included volunteer service organisations, FESA, school volunteering and areas unspecified (mostly one-off events).

Additional comments

Additional comments were thematically clustered with the most dominant being:

- Excellent service, essential, retain and keep funding CRCs (567);
- Good staff and management (119);
- Approve of services offered to the community (94);
- Under-utilised, need more promotion (61);
- Staff and management need upskilling (27);
- Unaware of them, don't use them or know enough about them (29);
- Obsolete or outmoded service (16).

6.3 Conclusion

In summary, the random household survey predominantly captured community perspectives from the southern portion of the state where the majority of CRCs are located. The sample was demographically weighted towards the female and over 50s cohorts. A considerable majority of survey respondents were aware of CRCs and the location of their closest centre. Three-quarters of those surveyed had accessed a CRC in the previous two years for a mix of personal and business reasons. Half of these respondents indicated at least monthly usage. Most were familiar with the range of available service however they chiefly accessed printing/copying and computing services including software training. Also identified with some frequency was usage of government access or information portals. Survey respondents not accessing CRCs mostly indicated that they did not require these services yet reported a lack of knowledge of the range of services offered. Predominantly, survey respondents reported a willingness to pay for services and considered that CRCs were essential for regional communities.

7. CRC interviews and web-based survey data

A key part of the evaluation consisted of obtaining the views of CRCs themselves. This was done through a combination of visits to just over a third of centres and a web-based survey of the remaining centres. The views of these CRC management stakeholders are discussed in this Chapter. As part of the visits to selected sites, interviews were also conducted where possible with business and community stakeholders as well as with local government. Reporting on those discussions form is provided in Chapter 8.

It is important to note that, on occasions, some views reported here have been challenged by DRD officers on factual grounds – in particular in relation to issues concerning consultation prior to the change to contracts, levels of financial support, and the flexibility contained with the contract for service. These apparent misperceptions by CRC managers are commented upon in the conclusion to this Chapter and in the final Chapter of the report.

Visited CRCs

In all, 34 of the 93 contract-based CRCs were contacted and agreed to be involved in a visit from the research team. Management and coordinators' perspectives were collected from 32 of the 34 CRCs involved in the study. One CRC withdrew from the study following the Curtin team visit and no one was available on the scheduled day to meet with the research team for one council-managed CRC. Predominantly, meetings involved the CRC coordinator and at least one management committee member, usually the President or Chair; this was the case in 19 locations. In these focus discussions, participant numbers ranged from two to eight. There were 10 interviews with coordinators only – six of these occurred during visits and four as follow-up phone calls. In two locations, the coordinator was interviewed separately from their management, in both cases these were council managed CRCs. Finally, in one location only the management was interviewed due to the emergency departure of the coordinator at the commencement of the interview. (For an illustration see Figure 2 below) In total, 71 management stakeholders were interviewed.
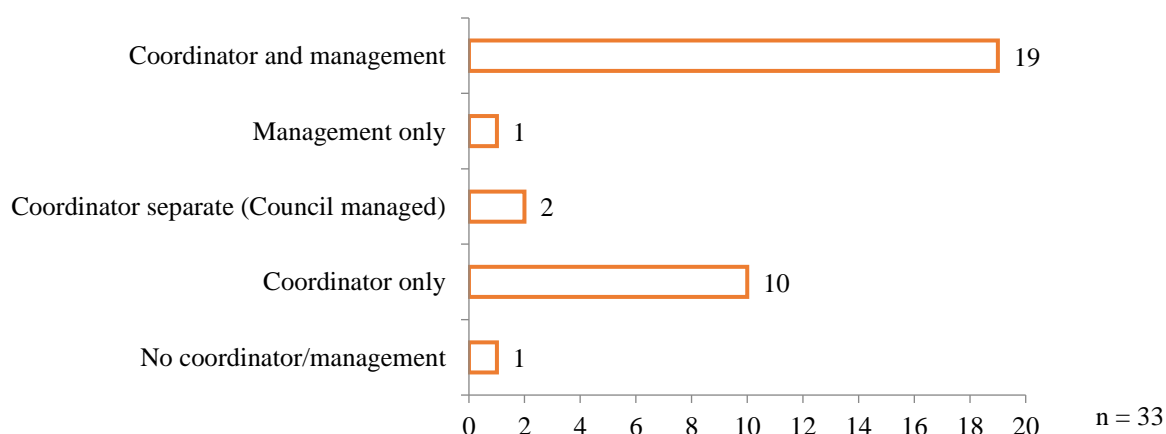
Figure 2: Types of interviews involving CRC coordinators and/or management

The geographic distribution of the CRCs visited by the research team is given in Table 3 below, along with a comparison with the distribution of all CRCs. There was an under-representation of Wheatbelt CRCs and an over-representation of the South West and the Great Southern, due to issues of cost and practicality. The research team was also asked to ensure that at least 20% of CRCs in each region were visited (or at least one CRC where there are less than five CRCs in a region). This objective was achieved.

Table 3: Regional spread of visited CRCs

Region	No. of CRCs per region	% of WA total	No. of visited CRCs per region	% of total (WA)	% of total (region)
Wheatbelt	40	43.0	8	24.2	20.0
South West	13	14.0	7	21.2	53.8
Great Southern	11	11.8	6	18.2	54.5
Peel	4	4.3	2	6.1	50.0
Mid West	10	10.7	3	9.1	33.3
Kimberley	3	3.2	2	6.1	66.6
Goldfields-Esp	8	8.6	2	6.1	25.0
Gascoyne	2	2.1	1	3.0	50.0
Pilbara	2	2.1	2	6.1	100.0
Total	**93**	**100.0**	**33**	**35.5**	**35.5**

Web-based survey of CRCs
An email circulated to the remaining CRCs included a link to an on-line survey focussed on a similar but narrower range of questions than those posed to visited CRCs. Web-based survey questions were confined to: changes since the introduction of contractual arrangements with DRD; fee-for-service arrangements; relationships with local business, community and local governments; and financial aspects. The total number of survey responses analysed was 33, with eight (8) of these partially completed. Integration of these findings within this Chapter is based on the broader sentiment and where relevant includes quoted content from open-ended responses.

7.1   Activities

Activities occurring within visited CRCs, both highlighted in interviews and cross-checked against respective CRCs websites, identify at least 40 activities occurring in the sample sites (see Table 4).

All visited CRCs provided general community activities, computer/internet access and technological assistance, printing, copying and binding services, and access to Westlink. Two-thirds of CRCs offered video conferencing services and provided a hot office option as well as

access to government services including access Centrelink computers or telephones. Over half produced the local newsletter or newspaper. Similarly around half of the visited CRCs provided businesses, health related and employment services and ran courses/workshops for business and/or the community. Half were Medicare agents. Around one-third included libraries and tourist information and/or compiled and managed the local community directory. Secretarial services were also provided by around one-third of visited CRCs. As was age care services and development in one-third of these sites. Major services less frequently provided included: train/bus ticketing, banking, postal and vehicle licencing.

Table 4: Activities by visited CRC

Activities	Number of visited CRCs with identified activities (n = 33)
Community activities and development: general	33
Computer access and assistance, internet access	33
Photocopying, printing, binding, laminating	33
Westlink	33
Hot office / Meeting rooms / hire	25
Government services and information	22
Video conferencing	21
Department of Human Service: Centrelink	20
Community communications: Newsletter or newspaper	19
Business sector activities	18
Health related services	18
Community activities and development: employment services	16
Courses/training	15
Department of Human Service: Medicare	15
Community activities and development: child and family related	14
Public Library	13
Visitors & Tourism related	12
Equipment hire	12
Community activities and development: seniors activities	11
Community communications: Community directories / email list	11
Secretarial services	11
Sale of goods	10
TransWA / Train and bus tickets	7
Government services and information: Local shire services	6
Bank	5
Traineeship program	5
Child Care / Play Group	4
Community communications: Business calendar	4
Australia Post	3
Vehicle licencing and plates	3
Catering	3
Sports centre or facilities	2
Community activities & development: volunteer referral agency	2
Public Toy Library	2
Community activities & development: financial counselling	2
TAFE courses	2
Community communications: Radio	1
Community activities & development: legal advice	1
Community activities & development: emergency relief food parcels	1

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7.2   Community demographics

Older service users

During interviews, CRC management stakeholders identified older people or the over 50s age group as the most frequent service users—they were described as either residents of the local population or older travellers, colloquially described as 'grey nomads'. This dominant demographic was identified in around two-thirds of visited CRCs, although older travellers were confined mostly to tourist or outback destinations. Local service users were characterised as unfamiliar with computing and online services, whereas grey nomads were seen as very comfortable with new technologies, and actively sought out the network of CRCs to utilise resources. Descriptions by interviewees of this cohort included:

> *[…] mostly unemployed or seniors use our centre, travellers will use our centre including overseas travellers, transient people staying at the caravan park moving through who are taking 2 or 3 months to move on.* (Interview 63: Management stakeholders)

> *And grey nomads. They also use the Centrelink access point if they got reporting commitments, and they love the whole thing in WA, especially if they are from the eastern states.* (Interview 29: Management *stakeholders)*

> *[Grey nomads] they are all technologically savvy, they have their iPad and laptops.* (Interview 41: Management stakeholders)

Young people

In approximately one-third of visited CRCs, young people were the second most identified service user group. Their use of CRC services included computing (usually gaming), watching television and participation in school holiday programs. Less frequently identified were secondary school aged children accessing CRC computers for study purposes. Services to this specific group were considered a primary growth area within CRCs. A range of comments included:

> *I would say the youth and seniors are benefitting from the Community Resource Centre but you know in a way it benefits all the people that utilise it but probably the most benefit would be the youth.* (Interview 35: Management stakeholders)

> *We get a lot of the local youth come in […] and use the computers and sit and watch the TV.* (Interview 65: Management stakeholders)

> *A few of the high school kids come down as well and use computers after school.* (Interview 6: Management stakeholders)

Aboriginal service users

Around a quarter of CRCs discussed providing services to Aboriginal people, which in some remote locations was described as close to half of the clients coming through the door. Other CRCs described Aboriginal service users as fewer and more transient. However, the nature of

services use by this cohort was similar irrespective of location. These services included access to and support with Centrelink services, and less frequently for computer assistance.

> *We have a big Indigenous population that floats in and out of town. So, they are the biggest user of Centrelink.* (Interview 25: Management stakeholders)

> *Everyone who is on Centrelink, white fellas or Aboriginal people, some Aboriginal people come in and use the facilities here, they might have a computer at home but not a printer.* (Interview 51: Management stakeholders)

Cross-section of population

Where there was no discernible trend in user demographics, a broad cross-section was discussed by management stakeholders particularly in CRCs which housed health, banking, postal and transport/licencing facilities.

> *I couldn't say to you with confidence that there is a dominant demographic. That's the beauty of our centre, it is because of the variety of contracted services we provide [...] we service the whole community. We have seniors computing that runs twice a week, we have youth groups, the employers, the business people, the community users; there is no dominant visitation in my view.* (Interview 30: Management stakeholders)

> *A lot of community groups use us, small business as well come here, I think we have an across the board usage.* (Interview 41: Management stakeholders)

Backpackers (international tourists)

While backpackers were typically subsumed under the traveller category, some CRCs, particularly those operating in tourist destinations or where there is opportunity for seasonal employment, reported this cohort as regular service users.

> *[...] in the tourist season, backpackers are quite a big percentage of our through the door service users.* (Interview 41: Management stakeholders)

> *[...] we get a lot of backpackers that work at the hotel, so a lot of them do come in and use our internet.* (Interview 26: Management stakeholders)

Other identified groups featuring less regularly in discussions included varying socio-economic groups, farmers and parents of young children.

7.3   Benefits

Universal access to services

Management stakeholders primarily described the benefits of CRCs in regional WA as being central points or 'hubs' where communities can have universal access to information and resources and meet a range of unmet social and service needs.

We are here to provide services, a welcoming facility [….] essential government services to regional WA. (Interview 28: Management stakeholders)

People can walk in off the street and have access to the internet, to Centrelink services, ask for something to be typed up, printed. CRCs give everyone access. (Interview 53: Management stakeholders)

Hubs

The concept of CRCs as hubs for communicating and connecting reinforced the branding and central tenets of the network:

A central communication hub, a meet and greet area, social interaction and networking, exposing people to technology. (Interview 31: Management stakeholders)

We are a hub; people come in and use the library, catch up in here. Because we have got the facilities for meetings, teleconference facilities, it becomes a place to meet. (Interview 54: Management stakeholders)

We are like the central communicator […] bringing all of our organisations and clubs together. (Interview 23: Management stakeholders)

… we are the local connection and that's our motto I suppose, we've always lived by it […] we want to be seen and known as the community hub so people can come here for meetings, workshops, events, information, government you know, access, grants, those sorts of things. (Interview 33: Management stakeholders)

Other benefits

Other benefits included assisting communities to bridge the technological (including coverage) divide, particularly relevant to remote or sparsely populated areas.

…outlying farms don't get internet … they haven't invested in the infrastructure to get satellite internet, many still rely on coming in here to download this or that, so this group definitely needs it [CRC] as a tech support. (Interview 54: Management stakeholders)

7.4   Challenges

Engaging business

By far the greatest challenge for CRCs was the requirement to engage in business development as part of the new contract arrangement with DRD. Barriers most frequently cited were the limited number of businesses in some small towns to develop, followed by the unwillingness by established businesses to engage with CRCs due to being serviced by other agencies, particularly in the agricultural sector. Farming was considered the most difficult business for CRCs to partner with. Others perceived that business and economic development was already

the mandate of local government, and could potentially lead to service duplication or competition.

> *Local businesses say 'We're already established businesses doing as best as we know possible; and if we want help we get outside professional help'. So it was always going to be difficult. We can offer as many seminars, workshops etc. as we like but you can't force people to come and attend them.* (Interview 22: Management stakeholders)

> *[...] you've got two groups of people in town; the farming and the non-farming. We have a very proactive farmer's group; they do everything for farmers. We can't step into that arena.* (Interview 31: Management stakeholders)

> *[...] people were really worried about the defining line between business and economic because these are predominantly the mandate of the Local Government. It is not really our responsibility.* (Interview 23: Management stakeholders)

Community participation

Lack of attendance at activities was the next most cited challenge for CRCs. Despite the promotion of activities and events (particularly workshops and seminars), often undertaken at the request of community/business stakeholders, a common refrain was 'no one turns up'. Many CRCs discussed putting considerable effort into engaging the community and/or business sector however getting people involved and maintaining their interest was often challenging.

> *[...] you can try and try and try and the same people or no-one comes, so you feel like you're not getting anywhere.* (Interview 26: Management stakeholders)

> *People are not willing to participate in activities that are put on.* (Interview 17: Management stakeholders)

> *Apathy is always the big issue. People think that CRCs will always be there and tend to have the view that the CRC is 'their' CRC, although they often don't get involved.* (Interview 54: Management stakeholders)

Resourcing

Funding and funding sources was another frequently identified barrier to outcomes achievement. After the initial large increase in DRD funding in 2010, perceived reductions in DRD funding since then to some centres were reported to have had implications for staffing including traineeships, operating hours and ultimately service delivery. In smaller centres, coordinators identified operating CRCs by themselves with no staff support and being 'stuck in the office'.

> *If you knew how much money you were going to get at the beginning of every year, you could make a really good plan but this relying on a grant for this and relying on a grant for that and having to fill in all those forms.* (Interview 12: Management stakeholders)

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*The other barriers are not having enough staff and being left by myself dealing with the community most of the time. (*Interview 17: Management stakeholders)

My limitation would be, I'm on my own, and I can't physically leave the premise. (Interview 53: Management stakeholders)

We don't have enough funds particularly at the moment for us to build, we know what we need to do to build our business, we can't if we are down staff so we are stuck in the office, we can't do the marketing that we should be doing, we can't do all those sorts of things so we are just sustaining. (Interview 63: Management stakeholders)

You find that it is the type of job that is not paid well. That is why trainees are crucial to maintain an adequate level of staffing. (Interview 52: Management stakeholders)

Issues with the Local Government

Most visited sites, and indeed on-line survey respondents identified a positive working relationship with their local council with 80 per cent providing 'good' or 'very good' responses. Notwithstanding, challenges in this relationship were raised by both the local government and committee managed CRCs. Efforts by CRCs to provide a 'community' rather than a 'shire' service were reported upon. Local government CEOs' relationships with, and understanding of, the CRC model were seen as a critical part of this dynamic. Competition with the local authority for scarce resources and fee-for-service issues were also identified.

Locals see it as being a shire service […] it is but it's also a community service, this is what we offer, so I've really had to market the CRC to show people we are in a shire building but we have this huge range of services available. (Interview 35: Management stakeholders)

The relationship was much better [before], the then CEO understood what the CRC did; the new CEO has changed the way we work together. The shire seems to think if you are in a partnership with the Shire than they are your boss. The focus is just different, the CRC is community focused. (Interview 12: Management stakeholders)

There is competition with the shire, the library does printing and computers, they're doing it cheaper than what we can. (Interview 8: Management stakeholders)

Training

In particular locations, CRC management stakeholders identified significant barriers to delivering training. This was largely due to the prohibitive costs of bringing in trainers to regional locations and the inability of local businesses or community to meet this cost. However, few CRCs discussed using web-based technologies and communication tools to overcome these problems, despite having these facilities in-house.

Our biggest barrier is getting trainers to come out and deliver training and courses for people, like MYOB for instance, they won't do it at a night time, getting them out during the day, I think

we've managed to do it a couple of times but most people who want to do training all work. (Interview 51: Management stakeholders)

We always have a problem with training, despite the expressed need. Farmer can't do two days, and local businesses and community can't do the price. (Interview 53: Management stakeholders)

We can't access the people with a particular skill set locally, especially for business activities/training. We have to get people from [major centre] and it is very expensive. (Interview 25: Management stakeholders)

Contracting barriers and budgetary changes

The move to contracts with DRD and claims of recent funding cuts to some centres were considered to present major barriers by management stakeholders. Perceptions that 'blanket' milestone expectations applied irrespective of the size of the community, making it particularly difficult for centres in smaller communities to comply, were discussed.

I think one of the barriers we are experiencing at the moment is the contract through DRD because it is very specific to delivering certain events and initiatives. One size does not fit all communities. (Interview 32: Management stakeholders)

There's a lot of stuff happening in our communities, the main barrier is that we are drawing from a very small pool of people so we are actually overloading our community with lots of activities that our community doesn't need in order to meet our contractual obligations with DRD. (Interview 49: Management stakeholders)

Other less often reported barriers included small and declining shire populations as well as more fragmented and transient populations due to sectors such as mining and tourism.

7.5   Partnerships and collaborations

Partnerships/collaborations identified by CRCs included parties such as banks, a variety of businesses, churches, community service organisations, educational institutions (TAFE, schools and universities), government agencies, local recreation centres and shires. Councils were the most identified partnership/collaboration participants. This was often due to CRCs predominantly being located in shire-owned facilities, particularly in the visited sample. However, CRCs also conducted services on behalf of local authorities. Activities identified included libraries, tourist services and health facilities, and in some areas increasingly more traditional shire activities such as the management and facilitation of community events.

Some examples of partnering with local governments include:

The shire is focussing a lot more on economic development and has now handed [community fund-raising event] over to us, you know a lot of those community things that shires run, they seem to be passing more our way (Interview 4: Management stakeholders)

The shire community support officer and I don't go for the same grant. It defeats the purpose. We look at it as for the betterment of the community. (Interview 14: Management stakeholders)

Benefits of partnerships

CRCs identified the benefits of partnerships to include information sharing, mutual support as well as creating collaborative working relationships with other local services and businesses, aside from local authorities. While partnerships often led to additional business for CRCs, the major driver was to contribute to the efforts of other bodies for the greater good of their community. Some examples are discussed below:

Other clubs and services have a different community demographic that we want to reach out to so it is important to partner with them as another way of tapping into people. (Interview 8: Management stakeholders)

If we see a community support service that is in need, we will open our doors to them. Any kind of opportunities for business or community development we do so with partnerships as an in-kind opportunity. (Interview 30: Management stakeholders)

7.6   Impact of new contracting arrangements

Visited CRCs and on-line survey participants were asked to identify changes around seven major areas since the introduction of new contracting arrangements, these were: services, infrastructure, governance, reporting, partnerships, personnel and support services.

Services

Management stakeholders discussed a range of service delivery impacts due to the change from grant to contract funding. These included difficulties with both conceptual and practical approaches to business development. The chief criticism was the need to report business activities quarterly, which was interpreted by many as a requirement for activities to be equally spaced throughout the year. A longer term view was considered to be more realistic.

Business development

Business development was identified as the most impacted aspect for services related to the introduction of contract funding. Largely CRCs reported this as a challenge, which was also highlighted in the previous section on barriers. There were mixed responses to working with business with some difficulties mentioned as discussed:

It is the business targets I struggle with […]. (Interview 24: Management stakeholders)

There are enough people doing that. By having to putting so much focus and planning and trying to find ways to meet the business development needs at the start, it really blurred the vision of what we are here for. (Interview 30: Management stakeholders)

It is quite difficult because it is tied to each quarter. Last quarter we had training session lined up for businesses, which we had to cancel at the last minute because we just didn't get the numbers. (Interview 32: Management stakeholders)

Funding for services and activities

Management stakeholders were largely supportive of the liberalisation of funding allocation which allowed CRCs to exercise greater control of resource deployment enabling services to be more tailored to local community need. Comments about better approaches for funding for services and activities, particularly the capacity to offer free services, included:

I found money isn't in separate allocations or pools anymore which has been good. Before you had to spend $5,000 on equipment, now you're given a lump sum and as long as you cover these certain things, you can spend it how you like. (Interview 4: Management stakeholders)

[...] now that we have to provide social services, we can choose whatever we want that will benefit our community. (Interview 35: Management stakeholders)

I don't think the funding has altered our service to the community a lot. It means that we can probably put on a lot more free things. (Interview 22: Management stakeholders)

Best fit for communities

DRD contractual obligations were nevertheless criticised by some centres for their alleged lack of fit with community needs based on demographics. The expectation of similar outputs irrespective of size of community was particularly noted:

They [DRD] probably needed to consult with CRCs more when changing over to the contact basis and really ask them what best fits and benefits your community because then [CRC name] wouldn't have been trying to push out eight social activities per quarter because we wouldn't have let that happen ... we can't do it. (Interview 35: Management stakeholders)

Judging one CRC using a blanket approach is obviously not working. What we can achieve here, and what [named two smaller CRCs] can achieve, we are on completely different spectrums. These communities have 300 people and we have 4,000. It is unfair and unjust. (Interview 30: Management stakeholders)

Infrastructure

Most CRCs reported few changes related to infrastructure, in both interviews and the on-line survey responses. Where change was identified, these were reported as minor repairs or refurbishments. Some CRCs discussed planned changes such as future work to extend current facilities or office relocation. A small number of CRCs identified the introduction of new components which involved renovations to accommodate new services such as the incorporation of a coffee shop into the service.

Governance

More than half of the CRCs visited and a quarter of online respondents reported stable committees since 2013 with only minor changes in membership. Some reported improved processes, particularly that the introduction of, or tightening up of, policies and procedures had enhanced governance. Within this context, management stakeholders largely spoke positively about recent audits and the overall benefits for all CRCs. For CRCs with minor changes, comments included:

> *We haven't really had many changes in the committee.* (Interview 1: Management stakeholders)

> *It's as stable as it can be in small towns like this, but I mean, when I look at the management group and there's probably one other person that's new since me but everyone else has been there for at least a couple of years.* (Interview 6: Management stakeholders)

Changes or adjustments to policies were acknowledged as providing positive influence in improving governance across the network. References to these adjustments are provided below:

> *I've actually found the whole process better for our CRC, we have to say what activities we're going to do, when we're going to do them, I found it better because everybody in the management committee knows when it's happening, so the whole process is quite beneficial for us.* (Interview 4: Management stakeholders)

> *[…] our governance has improved. More policies and procedures, it has pulled up the socks of 90 per cent of CRCs.* (Interview 31: Management stakeholders)

> *It has just tightened up I think. Governance has always been really pretty tight and organised. So, we just freshened up the policies.* (Interview 14: Management stakeholders)

> *The more rigid governance requirements have meant we got ourselves up to date and organised and the committee are more informed of their roles and responsibilities.* (Survey Respondent 34: CRC representative)

Audits or health checks, while involving a significant amount of work, were largely appreciated and considered to professionalise the CRN as exemplified in these comments:

> *[…] that was an amazing amount of work. There were a couple of policies that needed expanding on and there was a policy we didn't have. But I tell you one thing it did do, it made us realise we didn't have these things and now we have.* (Interview 28: Management stakeholders)

> *We recently had a health check which I think is a great initiative. They tried to make us more business-oriented, most CRCs are more professional now. The Department has played a big part in building that through the years in making CRCs more professional.* (Interview 52: Management stakeholders)

Reporting

Discussions about reporting elicited a mixed though evenly polarised range of responses, with some management stakeholders being satisfied with the improvements and others dissatisfied. Positive and negative aspects are outlined separately below.

Positive feedback

Positive feedback included that guidelines were clearer, requirements were more transparent and accountability had improved. For some, this had resulted in more streamlined processes:

> *I think gathering the evidence is probably and evaluations of everything is probably a little bit more time consuming, but as far as jumping into Survey Monkey at the end of the quarter and putting in statistics, that's so much simpler.* (Interview 1: Management stakeholders)

> *I think the quarterly stats breaks it down, it's fresh and relevant, it makes you conscious of what your outputs and outcomes are, but also keeps you on track, it's a constant reminder and I believe that DRD have set it up really well, like the Survey Monkey, it's clear, it's easy, so from a management perspective it's very good.* (Interview 33: Management stakeholders)

> *Not having to acquit funds gives more freedom to apply finances where most effective to run an organisation.* (Survey Respondent 10: CRC representative)

> *The funding is more flexible and is really great that it is reported on quarterly and then the next contractual payment is quarterly, makes for easier budgeting and better planed events.* (Survey Respondent 26: CRC representative)

Negative feedback

On the other hand, a considerable proportion of visited CRCs found the new reporting requirements to be either onerous, time consuming, too detailed or confusing, to be too much or required too often. This is illustrated in the following quotes:

> *It's all working really, really well when we don't have to concentrate on paperwork all the time …chasing the stuff for the DRD, that's just never ending, it's just on and on and on, it gets to you, you know, it wears you down.* (Interview 17: Management stakeholders)

> *[…] you have to tick the box that events are happening every three months. I don't like that at all. At least every six months, every 12 months would be better.* (Interview 29: Management stakeholders)

> *I prefer six monthly reporting than quarterly and it is the actual getting the numbers and the documentation, which takes the time and effort. The Department doesn't understand how much background work goes into providing the information they want.* (Interview 32: Management stakeholders)

> *Going from 2 x half yearly acquittals, 1 x annual Business Plan and a 3 yearly ICT plan to quarterly stats, annual health checks, annual reports and 3 yearly tender applications with*

fairly regular DRD involvement has increased the expected paperwork. The varying subjective assessments received on occasion can often duplicate the paperwork requirement. (Survey Respondent 12: CRC representative)

Partnerships

Since the introduction of the new contracting arrangements with DRD, most CRCs, including on-line survey respondents, identified that partnering with business was a priority. Although many collaborative arrangements were established during CRCs grants phase, feedback about partnerships varied considerably. Some CRCs reported significant traction with businesses, while other reports ranged from some successes, minor increases, still developing to no new partnership arrangements. Quotes below captures these perspectives:

> *The business side, we partner with [business group] so we work with them in running the afterhours sundowners.* (Interview 16: Management stakeholders)
>
> *[…] we have formed relationships with organisations in other towns, where we can get information to our local businesses if they need it. […]. So it's not our local businesses that we're promoting in that way, it is to provide the services to those businesses when and if they need them.* (Interview 1: Management stakeholders)
>
> *We are continually creating new partnerships, changes only occur when a service ceases to function, many are driven by funding.* (Survey Respondent 29: CRC representative)

Personnel

Most CRCs indicated that their staffing profile was largely unchanged, although during visits the team met relatively new coordinators, acting coordinators and long-term coordinators who were on the verge of retirement. Greater identification of personnel change was however reported by online survey respondents. Discussions about personnel were strongly themed around trainees and included: the introduction of, successes with and in some centres the reduction in trainee numbers since the introduction of the new contracting arrangements. A number reported that they had fewer trainees since the new funding arrangement which had impacted on trainee support/mentoring and local employment opportunities. CRCs reported managing changes to trainees in the following ways:

> *[…] we have one trainee, she's our second trainee since the contract, [before this] there had never been a trainee employed at the CRC even though the funding was always there.* (Interview 49: Management stakeholders)
>
> *[…] we used to have two which was really great and now we can only afford one. The way we are working now with four days we're probably ok with just the one, in fact at one stage we had three.* (Interview 28: Management stakeholders)
>
> *It probably affected us when we lost one trainee (we had two), that made quite a bit of a difference. We're coping, because we got a small population, it might be different for the bigger towns and bigger CRCs.* (Interview 40: Management stakeholders)

A reduction in the number of trainees at some centres in response to a decision to evenly allocate trainees to all CRCs and to not allow more than two traineeships to be undertaken by one individual, has changed the support and mentoring role that CRCs identified through trainee rotation. However not all CRCs have taken on a trainee, for a range of reasons. There may be the potential for DRD to reallocate funding for a trainee based on identified need.

> *We have one trainee at one time. In the past we had an overlap of three to six months of a second trainee. We employed one before the second one finished so they can help train the new trainee.* (Interview 12: Management stakeholders)

Support services

Linkwest and Westlink were identified support services for CRCs; these are discussed separately in the following section.

Linkwest

Linkwest were funded by DRD in 2014 to provide assistance to CRCs and offer specialised support in Human Resources Management (HRM) and Industrial Relations (IR), education and governance. Some CRCs have taken up this support and welcomed Linkwest's inclusion in the network:

> *Linkwest is sort of kick starting now in providing us with support that DRD can't in the HR and IR arena. They are also doing also providing education and direction to us.* (Interview 23: Management stakeholders)

> *Linkwest is the best thing to happen to the state network in my opinion. The conference they put on, the workshops, the learning opportunity, the networking […]. We then went back to them to update our procedures and operations manual.* (Interview 33: Management stakeholders)

> *Has been a good transition from WACOSS to Linkwest. Linkwest seems to be more approachable.* (Survey Respondent 7: CRC representative)

> *Linkwest has been a great help with support in the employment and networking areas. Their forum has been invaluable in providing critical information.* (Survey Respondent 32: CRC representative)

Despite these positive comments, there was a common theme regarding the limited use of Linkwest services. Views were expressed about the role and activities of the organisation and the lack of opportunity to engage or investigate the support services that Linkwest could provide, as discussed:

> *I don't use them overly. I'm not sold on the fact that they have been allocated a lots of funding to do the job they are doing. This is just my personal view. I think it should be the job of the Regional Coordinators.* (Interview 14: Management stakeholders)

> *I don't use Linkwest, they send me far too many emails to read.* (Interview 16: Management stakeholders)

We haven't gone down that path just yet, until we find a real need, at the moment we haven't had much involvement with them. (Interview 33: Management stakeholders)

Recently funded to support CRCs with governance [...]. Before that we were with WACOSS (for governance etc.) and we made the change and they [Linkwest] have been excellent. (Interview 40: Management stakeholders)

Westlink

Interviewed management stakeholders acknowledged the high quality of Westlink broadcasts, yet reported limited or selective use of this service. Interviewees reasoned that this lack of interest was due to increasing household access to satellite reception, namely VAST. Despite regular advertising, there was limited uptake of this services except where simulcasts were arranged as a wider community event. Reports of attendance at some Westlink telecasts are discussed as follows:

Westlink is brilliant. They broadcast a range of things. We hosted our first live Westlink broadcast, we had 38 people attend. We stream Westlink, if there is a training opportunity or a community opportunity. Our seniors do watch it. (Interview 30: Management stakeholders)

The simulcast, particularly the symphony in December is well attended. Generally we get 10 and 25. So, we try to put in, each month, some of the Westlink sessions that are coming up. Our focus in the Black Swan and orchestras. Feedback from people who can't make it to Perth has been positive. (Interview 32: Management stakeholders)

Other impact of changes

During discussions, themes related to contracting that did not fall under the preceding sections emerged. These included: additional responsibilities and time commitment to implement change and the withdrawal of funding for clusters which were considered a vital networking mechanism.

Hidden costs of change

Implementing the necessary changes from a grant to a contract funding arrangement required increased responsibility and time commitments from volunteer management committees to put in place the various policies and procedural changes and often necessitated additional staff time, some of which was unpaid. This was highlighted in the following quotes:

Personally, I am not sure if it my age, or whether I am getting too old for this, but we are a management committee of volunteers. Some of us probably a bit press ganged into it, we do enjoy it. There is a tremendous amount of responsibility being put on the management committee and I think that as volunteers we are probably being asked too much. (Interview 22: Management stakeholders)

We have a volunteer committee who meets up every month and donate their time and effort but I'm a little concerned at how long we can do that with increased requirements; governance, policies, procedures and so forth. (Interview 23: Management stakeholders)

Cluster meetings

Another aspect that emerged in discussions about changed arrangements with DRD was the withdrawal of funding for quarterly cluster meetings (or regional workshops). These were identified as valuable and missed were networking, idea exchange and support opportunities.

> *I miss the cluster meetings. The people that have been to them miss them because it was a great network. Lots of great ideas. We could judge how well we thought we were doing along with our peers.* (Interview 22: Management stakeholders)

> *The cluster is the key; you are talking to people doing the same job.* (Interview 29: Management stakeholders)

> *[…] before DRD was organising the cluster meetings and you just turned up but now we have started doing that ourselves because the DRD have pulled out of that space and we've found that it's important. We've done grants together […] it all works well. Our communities are different but similar.* (Interview 16: Management stakeholders)

7.7 What is working well and what should be retained?

Management stakeholders were asked to identify what was working well in their CRC and what should be retained. Responses were thematically organised into three dominant areas: specific and general services; staff arrangements; and connection to community. A number of CRCs could not prioritise a single aspect, so described everything as working well. Other responses included positive feedback in relation to such things as: the building, the shire and CRC partnership/ relationships.

General and specific services

CRCs taking part in visits discussed either a single service working well or highlighted the diversity of its services bringing the community and visitors into the CRC. For this first theme comments included:

> *Maintaining our businesses really, our strong point is the post office.* (Interview 31: Management stakeholders)

> *Our computer clinic, people come in, not necessarily on Tuesdays (half-price) but any time, […] just people needing pure computer help.* (Interview 36: Management stakeholders)

> *[…] the local paper, it is very popular, I think that is something that needs to stay in place as one of our information activities.* (Interview 49: Management stakeholders)

> *The range of services we deliver. People can rely on (resumé assistance, printing), we are able to meet their needs.* (Interview 53: Management stakeholders)

Staffing arrangements

The second common area that management stakeholders considered to be working well involved staffing arrangements (including trainees), volunteers and the knowledge and

expertise of CRC staff. Traineeships were considered to be particularly vital in the staffing mix within CRCs. As identified by management stakeholders:

> *[…] the staff and volunteers working well together.* (Interview 28: Management stakeholders)

> *The traineeships have worked superbly, that's one of the real highlights since I got involved to see the ways these young people have come along during that period. A lot of that goes back to coordinator's mentoring.* (Interview 14: Management stakeholders)

Connection with the community

The third major theme in relation to what was reported to be working well related to community involvement and connection to CRCs. Comments included:

> *Working really well, I think the connection with the community.* (Interview 4: Management stakeholders)

> *It is engaging with the community. If we lose focus, lose touch with our community then we would have utterly failed.* (Interview 29: Management stakeholders)

Fee-for-service

Most CRCs involved in interviews and the on-line survey identified that before the implementation of the new contractual arrangements they had mostly charged a fee-for-service involving printing, photocopying and internet services. Overall, CRCs discussed endeavouring to keep their pricing reasonable and reported often benchmarking their prices against other CRCs. Challenges associated with fee-for-service included the expectation that services are free due to the perception that CRCs are government or local government entities. Overseas travellers also held expectations that CRC services were free or complained that their pricing was too high. In certain circumstances, such as in relation to lower socio-economic groups, management stakeholders discussed not further disadvantaging people who couldn't afford their services.

Successes

Management stakeholders reported that service users were satisfied with paying a reasonable fee-for-service rate, particularly for personalised services. One CRC reported that they had to increase revenue and therefore put up costs which were accepted by the community:

> *We publicised the fact that we were going to do it [increase prices] and why and we had almost no push back… I never had any complaints.* (Interview 36: Management stakeholders)

A few CRCs reported that charges were generally low and that it was important to do this for their community:

> *It is not high. We are not charging a fortune for the internet. Printing and copying is all standard pricing.* (Interview 65: Management stakeholders)

I hold the view that we almost need to provide the service at cost, wherever possible. My theory on community engagement is the minute you make it difficult for somebody, they will go somewhere else and bad news will travel. (Interview 22: Management stakeholders)

One challenge that emerged from fee-for-service discussions related to service users' expectations that they should be able to access free services such as use of printing or photocopying and internet particularly among travellers, as discussed:

People often come in with a massive amount of photocopying or faxing or photos, and they get shocked when they get a $30 or $60 bill because it is a massive amount of printing and photocopying. (Interview 65: Management stakeholders)

One of our biggest challenges is we get people coming in looking for free internet and free power because it's offered in public libraries. (Interview 63: Management stakeholders)

A few tourists expect free internet or they tell you they can get it cheaper elsewhere in town. (Interview 40: Management stakeholders)

Management stakeholders also discussed service users' perceptions that CRCs are a government entity and therefore services should be free:

Fee for service, valuing our service, people don't understand that. There is a perception out there that we are funded by the government so we should do everything for nothing. We even had people come in here. (Interview 31: Management stakeholders)

People see because we work so well with the shire and we do so much with them, they think we are part of the shire and that we are funded by the government. "You're the government, you can afford this". (Interview 4: Management stakeholders)

A further challenge related to pricing and local community members, particularly from a lower socio-economic background or less affluent communities, was the requirement to keep CRC services affordable, as discussed by management stakeholders:

We look at our fees every 12 months to see if we can nudge things up a bit. People who aren't working they haven't got a lot of money, particularly the seniors. (Interview 28: Management stakeholders)

Because we're not a very wealthy population, we don't have a lot of spare money to spare and a lot of people struggle to pay and are reluctant to pay. (Interview 35: Management stakeholders)

7.8   Envisaged future role of DRD

Management stakeholders of visited CRCs considered that, by and large, the CRN was well placed under DRD. Views mostly supported this position with rationales ranging from DRD's long term association and support of the CRN to having a shared perspective of regional WA. As summed up in the following quotation:

> *The DRD is regional and that is their focus and our focus so we're working in parallel.* (Interviewee 33: Management stakeholder)

Most management stakeholders advocated maintaining the status quo, where alternatives were discussed, including the Department of Local Government and Communities (DLG&C), no great advantage was seen in moving to another arm of government. As one participant summed up:

> *[…] all you'd be doing is swapping the deck chairs. It doesn't matter which government department, it's not going to make a difference which one controls the funds and the accountability. However given the history, it makes sense to remain with DRD.* (Interview 22: Management stakeholders)

7.9   Future role of AWACRN

Management stakeholders were also asked to provide their opinion about the future role of the Association Western Australian Community Resource Networks (AWACRN). Respondents chiefly valued the role of the Association in advocating or providing a voice for CRCs with DRD and other departments as well as providing support and information. Many management stakeholders believed that the Association had even greater potential but was hamstrung by lack of funding and resourcing. Not all CRCs however held this view of the AWACRN with some considering that the Association had for some time lost its way but now seemed to be moving forward in a positive direction.

Advocates for the network
The importance of their role as advocates is highlighted in comments below:

> *[…] we are a member and I think they're a fantastic thing for CRCs, a voice for us, they seem to be the one that can go to the department and not challenge them, but discuss issues and challenge if they need to on certain things.* (Interviewee 4: Management stakeholder)

> *They are very pivotal, having the ability to lobby government ministers when there are things the government department is doing that they don't see the long-term impact or the impact to the community is very important.* (Interviewee 32: Management stakeholder)

Funding and resourcing
Identified aspects related to lack of funding and resourcing of the AWACRN included:

I think they underestimate themselves, they should actually play a greater part, but they need funding to make things happen. (Interviewee 12: Management stakeholder)

They have an important role but they are hamstrung by the lack of money. (Interviewee 31: Management stakeholder)

Role revisit

Although the AWACRN garnered significant support from management stakeholders, some interviewees were of the opinion that their role and approach needed to be reoriented:

The Association I think is necessary but it needs to find its role appropriately and its place and work with the Department. (Interviewee 23: Management stakeholder)

They could be more unbiased I think, because of the changes, I think sometimes there's a lot of personal opinion and they need to stand aside from that to make their decisions impartially. (Interviewee 33: Management stakeholder)

7.10 Scope for future development and vision

In concluding these interviews, management stakeholders were asked to identify the vision for their particular CRC. Most CRCs indicated that they wanted to remain responsive to community needs as a relevant communication and resource hub for their location into the future. The next most identified vision theme related to physical structural changes within the building housing their CRC, with interviewees identifying this aspect wanting to expand or improve their current premises. A small number of CRCs discussed their desire to introduce 'leading edge' technologies into their capacity with large map and 3D printers given as examples. While many CRCs acknowledged that they are dependent upon DRD funding to continue to operate their local CRC, some expressed their vision of developing greater financial self-sustainability to be achieved by developing new service offerings. These included introducing other aspects into their business, taking on local government services or incorporating commercial enterprises.

7.11 Conclusion

In this element of the study, coordinators and management (management stakeholders) reported a diverse range of activities and service user profiles in visited and surveyed CRCs. Largely, management stakeholders described CRCs as universally accessible communication and connection hubs. Partnerships and collaborations, while many and varied, had recently focussed on engaging the business sector and achieved varying degrees of success while many challenges were also identified. Other testing areas included maintaining community

participation, reductions in funding and consequences for staffing, shire relations and barriers to delivering training.

The introduction of the new contracting arrangements had both positive and negative dimensions. Positive dimensions included greater autonomy around budget allocations, capacity to offer a growing number of social and business supports, albeit with the same milestone requirements irrespective of community size. There was little acknowledgement or apparent understanding of the Department's view that the service contract conditions could be tailored more to suit their own circumstances (within the overall confines of the community level outcomes being sought), and little appreciation (at least initially) that quarterly reporting did not require or imply an even spread of activities throughout the year. This would indicate the existence of miscommunication or misunderstanding between the Department and many CRCs, at least in the early stages of the shift to contracting.

The obligation to improve governance processes and procedures accompanied by independent audits were generally lauded. Reporting requirements, as part of contractual arrangements, elicited both negative and positive feedback the nature of which was highly dependent upon the capacity of individual CRCs. Feedback on changes in personnel was mostly confined to the loss of additional trainees for some centres that previously had more than one.

Most management stakeholders generally welcomed the inclusion of Linkwest as a support to CRCs, although utilisation at the time of the study was acknowledged as limited. Westlink, while valued, was considered an underutilised resource across the visited and surveyed sites. Other themes that emerged from new contracting arrangements included the hidden and unacknowledged cost-saving represented by the contribution of volunteer management committees in bringing about these changes and some lamentation about cessation of funding for cluster meetings which were highly regarded as an important networking and support mechanism.

Aspects reported as working well within CRCs included service delivery, staffing arrangements and connection to community. Most CRCs considered that the principal of fee-for-service was unproblematic, apart from some challenges around community perceptions that CRCs were a government instrumentality and hence fee-free. For management stakeholders, both DRD and the AWACRC were considered relevant to the future of CRCs. Most interviewees also considered DRD to be the most appropriate arm of government to oversee CRCs as this would ensure continuity and help retain IP that has accrued due to the Department's familiarity with regional matters.

As for the AWACRC, management stakeholders considered its role as an intermediary between CRCs and DRD to be important. Scope and future visions were largely reported in the areas of greater responsiveness to community, improvements in infrastructure and equipment or long term financial stability.

8. Local stakeholders

In addition to CRC management, the research team also endeavoured to meet with other stakeholders who had knowledge of, or utilised, their local CRC. The three stakeholder groups interviewed and discussed in this Chapter are community members, local businesses and local government.

It should be noted that the research team relied on the CRC managers to contact and arrange meetings with these stakeholders, both for reasons of efficiency and relevance. However this does mean that they are not a random sample of local businesses or communities. Unfortunately, not every visited CRC was able to organise such meetings, for a variety of reasons – the existence of competing priorities or events, time pressures on CRC staff, lack of organisation or commitment by managers, or possibly a lack of stakeholder engagement. Nevertheless, the research team was able to meet with a significant number of local stakeholders.

8.1   Community stakeholders

Visits to the 33 CRCs included focus groups and individual discussions with 84 community stakeholders who identified as regular service users. Focus groups ranged from two (2) to nine (9) participants. While individual interviews with service users did occur in some locations, follow-up phone calls post-visit were also conducted. Community members represented a wide range of demographics including: males/females; a reasonable representation of ages, (although predominantly over 50); residents of towns and proximal farming communities; and recent through to long-term service users. Many identified volunteering at some point in a CRC or its previous iteration as a Telecentre.

Use of CRCs

Community members or service users participating in the study identified a broad range of engagement with CRCs across the suite of activities outlined elsewhere in the report (see Table 3). Services predominantly utilised were printing / photocopying services, computer access and internet, social events and, where applicable, the use of co-located services such as banks, libraries, post offices, licencing and government portal services. Local newspapers or newsletters — frequently reported as being produced, managed or housed within CRCs — were seen as vital information sources for most regional communities visited. While community members identified using CRCs for personal reasons, CRCs' support to service users who were affiliated with sport and social clubs/associations (e.g. children's sporting calendar, Lions Club, Men's Shed and Community Arts projects) in their voluntary capacity as organisers of teams and events and as members of management committees was a topic frequently discussed. Service users described the CRCs' informal secretariat as an important 'backbone' contribution to voluntary, NFP and NGO services sectors across regional WA.

Benefits of a local CRC

Service users in focus groups and interviews broadly expressed positive sentiment towards and appreciation for their local CRC. Community members most frequently characterised their CRC as a central access point or hub with overarching information, knowledge and relational connections. Cited benefits included: access to information technology, specifically computer and internet access; social and wellbeing benefits including responsiveness to individual and community need, fostering community connectedness, reducing social isolation, and offering activities that support physical (exercise classes) and mental health (art, craft, photography); and places of learning through courses, skills development, employment and library services. Community stakeholders reported that the capacity to access local services supported by friendly and capable staff was particularly beneficial. As participants noted:

> *[…] they are just so friendly and relaxed and they always manage to fit things in […] they understand the constraints of a small community.* (Interview 19: Focus group - community stakeholders)

> *There's a lot of use made of government computer access, and I think people feel a lot more comfortable accessing Centrelink at a CRC than if it was in a Shire office.* (Interview 10: Community stakeholder)

> *The CRC is the best way to disseminate information about activities, it has fantastic reach into the community.* (Interview 59: Community stakeholder)

> *[…] it doesn't matter what generation you are, it [technology] is always changing and if you're having trouble or there's a part of technology that stumps you, then there is some local assistance* (Interview 64: Focus group - Community stakeholders)

Other comments in support of the section summary include:

> *When they rebranded they were perceived as hubs, and I think they have become the hub. I think when they were Telecentres people didn't get what they were about […]. In rural WA they [CRCs] have become really important, not just as hubs but as places for people to meet and connect, and with technology that we can all access. It is money well spent in the regions.* (Interview 44: Focus group - community stakeholders)

> *[…] offering educational courses, not only provides new skills for people but it keeps them connected to the outside world, keeps them updated and it does actually reduce that sense of isolation.* (Interview 45: Focus group - community stakeholders)

Perceptions of Fee-for-service

In discussing user-pays for services offered by the CRC, overwhelmingly community stakeholders considered that fees and charges were either negligible or at a reasonable cost.

> *[…] would cost much more in the real world.* (Interview 58: Focus group - community stakeholders)

Community contributors also acknowledged the increased value attributed to the time, skills and expertise of staff within CRCs:

> *... for some services, they [CRC staff] are probably not factoring in their time, they could even charge more without it becoming too expensive for local people.* (Interview 10: Focus group - Community stakeholders)

> *The thing you get here is one-on-one service.* (Interview 45: Focus group - community stakeholders)

> *We may pay for the printing but it is the brain component, the 'know how' that we don't pay for [...].* (Interview 44: Focus group - community stakeholders)

Limitations

Service users identified few limitations associated with their local CRC in what was, overall, highly positive feedback. However where barriers or limits were voiced, the most common aspects included operating hours, community perceptions of the costs of services and concerns about ongoing funding. Comments on identified limitations are highlighted below:

Operating hours

> *Well one thing I found frustrating was when the funding was cut and they closed the CRC on a Monday [...] this limited the bank's operating hours and therefore the whole community's access to banking.* (Interview 45: Focus group - Community stakeholders)

> *Their operating hours are shorter now than when it was run by volunteers.* (Interview 57: Focus group - Community stakeholders)

Cost of services

> *People often think the CRC is expensive, it is not. People lose sight of what you pay for things here and what you pay for in Perth. The fact you can drop in here, you are not dependent on delivery ... the postal service is atrocious here. I think it is a community perception rather than the CRC doing something wrong.* (Interview 42: Focus group - Community stakeholders)

> *I understand the pricing because you are in the middle of nowhere everything costs more here, so even in the CRC you're paying for it.* (Interview 19: Focus group - Community stakeholders)

Funding uncertainty

> *There is a worry that when Royalties for Regions gets pulled so will the CRCs.* (Interview 56: Focus group - Community stakeholders)

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Community stakeholders taking part in the study were very satisfied with the current level of services offered in CRCs and few mentioned the need for additional services. This was frequently addressed by service users in discussions about the CRCs' capacity to flexibly meet local demand. This is encapsulated in the following quote:

> *The wonderful thing about CRCs is they are always asking us what we want, what they can do for us. The only thing that is limited is our imagination […] and of course funding.*
> (Interview 44: Focus group - Community stakeholders)

Conclusion

Eighty-four community stakeholders who identified as regular service users participated in focus group and individual discussions in visited CRCs. Community members represented a range of demographics although they were predominantly in the older age category. Community stakeholders identified accessing printing/photocopying, computer and internet, social events and co-located services. Identified were linkages to CRCs through sporting and social club/associations they were involved in, with the local CRC providing an invaluable contribution to community/NFP organisations as an informal secretariat. The CRC was considered a central access point or hub. Benefits related to access to information technology, social and wellbeing benefits and as places of learning. The capacity to access local services supported by amenable and knowledgeable staff was seen as a positive attribute. Community stakeholders considered that fees and charges are either negligible or at a reasonable cost. While few limitations of the CRCs were identified, negative comments related to operating hours, community perceptions of the costs of services and concerns about ongoing funding. Overall, service users were satisfied with the range of activities and services provided by their CRC and recognised its capacity to respond flexibly to community needs.

8.2 Business

During visits to CRCs, 54 business stakeholders were interviewed, mostly as part of group discussions. Participation in these discussions varied from one (1) to 12 interviewees. Business stakeholders identified being involved in the following types of business: accommodation (hotel, caravan park, aged care facilities), accounting, agribusiness, allied and alternative health, art gallery, banking, business networks, childcare, counselling, farming, hospitality, machinery and infrastructure services, postal, pub, schools, supermarket/grocery stores, TAFE, transport and viticulture.

Activities engaged in with CRC

Businesses across the visited CRCs reported a broad range of activities with some common themes emerging. These included: most utilised CRC services, were usually involved in business specific events, training opportunities and other business supports.

Most utilised services

Traditional CRC services, namely computing and printing/photocopying, were the most frequently identified activity for businesses.

> *We put so much through the CRC [...] menus, brochures, business cards, policy documents, and some books we have written and they helped us. I don't know where we would go without them.* (Interview 15: Business stakeholder)

> *I'm probably the best customer for canvas printing [at the CRC] because I ship that all over the world.* (Interview 42: Business stakeholder)

Promotion of business through the CRC was the next most identified activity. This included the use of local newspapers produced or affiliated with CRCs for business advertising, followed by use of their community contact lists for the distribution of promotional materials. The latter was associated mostly with organising large-scale events such as agri-business shows/days.

> *[...] we use them for marketing, their contacts, their ability to print out information we want to send out to the community. The events side of things again the same deal. They are the go-to point for pretty much everything that involves marketing and communication for a given town.* (Interview 38: Business stakeholder)

Business specific events

This stakeholder group discussed business specific events organised by or held at CRCs, including working breakfasts, sundowners, networks and involvement in local Chambers of Commerce.

> *We've had a few business events and come to all of those to listen to guest speakers on a variety of topics.* (Interview 38: Business stakeholder)

> *Through the CRC, I have attended sundowners, the women's working breakfast, and I know there are also men's business events.* (Interview 9: Business stakeholder)

> *The Chamber of Commerce here is new. We hold meetings here at the CRC and the CRC helped us produce a calendar of meetings/events. Realistically they have been the driving force, kept the Chamber going. The Chamber decides when and how; the CRC makes it happen.* (Interview 11: Business stakeholder).

Business training

Training provided for businesses ranged from basic computer courses, through to business-specific software (MYOB) centred courses as well as business management and first aid courses, to industry specific training. Comments about these activities include:

I only did one [management course] last week, on being a better boss. It was been run in conjunction with [Commodities Association], the CRC facilitated it. (Interview 9: Business stakeholder)

[…] we've had training that we requested, first aid, we needed to get this up and running, as everyone had sort of lapsed. (Interview 24: Business stakeholder)

Business support

Less frequently identified were support services that business stakeholders accessed including: office space, business incubation, administrative support, internet access for employees, equipment rental, and video and teleconferencing. Some examples of these are outlined below:

I do have quite a significant number of clients out here that like to have that face-to-face contact with an accountant, so, for me it's an ideal place where I can have a confidential conversation in a place that is comfy, local and central […] for me it's ideal. (Interview 46: Business stakeholder)

The CRC is administrative support for us, they do lot of bits and pieces to help us produce the paper and get it out to the community. It is an independent paper, the CRC assist us in the production. (Interview 38: Business stakeholder)

One of the biggest benefits for us is the facilities they provide for workers that come into town. We have a lot of temporary seasonal workers, backpackers and uni students. This gives them a great base to come and to have access to internet, library, computers, this enables them to get things done that they need to do. (Interview 42: Business stakeholder)

I had my first WebEx [online meeting] the other day. I had no idea how to do it. The staff set it all up for me, had it ready to go […] I raced in, plugged in the password, had a two hour meeting and then left. (Interview 43: Business stakeholder)

Benefits of partnering with CRCs

Largely, business stakeholders reported a good understanding and use of relevant services and activities that CRCs offer. Interviewed stakeholders reported that CRCs provide a range of business benefits, including greater exposure and networking opportunities. Many highlighted the importance of supporting and retaining services locally and the knock-on effect that CRCs provided to business.

Advertising through locally produced newspapers and within CRCs was reported to benefit the profile of local businesses, as discussed:

Using the CRC is getting our name out into the community because it is a place where a lot of the community come to do other activities; therefore our name is getting out there. (Interview 39: Business stakeholder)

Networking through the CRC was considered to improve businesses' connections and access to resources.

> *They put us in contact with the Small Business Network, who helped us with what things we need to be set up in business, including debt management.* (Interview 18: Business stakeholder)

> *Getting local businesses together, because it is a small town it isn't a huge thing, but the networking part of it is very useful.* (Interview 50: Business stakeholder)

Keeping services local

The capacity to provide and keep services local was reported as vital for the future of small towns in regional WA. Vibrant services in small communities were reported to have an important knock-on effect for other local businesses and for community coherence. Where CRCs were operating well, their services and facilities were acknowledged as contributing greatly to local economies and population dynamics. CRCs were identified as playing an important role in encouraging communities to use local services rather than taking their business elsewhere.

> *From a business perspective, sending my customers to [the CRC] to get their forms and documentation copied and printed, means that they then come back to lodge their application […] they're actually not leaving our community to go to another Post Office.* (Interview 7: Business stakeholder)

> *[…] a lot of that work they do keeps money in country towns. Without [the CRC] we have no option but to source outside of town. That would kill country towns, you don't have to look far to see towns shrinking. So, for [name of town] to have a vibrant CRC is priceless.* (Interview 38: Business stakeholder)

> *There's no other bank in the town […] the more people bank with our agency, the more we can put back into the community.* (Interview 39: Business stakeholder)

Comments below also discussed other value-adding aspects related to CRCs:

> *If a CRC employs two or three people then that's assisting families and that assists my business - that's a bit of turnabout within the community. It keeps the community vibrant. It has effects on the social fabric of the community.* (Interview 18: Business stakeholder)

> *All of the courses bring people into the town, which is indirectly good for my business. So the more they do the better off the town is. It is a snowball effect, we then do more business and we put more money back into the community via sponsorship. That's how farming communities work. You've got to have good businesses in farming communities because that's what keeps them going, it keeps the sporting bodies going, it keeps the schools going, because we all put money into it. And the CRC is part of that ... a big part actually.* (Interview 21: Business stakeholder)

Barriers to business support

Most business participants were unable to readily identify barriers to support in connection with CRCs with most considering them proactive places that are solution focussed, as illustrated in the following comments:

> *They always seem to find a way round most issues and it's usually not because of the lack of anything.* (Interview 9: Business stakeholder)

> *I can't think of a time that we would have sat back and said 'it's a pity they don't do A, B, C and D.' I think, for us they provide the services that are needed.* (Interview 24: Business stakeholder)

A number of businesses reported that barriers were related more to the town dynamics, such as the lack of a critical population mass and challenges associated with servicing transient populations in the mining (FIFO) and tourism sectors (backpackers and grey nomads).

Fee-for-service

Business stakeholders were currently paying fee-for-service for the range of activities previously identified. Predominantly, interviewees described the pricing within CRCs as reasonable and competitive. For courses in particular, many business stakeholders considered that CRCs could charge more to the business sector. This is summed up by one participant:

> *I actually think their prices are a bit low. I think they should charge more. And maybe more value would be placed on their services.* (Interview 15: Business stakeholder)

Better utilisation of CRCs by businesses

In certain locations, business stakeholders believed that the CRC was already well used and had no further suggestions. However, in other locations, the types of suggestions for improvement were largely focused on increasing community and business awareness of CRC activities:

> *The CRC is very well known within the town; just the programs are not necessarily broadcast. I wouldn't see them if I wasn't on Facebook.* (Interview 11: Business stakeholder)

> *The CRC provides very useful business support for me. It is however slightly underutilised by the community.* (Interview 2: Business stakeholder)

Conclusion

Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted with a broad range of industries and services, involving 54 business stakeholders. In summary, businesses were engaged in a wide range of CRC activities with computing and printing/copying the most frequently identified

activity, followed by using the CRC to promote their business primarily via advertising in the CRC locally managed newspapers. Interviewees had participated in business specific events organised by or held at CRCs and discussed their use of support services (e.g. training, office space, administrative support, access to telecommunication resources and equipment).

Stated benefits of partnering with their CRC included increased profile of their business, networking and importantly sustaining services in their local community. The majority of businesses were largely unable to identify barriers to partnership with their CRC. Fee-for-service was supported and there was a view that CRCs could increase their cost of services to the business sector. In some locations the CRC was viewed as well utilised, while in others suggestions for better utilisation in the community related to increasing local awareness of the role and services offered by the CRC.

8.3   Local Governments

Visits to CRCs involved 27 local government areas. The team interviewed nine (9) local government representatives during visits with a follow-up on-line survey request sent to the remaining 18 local authorities. This resulted in a further seven (7) local authorities responding to the study -- 16 in total or an overall response rate of 60 per cent. Questions posed to the local government representatives are included in Appendix Nine.

Local Government Areas and CRC Coverage
Of the 16 local authorities participating in the study, 11 had one CRC; three had two CRCs and two shires had three or more CRCs within their local government area.

Partnerships
Of the 16 respondents, four (25%) local authorities managed the CRC under the umbrella of council. The most commonly identified formal partnerships with the remaining local authorities were lease agreements related to use of premises, most including maintenance and absorption of utility costs (e.g. water, electricity). Other agreements included managing the library, handling payments for local government services, and/or front desk for general local authority queries, as well as housing, local authority-subsidised medical services. One council had provided an interest free loan to a CRC for the development of a community facility.

Relationship with CRCs
Most local authorities indicated that they had either a 'very good' (44%) or 'good' (25%) relationship with the CRC/s in their shire, accounting for over two-thirds of the local government sample as illustrated in Figure 3 (below).
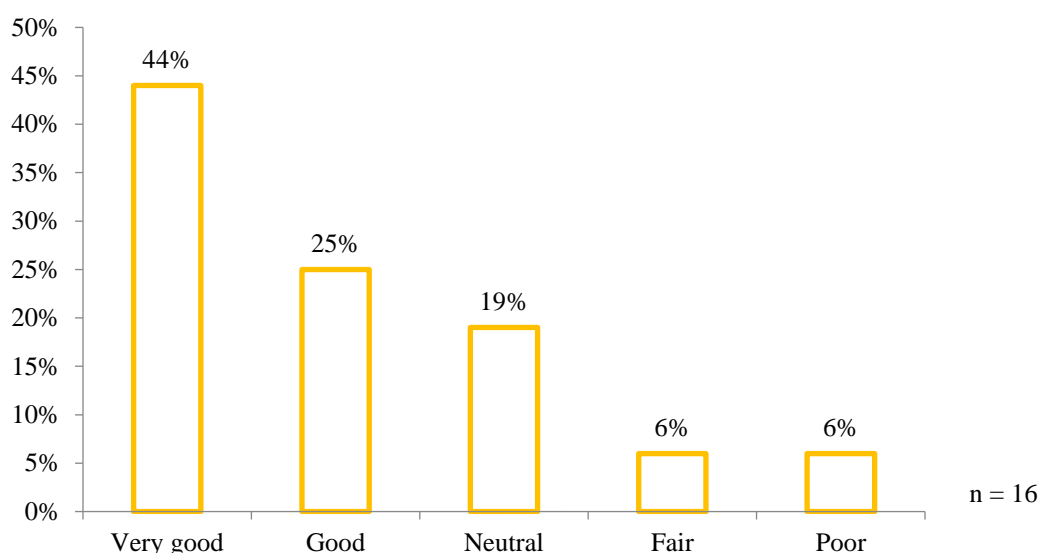
Figure 3: Shires relationships with CRC/s

Activities

Activities, or informal arrangements, with CRCs undertaken by the sample of local governments included community development (largely conceptualised as social and human service delivery dimensions), room hire for meetings, cooperation around organising/conducting community events, information exchange and council representation on CRC management committees.

Benefits

Overwhelmingly the greatest identified benefit of having CRCs operating in local government areas related to services provided to residents that would otherwise be unavailable, particularly resources and government services. Some local authority representatives described the CRC as the 'hub' or the 'social glue' of the community, complementing the council while enabling it to focus on core business. Terminology used to convey this included: as an 'alternative to', 'independent of' or an 'extension of' the local government. The considerable local knowledge possessed by CRCs and their capacity to act as brokers particularly in community consultations was also highlighted. Although the social dimensions were emphasised, CRCs' contractual requirements to offer training and support to businesses, professional development and coordination were particularly acknowledged.

Barriers to Enhancing the CRC: Local Government relationships

Most barriers identified related to external factors, such as: ongoing funding and resourcing of CRCs; attracting staff to regional communities; and limits around access to technology due to patchy internet coverage. In a small number of responses, either disharmony between the council and the local CRC or limited collaboration, often due to a range of historical reasons, were mentioned. These circumstances, although infrequent, were more likely to give rise to differing perceptions of the 'division of labour' between the shire and the CRC.

Some of the services offered by the CRC (e.g. government access point computer, newsletter) should be undertaken by the local council. (Respondent 3: Local government)

… We're doing an awful lot of community work, I just think the CRC should do more, they get funded for it … . (Interview 27: Local government)

Fee-for-service

Very few local governments identified paying a fee-for-service, except for funding to cover gaps in services such as medical facilities or libraries. Aside from this, local authorities paid general service fees associated with advertising in local newsletters, hiring facilities and printing/copying. These services were considered to be competitively priced and assist in retaining business in the local community.

We have a lot of statutory advertising that we had to do, so we utilised the [CRC-produced local paper]. Same as, we have a Shire news section that goes in every month… . (Interview 48: Local government)

In-kind contributions

Of the 16 local authorities in the sample, three informed us that they provide no in-kind support to their local CRC, with an additional local authority not disclosing these details. The majority of local authorities identified accommodating CRCs at a nominal or peppercorn rental. In most situations this included maintenance costs, utilities (water and electricity) and capital works. Other local authorities contributed administrative support (payroll, bookkeeping), subsided staffing or shared the costs of a trainee. In the case of CRCs with medical services, shires paid weekly fees and/or part funded a receptionist/trainee. Shires were asked to provide information about types of in-kind support within an approximate value range, as detailed in Table 4. Based on this data, on average shires contribute $18,000[5] annually to community-managed CRCs and $23,000 to local authority-managed CRCs. In relation to types of in-kind support, some 73 per cent of the sample accommodated the CRC at a nominal rent, 36 per cent provided administrative/staffing support from the local authority's resources (payroll, financial management) and 18 per cent covered additional staffing to a shire activity operating within a CRC.

Table 5: Annual in-kind support by shires to CRCs according to management and support type

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[5] Calculated by taking the midpoint in range provided and then deriving overall means.

	Not disclosed	Nil	$5,000-10,000	$11,000-15,000	$16,000-20,000	$21,000-25,000	$26,000-30,000	$31,000-35,000
Type of Management								
Community-managed CRC		3	2	3	1		3	
Shire-managed CRC	1				2			1
Type of in-kind support								
Rent/utilities			1	3	3		3	1
Admin/staffing support				1	1		1	1
Medical service funding/support							2	

Local government in-kind contribution was identified as over-looked in the 'real costs' of operating CRCs. As noted by one local government representative:

> *There is no value attached to the building, there is no income or expense recognised for the rent, the utilities or water. If you actually recognise the Shire contribution it would mean the DRD contribution would be downgraded. The in-kind contribution is quite a lot.* (Interviewee 37: Local government)

Role of CRCs in Business Development

Predominantly, local authorities considered that CRCs had a role to play in business development, but mostly in a peripheral way rather than as a central activity. Comments focussed mostly on duplication, core business and CRC capacity:

> *On their business plan they've got economic development as part of it, I'm still not sure why DRD pushed them down the business/economic development track, I really don't, [the shire] has an Economic Development Officer, it is a small town and we don't need to cross over.* (Interview 34: Local government)

> *My concern with the CRC and business development is that funding is limited, and that they shouldn't be jumping into things where there is no return […] where it is going to tie up a lot of their resources that they don't have.* (Interview 37: Local government)

> *They can promote and refer potential opportunities to the appropriate shire personnel to develop the relationship/business opportunity.* (Respondent 7: Local government)

> *There are already other providers who provide this service.* (Respondent 4: Local government)

> *The [CRC] staff don't really have that skill set.* (Interview 5: Local government)

> *Do not consider this [business development] as a central aspect of the CRC.* [Interview 27: Local government]

However, a different perspective of CRCs and business development is worth highlighting. Where it was perceived that the CRC was operating as a business this was noted as having possible implications for local government regarding the lease of premises and competition with local enterprises, albeit discussed by one LGA:

> *The Council believes the CRC often runs their operations in conflict with their lease and with their own constitution as a Not-for-profit incorporated body.* (Interview 13: Local government)

> *Competition with local businesses is a problem [catering service]. This was a potential business that could have been located in the town, not out of the CRC.* (Interview 13: Local government)

Ways CRCs could be better utilised by communities

The dominant aspects identified by local authorities for greater utilisation by the community of CRCs related to better promotion of services and responsiveness to service gaps. Suggested additional services chiefly focussed on greater opportunities for training involving community, local businesses as well as councils. Related comments include:

Promotion

> *Promote themselves better to increase community awareness of what they provide. They could potentially offer more to community.* (Interview 27: Local government)

> *Perhaps working on more promotion to ensure residents are fully aware that the CRC is here for them.* (Respondent 1: Local Government)

> *Better understanding of what the CRC has available.* (Respondent 2: Local government)

> *Maybe it is an issue of promotion, they may need to better promote what they're doing.* (Interview 5: Local government)

Service gaps

> *Liaison with other service providers to identify gaps and avoid any duplication.* (Respondent 5: Local government)

> *Services provided by CRC/s should be targeted at service 'gaps' within the community.* (Respondent 4: Local government)

Conclusion

Sixteen local government representatives participated in interviews or a follow-up survey, with a quarter of these managing a CRC under the umbrella of council. The major partnership identified by local authorities was the lease of premises and covering maintenance and utility costs. Other agreements included CRC management of the library, medical or shire payment services. Two-thirds identified a good relationship with their local CRC, which enabled informal arrangement such as community development, information exchange and partnering to conduct community events. Largely, local authorities saw the CRCs are the hub or social glue of the community that provided a range of valuable services. There were few barriers identified by these local authority study participants. In-kind contributions made by local authorities averaged between $18,000 and $25,000 annually, a subsidy cost that was considered to be infrequently acknowledged. In relation to changes in the focus of CRCs most local authorities' comments indicate business and economic development is considered outside of the remit of CRCs. Finally, some local authority representatives considered that CRCs could promote themselves better and provide greater coverage of gaps in the community service provision.

9. Broader Stakeholders

As part of the consultation process undertaken during the project, the research team met with, or received direct communication from, senior decision-makers and officials from four organisations directly related to the regional development portfolio, as well as from five other government agencies who have direct involvement with CRCs. The following consultations were undertaken:

- Regional Development portfolio:
  - Department of Regional Development (3 officials – separate interviews)
  - Office of the Minister for Regional Development (1 official)
  - WA Regional Development Trust (1)
  - South-West Regional Development Commission (email response)
- Other WA government agencies:
  - State Library (1)
  - Department of Local Government and Communities (3 officials – group interview)
  - Small Business Development Centre (3 officials – group interview)
  - Tourism WA (email response)
  - Department of Sport and Recreation (email response)

In addition, two group interviews were held with the two non-government organisations primarily responsible for servicing the Community Resource Network:
- The Board (8 members) of the Association of Western Australian Community Resource Centres
- Linkwest (2 officials), who provide support services to the CRN and to the Association.

This Chapter provides feedback from these consultations about several key issues related to CRCs, but it should be noted that not all sections were equally relevant to each group.

9.1 Involvement by Government Agencies with CRCs

Those government agencies outside of the regional development portfolio were asked about their recent and current involvement with CRCs. Varying degrees of co-location and service delivery (contracted, fee-for-service and free) by CRCs, both directly with the agencies or with their contracted service providers, was evident.

The closest involvement was with libraries: figures provided to the research team by the State Library (which included grant-based CRCs) indicated that 38 towns and communities have their libraries co-located with the CRC. Most regional library services in WA are offered through local governments, some of whom then sub-contract them to the CRCs to operate. Despite this large number of CRC-run libraries, there are many more towns (61 in all) with

separate libraries and CRCs. Another 64 towns have libraries and no CRC (these include many of the larger regional towns such as Albany, Bunbury, Esperance etc.), while 17 communities have a CRC but no library (mostly in remote communities with grant-based CRCs).

While the relationship is generally positive and supportive and the State Library sees potential for closer co-operation, there is a fundamental "free versus fee" difference in attitude to service provision – libraries have a mandate to provide free state-wide databases and access to books and magazines (including e-books and e-magazines), whereas CRCs often wish to charge for internet access.

> *We are fighting a more or less continuous philosophical battle there* (Interview 72: broader stakeholder)

A second area of reasonably frequent and positive utilisation of CRCs is in tourism. Around twenty CRCs also operate as Visitor Centres, while others are located in close proximity (e.g. one or two doors' away) to a Visitor Centre and work closely with them. Almost all provide tourist information of some sort.

> *the Community Resource Network (CRN) ... plays an important role in supporting tourism throughout Western Australia. In particular, CRNs often serve as visitor centres providing information and promoting attractions to tourists in regional locations where there are limited facilities available.* (Interview 79: broader stakeholder)

The Department of Sport and Recreation (DSR) has quite extensive engagement with CRCs although its extent varies between regions. The main relationships occur in the Wheatbelt.

> *The DSR Wheatbelt office has collaborated with a number of Wheatbelt CRCs to deliver capacity building programs, disseminate information on our behalf and to seek local intelligence to help shape programs and strategies of the department.* (Interview 80: broader stakeholder)

Specific examples of collaboration between DSR and CRCs include working with local sporting clubs to complete the Healthy Club Checklist – a club management tool used by DSR to identify areas of need in club development and governance.

> *The CRC then facilitated a number of strategic planning workshops for local community clubs. Strategic planning was identified as a priority and recognised long term need of clubs.* (Interview 80: broader stakeholder)

The DSR also partners with local governments across the state to deliver club development support through the placement of Club Development Officers (CDOs). Funding from the department along with a contribution from the local governments enables local CDOs to work with clubs to support their development, governance and meet other local needs. A total of 28 CDOs are currently employed in regional WA across 45 Local Governments. CDOs are likely to have developed their own partnerships with local CRCs. One example is in Kununurra.

> *In Kununurra, DSR has partnered with the local CRC to deliver the Club Development Officer Scheme in that community. Traditionally, DSR partners with Local Government to deliver this*

scheme ... [but] Shire of Wyndham/East Kimberly were no long in a position to support this program, so DSR negotiated with the KCRC to employ the CDO and deliver club development activities to the community. This work aligns closely with the broader objectives of that CRC to provide assistance to community groups in terms of governance, planning and program delivery. (Interview 80: broader stakeholder)

In addition:

Other CRCs are engaged for information dissemination and from time to time access to video conferencing facilities. (Interview 80: broader stakeholder)

The Department of Local Government and Communities (DLGC) moved to a contracted services model a few years ago. It is now responsible for more than $35 million in funding to purchase services from community groups such as Volunteer Centres, Community Neighbourhood Centres, parenting services, financial services, etc. Currently, three CRCs are also Volunteer Centres, and one CRC (Tom Price, which was not part of our study) also operates as a Community Neighbourhood Centre. The level of awareness of CRC capability in service delivery was not always high in DLGC, and CRC services were not necessarily actively sought after.

You started talking about a range of capabilities they had; I certainly wasn't aware they did things like that, in fact when we started our conversation I wondered whether the days of Telecentres were over (Interview 76: broader stakeholder)

From my point of view anyway, we'd go from one end of the year to the other never hearing from the CRCs or the Department in relation to them, so ... there isn't an exploration of the interest in picking up or doing business with them, there just isn't (Interview 76: broader stakeholder)

The Small Business Development Commission (SBDC) has recently moved to a new system of contracts to provide its regional small business advisory services. As a result it was still too early to say what impact this would have on the CRCs.

Under the old model it was fairly mixed. We found some of the most successful [small business] centres from our point of view were the ones that really did work with their CRCs and chambers and so on, but the vast majority didn't. Under the new model it's a little early. The new model has as an expectation that there will be the collaboration ... look for opportunities to work together with either infrastructure or membership based organisations. But it's not prescribed. (Interview 75: broader stakeholder)

A number of broader stakeholder interviewees provided suggestions for how to increase the interaction between CRCs and government (and Not-for-profit) organisations. These are discussed later in this chapter.

9.2   Role of the CRCs

Interviewees were asked what they saw as the main role of the CRCs. A wide variety of views was canvassed.

Technology

The antecedents of the CRCs as Telecentres was well understood, and was still regarded as relevant given the current patchy state of internet, broadband and mobile phone services in regional WA, and the fact that there is still a digital divide in terms of some people's access to, understanding of, and familiarity with, technology.

yes, it is digital backup access in a world where digital is not working in regional and rural Western Australia. (Interview 69: broader stakeholder)

you've got basic literacy issues and computer literacy issues ... government and councils are pushing so much of their business online .. there's an assumption that it's fine and everyone can just do it but that's not the case ... so the technology still in terms of the CRCs is still a very valid mission. (Interview 72: broader stakeholder)

Tourism

CRCs were seen to play an important role in promoting tourism, not only those who also operated as Visitor Centres (see above) but also in other, related, ways:

the significant role of Community Resources Centres (CRCs) in supporting regional communities and visitors in Western Australia. Maintaining a State wide network of these is considered important as these centres often provide visitor information services in remote areas, opportunities for people to access training courses, and workforce development options including tourism and hospitality that would otherwise not be available. (Interview 79: broader stakeholder)

Business and economic development

The appropriate role for CRCs in business and economic development was an issue considered by many broader stakeholders. A variety of views existed, with many seeing this as being unrealistic beyond the basic provision of facilities (e.g. a venue for training) and low level support. It was also seen as important to ensure that overlap and competition didn't occur, and that CRC staff were competent to provide the services suggested.

[CRCs have] been asked to be more economic on the one hand and provide small business and look at economic development ... I frankly think that's not realistic. (Interview 66: broader stakeholder)

... as an infrastructure provider they have a role .. I don't know that they should have included in their contracts KPIs around holding business functions and things like that. (Interview 75: broader stakeholder)

State government has bought business advisory services ... and sometimes they need a place to operate from ... another area could be provision of these hot desk type things ... in particular in the remotes where there isn't commercial places around ... need to be limited to where you don't have a main street that's struggling to get tenants. (Interview 75: broader stakeholder)

What business advisory service could they provide? Because there's a lot of people that just go oh that's easy which undermines what a business adviser does ... we now have highly qualified incredible people ... could they [CRCs] refer somebody on so somebody phones up and says I don't know how to get a tax file number, OK well, here's how you find that out or how do I get an ABN ... but if they come to them going 'I've been in business 5 years and I'm going broke',

you don't want well-meaning amateurs working with businesses. (Interview 73: broader stakeholder)

There were others, however, who felt that the CRCs needed to be more involved in business and economic development.

> *... we want to get a much higher level of outcomes and certainly outcomes that relate to job development, making communities more liveable, attracting and retaining small business. The regions are 96% small business so they've got a big market out there.* (Interview 69: broader stakeholder)

It was commented upon a couple of times that the focus on business and economic development had arisen because of the change to RfR funding.

> *There's a tension between the CRCs and their funder ... their funder being RFR – if you're funded from RFR you have to deliver on the pillars of RFR, which is this business development pillar. So the funding is forcing a network that was never designed to play in the economic development space into an economic development space ... That's a fundamental problem as I see it; the CRC network isn't set up for it. They're set up for community or social development.* (Interview 74: broader stakeholder) *... and in fact that's the way they're named.* (Interview 73: broader stakeholder)

Financial sustainability

The shift to RfR funding – as well as the move to a contract rather than grant model – was also seen as impacting on the role the CRCs were playing.

> *The CRCs provide a local focus point for community activity but have reduced their delivery of local community learning programs ... The focus has been finding contracts for service delivery of information that yields a revenue stream for the CRCs as a basis for stability.* (Interview 71: broader stakeholder)

> *I think they should be looking to get as financially independent or diversified away from being dependent on RFR as they can because if they don't do that then one day they will get shot to pieces ... it's about managing your risk.* (Interview 66: broader stakeholder)

> *... it's a tenuous existence, staying funded because the Minister likes you and your community likes you, that is not a long term future in government.* (Interview 69: broader stakeholder)

> *Why would people go to that CRC network, what's its value add, is it easy to communicate with, is it something you can use to drive development in the regions? If the answer is no, and it's just a social service network, it is vulnerable, it is really vulnerable.* (Interview 69: broader stakeholder)

Local community hub

A number of interviewees commented on the broader community role played by the CRCs, particularly in smaller towns.

> *... they are recognised as a focus point for volunteering ... I do see them playing a strong role as a local enabler and facilitator.* (Interview 71: broader stakeholder)

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... the support for the social development of the community and infrastructure ... I've even heard stories that they've filled the void of the CWAs, bringing the community together (Interview 73: broader stakeholder)

I think they're in the social and community space ... (Interview 66: broader stakeholder)

In some local government areas, they are almost regarded as a Community Hub, and provide a level of autonomy to the community – with the community and Board determining priorities. (Interview 80: broader stakeholder)

because they are ... run locally it's usually someone very local running the centre and they have, most of them have a local management committee, they are very responsive to the local community needs. (Interview 81: broader stakeholder)

... the bulk of ... work is going to be that interaction and ongoing connecting of everybody in our communities. (Interview 83: broader stakeholder)

... a little bit like a Citizens Advice Bureau. (Interview 83: broader stakeholder)

we are there because we want to help communities, so we're not there because we want to be a retail store. (Interview 83: broader stakeholder)

it's about the equity that we bring to our community. (Interview 83: broader stakeholder)

Service delivery

However, the community role was not universally seen as the most important role for the CRCs to play. By contrast, some considered service delivery as key.

They were never meant to be a community development hub – they were meant to be a service centre ... that's why you used to have banks, you used to have Centrelink, you used to have a whole bunch of people delivering a service. (Interview 68: broader stakeholder)

These guys are actually delivering this service to fill a service gap ... this is what CRCs are about, over and above just running a good business and getting a return on the business. (Interview 70: broader stakeholder)

Community Resource Centres in the main are very important to regional WA. The variety of services they provide, aligned to community requirements, as well as the opportunity for agencies to collaborate with a local resource on the ground are two sound reasons for their existence. (Interview 80: broader stakeholder)

Learning and leadership

A minority of interviewees considered leadership and community learning to be priority roles for the CRCs.

Learning networks are a major value add to small regional communities but CRCs are not funded for this ... There is an important role though in facilitating access to community learning and even formal online learning and I do see a potential new role in the space of community learning style hubs and local business incubators. (Interview 71: broader stakeholder)

Leadership, human capacity is important in regional WA and [CRCs] are the major vehicle for that. (Interview 67: broader stakeholder)

Reconciling community, service and economic agendas

Some interviewees argued that there was not necessarily a conflict between the various roles envisaged for the CRC.

... we want vibrant communities with strong economies ... not separate agendas ... CRCs fit into the first bit, preconditions for economic growth and resilience, particularly where towns are in decline, they have a role in keeping it together. (Interview 66: broader stakeholder)

... economic drivers are no good without that human capacity and leadership. (Interview 67: broader stakeholder)

Taking them down this leadership, community development path, that subliminally happens anyhow if they are delivering the service. If they are doing something for somebody, the service is being delivered to that individual, or range of individuals, and then they're in the facility, they see what's happening, then the CRC could be developing some community capacity building programs but they don't actually deliver them, they're just a middle person, they're a venue ... the more activity they get into in the venue, the more people spend money in the venue, the better off they're going to be. (Interview 68: broader stakeholder)

shifting the dialogue in the regions towards very much driving economic development and growth, social is in there as the enabling requirement so you could still attract business to a town. (Interview 69: broader stakeholder)

Where you've got the community, the need and the people with capacity, you'll find the best CRC. (Interview 70: broader stakeholder)

9.3   Concerns

While the value of the CRCs was widely recognised, several areas of concern were raised by interviewees.

Strategic Direction

A number of broader stakeholders were critical of a lack of clarity in the strategic direction underpinning the network.

... there is an absence of a strategic policy framework for CRCs outside of being a convenience point for information distribution. (Interview 71: broader stakeholder)

They need to also position themselves to be credible in the eyes of government agencies ... they are suffering rightly or wrongly from this perception that nobody knows why they exist ... this is not a slight on the people who are in the CRCs, it is just the concept of the CRCs ... What's the purpose, what's the outcome the government wants from them? Once you understand that then you can figure out how to deliver from them. (Interview 74: broader stakeholder)

Possible Duplication

As noted above, some argued that there needed to be more clarity about what CRCs did as opposed to other service providers.

> *Almost all organisations separate domestic clients from business clients ... it would be a stretch for individuals to be competent in these things and those... so infrastructure but not expecting them to do* per se *business development or business support ... and they run the risk if they do of actually competing with other organisations.* (Interview 73: broader stakeholder)

> *It confuses the market as well – 'well the CRC does this business training stuff'.* (Interview 74: broader stakeholder)

> *We always saw them as ... if you want to use a venue and that was pretty much it ... everything ... they could potentially be doing from a social perspective is pretty much what we expect from our Community Neighbourhood development service in terms of that training, information.* (Interview 77: broader stakeholder)

Opportunities lost

While it was generally agreed that the best CRCs were innovative and had a 'can do' attitude, there was some regret at lost opportunities.

> *I reckon they started off as the enterprising change agent and they have fallen into becoming a really really good backstop.* (Interview 69: broader stakeholder)

> *I'll give you an example ... the growers group alliance got in and provided what I would call women in farming enterprises support activities, enormously successful, 120 women turned up for workshops, which CRCs often help organise but didn't initiate. There was a need in farming in small businesses but people don't even see them, don't even think of them as small businesses ... But there was a need and they didn't spot it, my point is why didn't they spot the need? Why did someone else grab that opportunity? ... These guys are being funded by the government to get out there and do exactly that, and I could just keep giving you examples of opportunities that they've missed.* (Interview 69: broader stakeholder)

> *We did get a bit of pushback from one of the CRCs when we were trying to help Volunteering WA set up a new office, so it wasn't one of our funded ones, it was their own initiative, but they asked us where could we go, and we suggested the CRC and there was a little pushback from the CRC in terms of 'we don't want that kind of business in there' ... in that building. So it was a bit of a contradiction, really ... the volunteering service would have been just another component of the community.* (Interview 78: broader stakeholder)

Government and service delivery in the regions

Several interviewees – and not just those from regional development portfolio agencies – noted the Perth and urban-centric nature of many WA Government agencies. This, combined with their siloed nature and inability to work collaboratively in the activities they did undertake in regional WA, was seen to make life more difficult for CRCs in undertaking many of their roles and a missed opportunity to make use of their facilities.

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The number of Commonwealth and State agencies that are servicing towns ... why can't we just have one building with multiple agencies ...there might actually be an opportunity for alignment, you've got a CRC, you've got a building. (Interview 73: broader stakeholder)

I was really surprised at how un-joined up the WA government is, it seemed to me that it was very siloed. (Interview 72: broader stakeholder)

Every government department just about has a different VC (video conferencing) platform ... somehow they need to say 'you all need to work through this one' ... if you want to engage in regional WA, here are three of the things you must do: have you contacted the regional body, e.g. the Development Commissions? Have you contacted the CRC Network? And, you must use this platform because it's already in 90 communities and you don't have to re-pay for it. (Interview 83: broader stakeholder)

Ministers and the cabinet have a lot to answer for here ... ministers who have projects or programs or services that need to be delivered into an area where there's multiple agency involvement I believe have a responsibility to have that coordinated at a ministerial level ... you've got ministers who operate out of the same floor of a building and don't know what each other are doing ... actually guys we have this infrastructure the public are paying for, you guys have services the public are paying for, let's pump them out of CRCs and make that their reason for being because ... you just can't afford to have this lack of coordinated response to community service delivery. (Interview 75: broader stakeholder)

A number of agencies had quite thin coverage of more remote parts of the State, in particular the Kimberley, Pilbara, and Murchison, and could see the potential for CRCs to assist in delivering services there. But given the nature of the towns and the costs of services, governments had to be realistic about the costs involved, whether CRCs were involved or not.

Government also has to recognise that when you are delivering services out in rural and remote, you burn money. (Interview 72: broader stakeholder)

There needs to be some sensible discussion about what government are doing in those places, and what can we do to make it more sustainable, to actually build something that is going to last and add value to these communities. (Interview 73: broader stakeholder)

there are no other services being delivered to that community and government has a moral obligation to deliver some things … If [CRCs were] not there ... how is government going to deliver to all those people in those isolated communities? (Interview 83: broader stakeholder)

One interviewee argued that while collaboration between government agencies (and with the CRCs) was important, the lack of resources in most regional organisations meant that merging of regional services – as was suggested in the 2004 review of the Telecentres in relation to tourism, libraries and small business services – was not necessarily a sensible strategy.

No-one's got any money ... a library is $11,000 a year. To run the VCs ([Visitor Centres] – get zero money – in X [town] the VC sits right next to them but there's absolutely no point putting that VC in that CRC because the VC has a network of 20 to 25 volunteers and if you put the VC into the CRC with staff then the volunteers would fall away so X [CRC] made a strategic decision to keep them right next to each other so they could work together but keep them separate so you can increase the volunteer network. So I think some of the things you want to put in there [CRC] very quickly become a millstone around your neck ... You can't run a library

for 11 grand ... all it does it's an amount of money to force the local government to run your library, that's all it is. (Interview 69: broader stakeholder)

According to this argument, co-locating without merging and thereby leveraging resources from local governments and volunteers is a better way to proceed.

While the diversity of regional WA and the CRCs is regarded as a key strength, it also has its downsides. Interviewees were aware of the variable capacity of CRCs.

> *... the towns that are likely to have a philosophical need for a CRC is in a town that is probably not going to be able to meet the actual requirements that you've set up for them ... the guy who's going to run the perfect CRC is going to be in a town that doesn't need the CRC, it's going to have all the services.* (Interview 70: broader stakeholder)

> *There are varying degrees of capacity and capability of CRCs across the state. Some are very strong with sound management and governance, others have less capability. So there can be inconsistencies in terms of the level of service provided and programs that are able to be delivered. There are also inconsistencies around pricing which can make it more challenging when trying to roll out a program across multiple CRCs.* (Interview 80: broader stakeholder)

Culture and change

The interviews with broader stakeholders did not dwell on the change period following the release and implementation of the WARDT review. However, it was noted by one interviewee that there was a lack of recognition that the CRCs were a "movement", not just separate, independent, Not-for-profit organisations, and that this historical legacy of local community commitment was a strength that should be tapped into. Another interviewee put the situation as follows:

> *There's all these new people coming in, not aware of what was, they're just there because they are getting the pay and there's a contract to deliver, so that focus that's being driven is changing some of the community feel and involvement in those centres, it is making them more a government or paid-service ... I'm not here because I just want to deliver a contract ... people gave voluntarily of their time, but now it's become too administrative and too focused on what's in it for government and not what's government getting for it.* (Interview 83: broader stakeholder)

Evaluating performance

Creating a useful evaluation system for CRCs was regarded as a challenge because of their diversity and because their outputs and outcomes were not as clear and simple as those relating to the SBDC or DLGC-funded service providers.

> *It's going to be different in different towns ... the rules need to be flexible enough for people of different capacity to deliver, it needs to be able to cope with the variability of the needs ... that's what makes it work* (Interview 70: broader stakeholder)

It was pointed out that it is unreasonable for CRCs to be required to have a KPI of one government agency visiting per quarter, when they had no control over what government agencies did and given the lack of commitment by many agencies to regional service delivery.

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The issue of how to measure outcomes is an important one for the network and for individual CRCs alike. Although some regarded an 'active purchasing model' with a clear, outcome-based performance measurement system as possible and desirable, others were more cautious, given the size and diversity of the network:

> *The performance measures – do they really drive behaviour in performance? Probably not. Are they the right behaviours and performances even if they did? Probably not ... so let's get real. Let's not overcook it.* (Interview 66: broader stakeholder)

Either way, it should be possible to come up with better outcome measures:

> *... working with the Department and the Association around identifying what the outcomes are actually for the network and then the outcomes that would enable the individual CRCs to adapt to their local communities rather than just ticking boxes ... you know, workshop what that would be and trying it and once that's worked out, how, what data would be collected, how it would be collected so that it's meaningful and we can demonstrate you know, the real impact and the real value of what the services are doing rather than five people came to an event or whatever.* (Interview 81: broader stakeholder)

It was also argued that evaluation should focus more on getting value for money from the Network as a whole:

> *... we spend a lot of time and effort managing 106 chunks of 100 grand, and not much time and effort managing and enhancing our $13 million.* (Interview 66: broader stakeholder)

9.4　The Network

It was widely acknowledged that the introduction of Linkwest to the CRCs and the AWACRC has been a positive move. In addition, it was accepted (if not always welcomed) as necessary to move to a contract mode of operation rather than the grant arrangement, in order to comply with government policy and to more clearly separate DRD's role as a funder and contract manager from the Association's role as the representative and advocate of the CRCs. Linkwest's role in supporting the CRCs through the Association assisted this clarity.

There was recognition of a strong internal support network among individual CRCs, although some wondered whether this was still as evident under the new contract system.

> *One of the things they do well is they really network well with each other and share ideas and resources etc.* (Interview 81: broader stakeholder)

> *In the past DRD was a lot more collaborative with us as a network and treated us as a network ... we all worked together ... even though I was one person in that office, I went to work with 80-90 other CRCs (telecentres back in those days) ... because we had those connections ... we all act as a network because we know that we're in these little towns we are isolated from each other geographically but with the technology at hand, it's been like that for twenty years, that is our strength ... the biggest difference in the change from grant to contract for me has been that DRD aren't promoting that sense of network.* (Interview 83: broader stakeholder)

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However, several interviewees expressed the view that the Network's capabilities were not being fully realised in terms of their outward-facing activities, which was impacting negatively on their ability to find and exploit opportunities for new partnerships and business.

> *... whilst the fact that they are a very um, homogenous group and they network with each other very well, one of the disadvantages of that is ... they need to be a bit more outward looking in terms of what else is out there, what other Not-for-profits, what other partnerships etc.* (Interview 81: broader stakeholder)

Part of the problem which was widely recognised was the lack of resources available to the Network.

> *Fundamentally there is not enough strategic horsepower in the network to facilitate the contribution CRCs could make to regional WA.* (Interview 71: broader stakeholder)

Additionally, it was clear that government agencies did not want to deal with numerous CRCs – they preferred a small number of contracts with providers who could deliver services across several communities.

> *I mean how do you work with 106 disparate, independent, diverse, disorganised separate organisations? ... so from a service provider's view it's probably just too ... hard to do the innovation required to get it all in order.* (Interview 66: broader stakeholder)

> *Do you have to then deal with each of them individually or is there some organisation? Because if I have to ring up 24 Wheatbelt CRCs to organise it, it's too much effort frankly.* (Interview 76: broader stakeholder)

However, given the diversity of regional WA it was also acknowledged that 'one size doesn't fit all' in terms of servicing the regions. As a consequence, the potential for regionalisation – that is, clusters or zones of CRCs – was recognised as a possible way to square the circle on the tension between diversity and efficiency.

> *If you moved to a zonal model where the contract was to provide funding for 10 rather than 1 ... now we've got more money ... you still have to find a presence ... now you've one entity that's accountable, oversight, management ... the efficiencies that dropped out would be enormous.* (Interview 73: broader stakeholder)

9.5   Opportunities for Increased Activity and Service Delivery

The potential for the CRCs to provide a greater level of services to government agencies and NFPs has long been recognised and was explicitly discussed in both the 2004 and 2013 reviews of the network. Some interviewees noted that the Commonwealth seemed to be more active and successful in utilising the CRN than WA government agencies – and, if anything, possibly eating into the time available for the CRCs to take on other tasks.

> *... one of the areas of concern for CRCs which I think definitely has an impact on their capacity is the fact that ... if they have a contract with Centrelink or are agencies, they do receive separate funding, however the amount of work that goes into delivering that service far outstrips what they actually get paid to do.* (Interview 82: broader stakeholder)

In addition to those agencies interviewed for this report, other WA departments and agencies specifically mentioned by interviewees as potential partners and clients for the CRCs included:

- Agriculture
- Child Protection
- Education
- Health (in particular WACHS, mental health, tele-health)
- Housing
- Training and Workforce Development

Reasons CRCs were not used more by departments ranged from departments not wanting to deal with a lot of (quite diverse) centres, to a perceived lack of skills among CRC staff (for example in providing business advisory or library services). Some interviewees mentioned a lack of marketing and recognition.

> ... there are some CRCs who aren't very good at making themselves needed ... I think the communities are always in need and considering ... it's preventative services is what is crucial ... the CRC needs to know how to make itself needed, they need to know how to kind of reach out to the community and make sure that the community makes the most of them. (Interview 82: broader stakeholder)

> The acronym CRC does not have a lot of recognition. (Interview 71: broader stakeholder)

To remedy this, it was suggested that CRCs actively seek out business from government agencies.

> You need a dedicated person in there who's out there who's banging on their doors ... who's going talking regularly to agencies about what opportunities can we develop up. (Interview 68: broader stakeholder)

This task could be undertaken by DRD, AWACRC or a third party acting on their behalf. At least two interviewees suggested that the Regional Development Coordinators could play a greater role, but others countered that the Coordinators' role had shifted to that of contract management and that a proactive business development role was no longer appropriate.

The AWACRC noted that it had held a forum to demonstrate the possibilities inherent in the network to several agencies and that this had been received enthusiastically. However, little had come from it. One reason suggested for this was the lack of resources within government agencies to contract CRCs to act as service providers on their behalf.

The primary opportunities were seen to be based on the core assets of the CRCs.

> What are their strengths? ... they're a building, they've got room and they've got good technology, well who needs that? (Interview 73: broader stakeholder)

This applied to Not-for-profit organisations as well as government agencies.

> The CRCs ... have the video conferencing platform and there's a lot of Not-for-profits within Perth metropolitan area that would like to deliver services out to regional area, you know, not really aware of what the CRCs can actually offer, it means going to things like peak forums and

… raise awareness of those and help broker those partnerships. (Interview 81: broader stakeholder)

Actual service delivery by CRC staff was not necessarily considered essential. Rather, the CRCs were seen as providing a venue and technology and the personnel to facilitate services and training for other organisations.

> *I don't think we would actually ask the CRC to actually deliver the training while we've got our own staff who are accredited, but we could use the facilities of the CRC to get the program to that community, so whether it be a fly-in fly-out model, where our person from metro goes up there for a week and delivers, or we use Skype or we even have someone co-located in the CRC, one of our staff members, sit in a CRC and deliver the program … a network of CRCs throughout 2 or 3 CRCs and hook them up.* (Interview 78: broader stakeholder)

> *Over time we would hope that providers would see the economic or commercial benefits to them of using CRCs as an infrastructure point to deliver a service outside of their main area – if it's appropriate.* (Interview 74: broader stakeholder)

> *… if government could recognise them as a service centre and fund them to deliver certain bits of government service then … there could be a bunch of things that government wants to deliver through these nice facilities.* (Interview 68: broader stakeholder)

> *CRCs could also become an initial point of contact locally for the dissemination of information regarding business practices, funding programs and key contacts such as consultants or industry associations. Adding this capacity to guide existing or prospective tourism businesses through these processes or facilitating access to the appropriate contact for further information would expand the range of services currently provided. The CRC network also has an important role in providing information about training opportunities and courses for people in regional areas. This potentially includes tourism and hospitality.* (Interview 79: broader stakeholder)

One interviewee mentioned the potential for CRCs to support indigenous tourism.

> *Building the capacity of potential Indigenous tourism operators and providing opportunities for access to training and information is often a critical element in the development of this sector of the tourism industry, and is potentially a role that could be undertaken by CRCs.* (Interview 79: broader stakeholder)

The impending rollout of NBN was seen as a possible source of future activity – but only if the CRN increased its capability and knowledge to deal with this opportunity.

> *Could CRCs become agents for NBN Co? They could, they really could, they could become part of the solution … They could hire a technical specialist to go around all of the CRCs … and design 100 local area plans to harness the local capacity of the NBN … work that into the state plan for WA … be the on-ground network for the consultation process, get the bums on the seats.* (Interview 69: broader stakeholder)

9.6   Conclusion

There was general support for the CRCs as a valuable regional network according to these broader stakeholders, but acknowledgement that much more could be achieved. Part of the problem was the lack of regional commitment from many government agencies, and a failure

to work together amongst themselves or with the CRCs. This is not a new phenomenon and it would not be reasonable to hold CRCs responsible for it. But they continue to be a possible contributor to tackling it, especially if they can utilise their network potential. There was also a lack of clear understanding about the strategic purpose of the CRN, and of the appropriate choice of performance measures.

10. Financial Review

The provision of services by CRCs is predominantly funded via the Department. This funding is critical to the sustainability of CRC services and to ensure the CRN is able to respond to need as well as continue to support the communities in which they operate. Of course, the Department and the CRN are keen to ensure that the funding arrangement results in value for money. They are also keen to ensure the structure of the funding arrangement supports this objective as well as driving the CRN to produce a set of outcomes relevant to the overall purpose of the network.

The data, information explored and the results reported in this chapter relate to requirement 4 of this research project. Specifically, the research team was to provide an:

> *analysis of the real cost of delivering the range of services currently contracted by DRD.*

The nature of the CRN, particularly in relation to individual CRC size in turnover terms, combined with the combination and variation of services and the complexity of various models and service mix across the network, mean that the data required to assess the real cost of delivery is difficult to access. This is predominantly due to the nature of the finance systems in place within the CRCs themselves and the lack of data. Further, it is clear that the fee-for-service elements of the CRCs' operations are also broadly of negligible financial impact—the likelihood of self-sufficiency or material financial gains in this area appears very low.

Therefore, the ongoing provision of funding is critical to the CRCs' continued sustainability and, because they have responded to local needs and developed individual CRC service offerings accordingly, the CRCs were unable to furnish us with costing data. Further, they do not maintain data such that product costing can be undertaken. In terms of their development and historical reporting expectations, this is logical and is an efficient method of operating from their perspective.

While we have not evaluated the CRC finance systems, they appear generally fit for purpose and are likely to support the needs of the individual CRCs which are small organisations in terms of turnover. However, improvement could be made in terms of:

- Increasing the understanding of those charged with CRC governance in terms of financial sustainability and how to use financial information; and

- Improving financial information quality.

In the case of the former, a training program focused on financial data and how to use it from a costing perspective (that is, how much does it cost to provide services) will likely enhance decision making capacity within many CRCs as well as potentially better inform government and other stakeholders via a more robust outcomes development and reporting model.

In the case of the latter, the adoption by the CRN of the National Standard Chart of Accounts (NSCOA)[6] would likely introduce some uniformity in information definition, reporting and interpretation which would also assist in focusing attention on problem solving, enhancing sustainability and the communication of financial outcomes. All Australian governments, including WA, have agreed to accept NCSOA when requesting information from NFPs.

In both cases, the guiding principle should be that the solution proffered meets a predetermined set of cost-benefit criteria.

As with all accounting processes, the CRCs must ensure they only establish administrative processes that support their objectives and deliver a cost benefit calculus that means that they derive more utility out of their administrative activities than the cost those activities incur. Therefore, they are not likely to separately cost and price their various products because the cost would outweigh any advantage such an activity would provide. This is especially the case given the generally relative immateriality of the amounts concerned across the network.

As such, this Chapter examines the sustainability of the CRN and provides detail on the financial position of performance, in general terms. Overall, there is no doubt that the agreed outcomes identified during the procurement process are minor cost elements as compared to the support provided by the Department in ensuring the sustainability of the network.

10.1 The Data Used

As discussed elsewhere in the report, 93 CRCs in WA's CRN were the subject of this study. From these, we received manual survey responses from 19 CRCs arising from centre visits and Qualtrics survey responses from 33 CRCs: a total of 52 submissions (a 56% response rate). Some 24 submissions were unusable for a range of reasons including incomplete and incorrect data, leaving 28 submissions suitable for analysis (a 54% validity rate for the sub-sample).

The financial information sought from respondents (see Appendix Five) highlights the relatively unsophisticated nature of the financial data available for analysis. Of course, as indicated previously, this does not suggest that the data available is inappropriately simple but, rather, that there has not been a call for this type of data before and, as such, the data available is likely to be fit for purpose in relation to audit and reporting requirements but is less suitable for undertaking an assessment of the costing and pricing of individual services offered by CRCs.

Interpretation and Limitations

Readers of this report should consider the contents of this chapter in the light of the following limitations related to the data:

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[6] See Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission:
http://www.acnc.gov.au/ACNC/Manage/Reporting/NSCOA/ACNC/Report/ChartofAccounts2.aspx?noleft=1&hkey=179cdfe1-4e9e-412a-96c3-e0db53e0acfe

- All data was provided by the CRCs themselves via their own completion of the data collection forms;
- We did not confirm, review or assure the data in any way as to correctness or completeness;
- We did not seek auditors' reports or any third party assurance in relation to the data presented;
- We comment upon solvency and ongoing sustainability in order to contextualise the broader discussion reported and have not undertaken exhaustive work to determine the extent to which the CRN, or individual CRCs, is/are viable and sustainable from a financial perspective into the future; and
- The collection of data was challenging for most CRCs and the collection of costs components for analysis by the research team was highly problematic as the data does not exist in a format allowing for product analysis. Further, the participating organisations were under-resourced and unable to provide cost or other breakdown information allowing us to explore further cost issues. Finally, we were unable to collect such data directly as it requires deep organisational knowledge and access to transactional data that we could not command.

Ultimately, we took a subjective view as to the nature of incomplete data and whether it was useful for informing this project in the context of its objectives.

Therefore, due consideration needs to be given to both the data and our recommendations in the context of the above limitations.

10.2 Financial Position – Net Income

The financial position of an organisation is reported via the Balance Sheet. The survey did not request Balance Sheet data because our focus was squarely on service delivery costs. However, by looking at the net income results for the three years surveyed we are able to determine what retained earnings are generated during those three years.

Retained earnings represent the profit of organisations and the extent to which their financial operations increase their financial capacity by adding to the balance sheet. Therefore, we can calculate a general indicator of balance sheet strength by reviewing this calculation. It is important to note that this calculation is indicative only and it should not be used to suggest any definitive assessment of the financial strength of the network.

We have reported upon this element as sustainability, critical for ongoing CRN service delivery and to give a picture as to a fuller financial picture. However, for a reliable and nuanced view of financial sustainability, the financial capacity of each individual CRC needs to be considered in isolation.

Net income is the result of gross income less gross expenses. The result below is the three-year net income cumulative total (that is, the cumulative net income from three years of trading) on average:

Net income 3-year total $53,312

From this result we can only infer that CRCs are on average adding to their opening retained earnings rather than consuming them. We cannot infer anything about their net asset position and were not focused on this aspect. Nor can we make inferences as to whether the resulting reserves are sufficient to maintain operations at desired levels as we do not have information on, for instance, asset replacement requirements or organisational liquidity. Again, these issues are not germane to our analysis or the purpose of this report.

However, we are keen to identify that there is, on average, a relatively small increase in net assets occurring. Any organisation must make a profit in order to maintain its medium and longer term financial viability and sustainability. If it does not, the organisation will not be able to replace assets, undertake change or innovation, or meet medium term obligations when they fall due. This is an important element for the consideration of the Department when determining funding levels and what operating results may constitute appropriate financial performance.

Financial performance

The financial performance of an organisation is reported in the Profit and Loss Statement. The following tables summarise the data, again presenting a set of averages based on the CRCs providing financial information.

Table 6: Net income

Result	Average $
Net income 2013	17,521
Net income 2014	23,319
Net income 2015	12,472

Net income is the result of gross income (adjusted for capital grants) less gross expenses; otherwise known as net profit. The results in Table 6 show that CRCs are relatively marginal operations—they do not generate substantial profits. Equally, they are demonstrating financial sustainability in a simplistic sense[7] that they are performing in an apparently financially positive direction. As already indicated, this is imperative if the CRCs are to be sustainable over the medium and longer term and do not provide service provision risk to the Department.

Table 7: Gross income growth

Result	Average %
Gross income growth 2013—2014	1.24%

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[7] A 'simplistic sense' since, as referred to in the previous section, financial sustainability should also consider the ability of the organisation to replace assets and to invest in new capital equipment in pursuit of strategic objectives.

Result	Average %
Gross income growth 2014—2015	(8.12%)

Gross income is total income before deducting gross expenses. The results in Table 7 show very modest variability from year to year but in a negative trend (that is, gross income appears to be shrinking).

Table 8: Net income growth

Result	Average %
Net income growth 2013—2014	33.09%
Net income growth 2014—2015	(46.51%)

Consistent with the results in Table 7, the results in Table 8 also show variability from year to year, but here it is more pronounced. That the 2014-2015 contraction in net income exceeds the contraction in gross income shows that expenses are not shrinking in proportion to shrinking income. This could be due to many circumstances including a lack of responsiveness in the organisations (failing to take action to reduce their costs in response to reduced income), or being saddled with fixed costs (such as salaried staff), or simply failing to generate the necessary amount of income from their activities to cover the costs (such as under-priced fee-for-service activities or low staff productivity and/or utilisation).

Composition of income

Composition of income is a critical consideration from the point of view of individual CRCs and from the Department's perspective. Diversity is a recognised indicator of sustainability in that the risk associated with single-source or majority-source income from one client leaves an organisation open to considerable financial harm should that single client withdraw their support (Gilchrist, 2013).

It is also critical from the Department's perspective in the sense that a more diverse income stream for CRCs will likely also result in greater leveraging of the funds provided by the State. As such, the sources of income and the relative proportions of income from those sources are a critical issue from a governance perspective.

Respondents were asked to detail the composition of their gross annual income from:

- CRC grant
- Other government agencies (by agency)
- User pays (in aggregate)
- Other sources (in aggregate)

Table 9: Composition of income 2015

Income source	Average (%)
CRC grant	57.55%
Other government agencies	11.02%
User pays	23.81%
Other sources	7.62%

Figure 4: Composition of income 2015
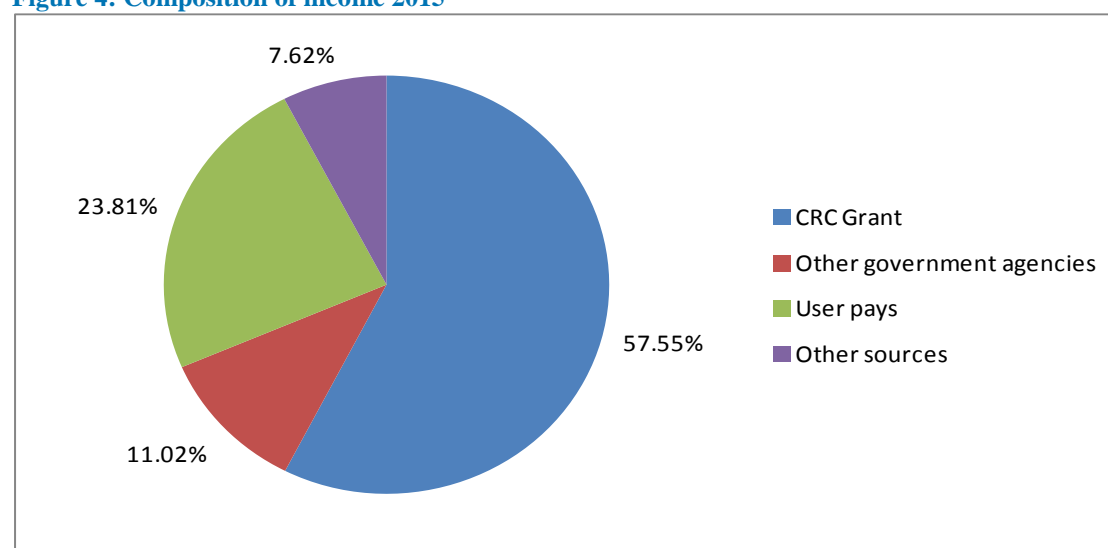
The results in Table 9 (illustrated in Figure 4) show that CRCs are heavily reliant on government funding of differing sources with DRD's funding being critical to organisational survival and advancement. Indeed, almost 69 per cent of income is sourced from government, with almost 58 per cent being from DRD itself.

Figure 5 illustrates the profile of all the CRCs examined (n=28) in relation to the proportion of their funding from CRC grants. It is notable that no CRC in the sample derived less than one-third of their income from CRC grants and that almost two-thirds of the sample derived greater than 50 per cent of their total income from CRC grants.

The relationships between funding sources (and therefore funders) are synergistic—the scale of organisation enjoyed by each funding group can only be enjoyed by the continued participation of all the parties. That is, notwithstanding the fact that DRD provides the bulk of funding with an average of around 58 per cent attributable to it, there is little doubt that withdrawal of the remaining 42 per cent would likely see DRD having to allocate further funds to the CRN in order to replace the income from other sources lost.

Figure 5: CRC grant funding range distribution
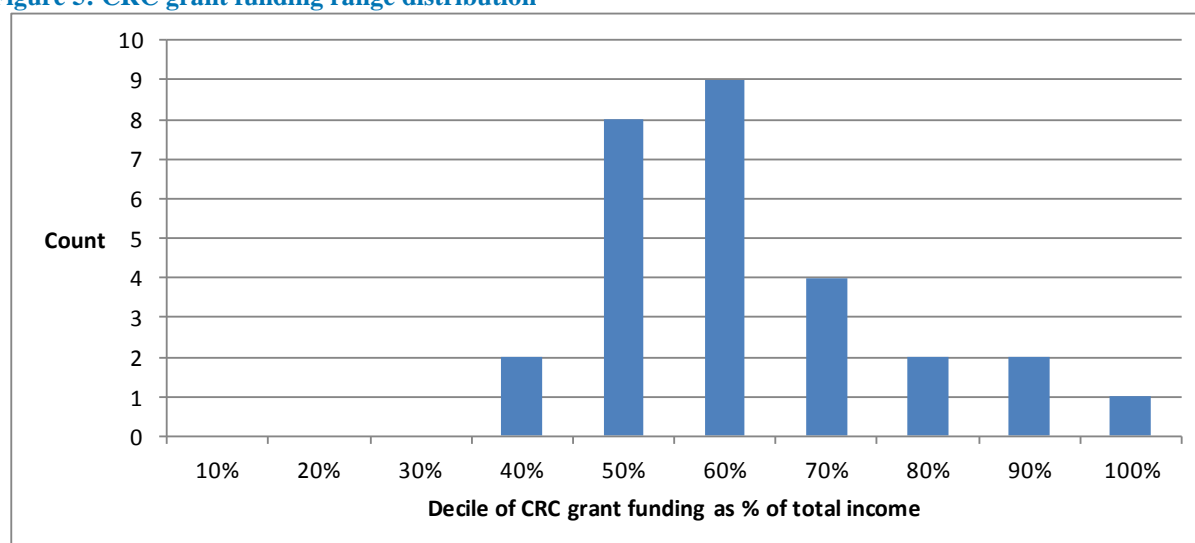
It can be said for every funding party in this synergistic environment that they enjoy the extent to which their funding leverages that of all the other funders. And so it is true for government funders that they achieve more from their co-funding of CRCs than they could achieve by spending the same amounts in isolation.

Therefore, a likely continued strategic direction would be for those CRCs in appropriate regions (i.e. where there is both population and inherent economic activity to support it) to seek to further leverage their DRD funding by adding to it via other funding sources.

Of course, such sources must have the following attributes which can only be assessed by the CRCs themselves:

- Have strategic relevance;
- Represent value for investment from the CRC's perspective (i.e. some funding can be secured at too high a price in terms of strategic purpose and other obligations);
- Be secured in exchange for services that are commensurate with those already provided; and
- Be secured for services which the CRC has the capacity to deliver.

Clearly, this aspect of ongoing sustainability is also best met within a strategic framework that would allow the CRCs to assess the extent to which these attributes exist and to ensure the development of CRC capacity is in line with the overall strategic intent of each individual CRC which should also be within the overall strategic intent of the CRN.

10.3 Composition of expenses

Some evaluation of the composition of expenses is critical in order to contextualise the discussion pertaining to sustainability and cost of service delivery. As may be expected, the

bulk of costs are associated with human resources, while expenses such as accounting and audit appear to be relatively modest on average.

Table 10: Composition of expenses 2015

Expense classification	Average %
Employees	64.83%
Rent and accommodation	0.84%
Insurances	1.59%
Accounting and audit	1.34%
Contractors	1.06%
Utilities	2.53%
Stock	4.45%
Motor vehicle expenses	0.02%
Other expenses	23.34%

Longitudinal data is available for expenses. However, in the absence of finance-specific contextual information the changes are difficult to interpret. Table 10 shows that, on average, staffing costs dominate CRC expenses, being roughly two-thirds, and this is hardly surprising. If anything, it may even be low, particularly given the negligible property and vehicle expenses. However, this is simply an observation that may or may not bear out upon closer assessment. Importantly, DRD should consider this aspect of comparative assessment before making high level policy changes that may impact the capacity of organisations to maintain their seemingly progressive cost mix. Apart from the low staffing costs, the remarkable results are that rent and accommodation are also low while other expenses are relatively high.

We understand the low rent and accommodation expenses are due to the CRCs being the recipients of in-kind support from local governments and others in the way of free, peppercorn or heavily subsidised accommodation. This in-kind support further amplifies the leveraging effect discussed in the preceding section. Additionally, these elements of resourcing, while not able to be included in a traditional financial report or analysed in the context of income provided, highlight the importance of such non-monetary income contributions and the relationships CRCs have with local authorities and other institutions within their community.

The low motor vehicle expenses are likely to be simply a reflection of the business model—if the services are not provided on an outreach basis then vehicles are not required.

The high other expenses is worth noting because, once again, in our experience the vast majority of expenses are typically captured in the explicit classifications. The special circumstances of CRCs in relation to rent and accommodation, and motor vehicle expenses naturally results in a higher than usual other expenses quantum but on average one-quarter of

expenses remains very high.[8] One respondent provided detail on the composition of other expenses and the heaviest expenses in descending order were depreciation, information technology and communications, rates and building maintenance, and printing and stationery.

10.4 Conclusion

Therefore, in response to the primary question associated with this chapter, we confirm that:

b) the true cost of service is subsidised by funding from other sources and that the Department would be unlikely to ensure sustainability of service if these funding sources were lost;

c) the presence of these funding sources acts as a point of leverage in the interests of DRD and, with appropriate Network-wide strategic direction, this leveraging could enhance the outcomes from the Government's perspective;

d) strong and important relationships exist between the CRCs and their local authorities and other local entities. These are critical to resourcing the CRCs via in-kind contributions and also support CRCs as important components of the broader community; and

e) it is likely that any benefit of determining greater detail about CRCs' income and expenses will fall well short of the cost of the exercise and in any event will be smaller than the benefit of developing a Network-wide strategic direction.

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[8] A general rule for financial reporting is that no greater than 10% of expenses may be classified as 'other' so as to avoid the non-disclosure of material classifications.

11. Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

In this final Chapter, we summarise our main findings in terms of the evaluation of the changes to the CRN since the move to a service contract model, and then provide comments and recommendations regarding certain aspects of the network and its future. We use the Statement of Requirements as the basis for structuring this Chapter.

11.1 Effectiveness and impact of post-Review changes to the CRN

On 26 September 2013, the Western Australian Government publicly released the WA Regional Development Trust Review of the CRN along with the Government's formal Response. In that Response, the Government noted that it broadly supported the Trust's recommendations, and that DRD would be the lead agency for implementing changes arising from the review.

In this evaluation, the research team was asked to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the changes to the CRN, specifically regarding:

a. CRN provision of access to, and delivery of government services to their local communities;
b. CRN services to build human capacity to support communities – specifically in terms of contracted social and business development services;
c. CRN connectedness with broader government agenda and the alignment of CRN services with the objectives of the *Royalties for Regions Act 2009*;
d. Community and key stakeholder feedback regarding value and impact of CRN program;
e. Community and key stakeholder perceptions of future needs in terms of CRN services.

The first three of these aspects were to be based on feedback from CRCs, which we obtained through visits and an online survey. The latter two aspects were to be based on feedback from the community and key stakeholders, which we obtained through a CATI community survey and also through interviews with community members, local businesses, local governments, relevant government agencies, Linkwest and AWACRC.

In this section, we will begin with the community and stakeholder views, i.e. points (d) and (e) above, before turning to the CRCs' perspective, i.e. points (a)-(c).

Community and stakeholder perspectives

The research methodology was designed to get a wide range of perspectives on the value and impact of the CRN program. To that end we interviewed stakeholders from government, local businesses and community users of the CRCs, and perhaps most importantly, we surveyed the general community in order to get their feedback on the program. We summarise our findings below.

Community and business perspectives

The random survey of 2,400 households (reported on in Chapter 6) provided an objective account of how the community sees the role of the CRCs in regional WA. The results of the household survey were very encouraging. Around 90 per cent of respondents were aware of the CRC in their community, 74 per cent had accessed a CRC in the past two years, and around one third of the total sample accessed a CRC at least monthly. These are very high levels of awareness and use.

Most respondents visited a CRC for personal use, but a significant minority (around 40%) also cited business use. Most services used were the traditional offerings of CRCs such as printing or photocopying, computer and internet use, access to government services, social events and computer training. However there was a range of other usage reported including library, newsletters, health services, banking, and postal services.

Additional comments from respondents indicated that CRCs provided excellent service with good staff, and were regarded as essential to retain in the community.

Respondents who did not use the CRCs indicated they had no need for their services, although some also indicated a lack of awareness of what services were actually on offer.

As reported in Chapter 8.1, we also held discussions with 84 community stakeholders who identified as regular users of CRC services. Their feedback was overwhelmingly positive. CRCs were seen as a central access point to printing and photocopying services, computer and internet access, social events, and co-located (mainly government) services. CRCs acted as a community hub, providing news and information (often via the local newsletter), support for sporting and social clubs, social and wellbeing benefits and places of learning, at reasonable cost and supported by friendly and capable staff.

Interviews with 54 local business people (reported on in Chapter 8.2) also revealed a wide range of engagement with their CRCs and very positive feedback on these interactions. In addition to computer and printing/photocopying, businesses used CRCs to promote their business, to attend business events, training, utilise office space and equipment – all these were seen to increase the profile of their business as well as sustaining the local community.

Of course, these stakeholders attended our interviews at the invitation of CRC managers and therefore may not have been entirely representative of users of the Centre or of the community in general. However, their views are consistent with the results of the random household survey.

Government perspectives

Interviews with local governments (Chapter 8.3) and several state government agencies (Chapter 10) provided a different, in some respects 'top down', perspective of the role and performance of CRCs and the CRN. While their views are not easily summarised, some points stand out.

Local governments

Local governments are very important partners of CRCs. As identified in earlier Chapters, there is a good deal of 'subsidisation' and in-kind support provided by local governments to CRCs, often by way of free or cheap rent and utilities. However, local governments also gain immeasurably from this relationship. A number of local governments (and CRCs) noted that they consciously pushed some social and community activities to CRCs in order to free up local government for other responsibilities. In addition, several local governments also noted the positive role that CRCs play in promoting and sustaining the community.

The move towards a more commercial focus for CRCs was viewed with some concern by a number of local governments, because of the Not-for-profit status of the CRCs and the provision of free/nominal leases to CRCs on this basis. Problems may also arise from CRCs running or supporting businesses (as part of a financial sustainability imperative) in competition with existing businesses or the local main street. However, consultation with local government should be able to overcome this.

In summary, local government is an important partner in the operation of the CRN and generally values the role that CRCs play in their local community.

The Commonwealth

Commonwealth agencies were very well represented in CRCs, with many centres holding contracts to provide a Centrelink access point and others also acting as agents for Medicare, Australia Post and the Department of Veteran Affairs. Although these Commonwealth agencies provided funding and training for CRC personnel, several centres reported spending considerable time in assisting clients (e.g. the elderly, or people with low literacy) with their computer engagement with *myGov*. Most CRC's envisaged that this was likely to increase as more Commonwealth payments become available only through this method. Providing this assistance to community members was seen as an important service but also cut into the time that CRC staff have to carry out their other tasks. Some interviewees argued that the CRCs may be spending more time with their Commonwealth clients (in particular Centrelink) than was actually allowed for in their (Centrelink) contract, but that there was little they could do about this as it was such a crucial service for their communities, especially those in greatest need.

State Government

Paradoxically, State Government departments and agencies tend to be more reluctant to partner with CRCs than either local or Commonwealth governments. The CRCs were considered to have important assets – in particular, buildings, technology and local knowledge and contacts. These could be used to assist partner organisations to run training in particular. This was already happening to some extent (e.g. Department of Sport and Recreation) but it was widely considered, including by the departments themselves, that there was scope to do more.

Although some agencies (State Library and Tourism, via Visitor Centres) are regular users, State Government engagement with CRCs in general is quite limited compared to the possibilities that exist. This is despite regular encouragement from reports and reviews over many years, and efforts by AWACRC and others to promote the potential of the CRN. There would appear to be at least two reasons for this.

The first lies within State Government itself. There is a lack of resources (and according to some, a lack of willingness) by agencies to invest in regional service delivery. The Perth-centric nature of most agencies was commented on by CRC and government interviewees alike. Another oft-cited issue was that of departments spending scarce funds on their own video conferencing systems that were not compatible with those already available in CRCs. WA Government in general was regarded as siloed; this has been commented upon in many reports dating back at least to the Gordon Inquiry in 2002, with the 'seagull' effect of agencies flying into (and out of) regional communities on successive days with little or no coordination. This is not CRN's problem to solve, although its network of centres could provide a potential solution in many communities.

The second reason for a relative lack of State Government engagement lies more with the CRN and CRCs themselves. As has been noted many times, there is a lack of awareness by agencies of CRCs and what they have to offer. Also, and as noted in some of our interviews, agencies perceive that there is variable quality and expertise across the CRCs. Departments need to be certain that service standards can be met. But mostly, the issue is structural. The very attributes most valued by CRCs – their diversity and local responsiveness – are what make them difficult to deal with, at scale, for government agencies. Departments do not want to sign 93 different service contracts – they want to deal with a small number of contractors who can cover a larger range of communities. This raises the issue of the role and capacity of the CRC Network. This is discussed in Chapter 11.2 below as part of the broader consideration of DRD's role and its relationship with the CRN.

A number of agencies considered there was a lack of clarity about the strategy for CRCs and the CRN, which fed into uncertainty over the appropriate outcomes and output measures that might be expected of them in their contracts. What was their core purpose? Who were their primary clients? As noted in Chapter 9, differences of opinion existed over the extent to which CRCs should be regarded as a community hub or service provider – or both. Similarly, the relative importance given to social versus business development was also disputed. Most (but not all) stakeholders considered that CRCs sat more comfortably and appropriately in the social and community service space, and that this still aligns with the objectives of Royalties for Regions. Economic and business development was commonly regarded as being more sensibly dealt with by agencies 'higher up' the chain, such as local government, Regional Development Commissions, and State Government departments and agencies.

Centre perspectives

Service delivery and the role of CRCs

Face-to-face discussions and online surveys (Chapter 7) with CRC managers and staff provided a fairly comprehensive 'bottom up' view of how CRCs operate and the challenges facing them as the Review recommendations have begun to be implemented. Their views are diverse and cannot be easily summarised. However, three general points can be made:

i. It is clear that most CRCs see their main role as servicing and promoting their local communities, and they pride themselves on being responsive to local demands and needs. They regard their centres as being crucial to filling in the gaps left by governments (of all levels), businesses and other groups who are unable or unwilling to provide services or facilities in small and often isolated towns. In addition, they are a place for assisting and advising the less fortunate members of the community, people (such as seniors) unfamiliar with or unskilled in new technology or accessing government websites, as well as helping the myriad of community groups and businesses that require support, advice or local knowledge. They see CRCs as providing the 'social glue' that helps to bind the community together.

ii. Relatedly, while contracted service provision is important, for many CRCs it is secondary to their primary role of providing social infrastructure and community development. Providing services under contract for government and other organisations is valued and sought after, but as much for reasons of equity (access to such services is regarded as a right for regional communities) as for its contribution to the financial sustainability of the centre.

iii. Consequently, the immediate post-Review period has been problematic for many centres, in that the emphasis has shifted to provision of contracted services as the primary basis for State Government funding. While the shift has helped spur increased professionalism in the running of the centres, and underpins the increase in resources the centres have received since 2010, many believe the contracts do not fully capture the various social and community service aspects that have defined the CRCs. In addition, as occurs with many contracting arrangements, there is an apparent trade-off between efficiency and diversity. We often heard the view expressed that there was an unfortunate "one size fits all" attitude to the contract with DRD, when the centres believed that the main value and strength of the CRCs lay precisely in the network's diversity and local responsiveness. Conversely, we also are aware that DRD believes this represents a misunderstanding by many CRCs and that there is much more flexibility available in the contract to meet service obligations. This indicates that at the very least there is a communication issue regarding the details of the contract, and potentially also that managerial capabilities vary among CRCs. This is not surprising given the size and diversity of the network.

In general, the CRCs have maintained and in some cases increased the range of services and activities they undertake (see Table 4 in Chapter 7). Photocopying and printing-related services and ICT support remain important for most CRCs, confounding expectations that these may diminish in importance as digital and 'smart' devices become more available. Provision of government information remains a priority, and there is a diverse range of government services (as noted above) across the network, although the amount varies greatly by centre and community. While provision of access to and delivery of government services (e.g. by video link or through facilitating visits) increased in many centres, few saw this as resulting directly from the change to contracts but instead saw it as part of the normal development of the centre over time. Fee-for-service arrangements have continued and in some cases expanded, partly in response to the new contract.

The main change that has occurred in service delivery since the move to contracting has been a greater emphasis on providing business development services. As noted in earlier Chapters, this has received a mixed reaction, with some CRCs finding it difficult to reach the contracted number and type of activities. But other centres have had more success at finding productive ways of working with local businesses, often in conjunction with existing business support associations.

There was little if any explicit discussion of the alignment of CRN services with Royalties for Regions. Where it was mentioned, it was noted that the *RFR Act* emphasises economic, business and social development, and that CRCs were more suited to the latter, although they still could play a role across all three areas where appropriate.

The move to contracts – positive and negative features
Not all recommendations of the Trust Review have been fully implemented yet. Our discussions with DRD staff, AWACRC and individual CRCs confirmed that there were quite a few difficulties in the initial rollout of the changes arising from the Review. Some CRCs argued there had been a lack of consultation, or that consultation and implementation of changes had been rushed. Inevitably, there were teething problems in introducing new contract arrangements and several CRCs found the changes stressful. It was commented upon that there was apparently a higher than usual turnover of CRC management and staff in the immediate aftermath of the move to contracts.

However, we also received many comments that most of the initial implementation problems were now in the past and that there was a good relationship between the Department, the Association and the network in general. Therefore, our interest here is in the substantive issues to do with the contract and the changes that have been brought about since the Review's recommendations began to be implemented.

A report commissioned by the AWACRC based on a survey of 61 members in April 2015, covered much of the same ground (Sharon Moore & Associates, 2015). Our findings correlate broadly with that report.

Positive aspects of the changes implemented over the past 18 months include:

- *Governance*: the Health Check process has been generally welcomed and resulted in improved management processes, policies, and risk management.
- *Flexible finances*: the shift to a one-line budget system has allowed greater flexibility and control for managers in running their centres and enabled them to be responsive to changing circumstances and opportunities.
- *Support*: the commissioning of Linkwest has been welcomed by AWACRC and many CRCs, as providing a level of expertise on issues such as human resource management and industrial relations (in particular the requirements of the employment award) as well as governance support in general. However, the extent to which Linkwest's services had been utilised by individual CRCs was still relatively low.
- *Reporting*: the process of reporting was generally considered to be quite straightforward, once systems were in place. However there are still issues relating to the content of the reporting (see below).

Overall, there was general acceptance that the shift to a contract mode was irreversible and had many positive features. However, there were still a number of criticisms by CRCs of how the new system was operating. Many of these revolved around reporting:

- *Frequency:* many centres complained about quarterly reporting as being both time-consuming and lacking in understanding of the fluctuations in activity that would be expected in any local community. They were concerned about being considered to have not met the terms of their contract for what they regarded as quite sensible reasons. For example, there are fewer activities during harvesting season and so it would make more sense for business event requirements to be measured over a longer period. DRD has noted that while quarterly reporting of activity is required, the contract does not require activities to be evenly spread across each quarter.
- *Consistency*: separate from what activities or outputs should be measured (see below) was the issue of consistency in getting advice from the Department about 'what counted' as an activity according to the contract. This was mentioned several times during our visits, and also in the report commissioned by AWACRC.

Related to reporting were criticisms of the targets themselves and antipathy to the apparent emphasis on business development activities at the expense of community services:

- *Meaningful measures:* many centres (and quite a few of the broader stakeholders) regarded the focus on 'numbers of events held' as not being a sensible output, and lending itself to the holding of events for the sake of meeting the output target rather than because it was useful or likely to be effective. We provide further comment on this later in this Chapter.
- *'One size fits all':* there was widespread criticism related to CRCs receiving essentially the same targets for events despite the widely differing circumstances and resources of each centre and community. Saturation could quickly be reached in smaller towns. Again, the Department has argued that this is a faulty interpretation of the contract and that CRCs can and should tailor their activities for their own communities. Again, this could indicate communication and capacity issues, and needs to be looked at in the next round of contracts.

- *Economic and business development focus*: many centres argued that this was unrealistic and unwarranted, for several reasons. First, they argued that while they did provide many business support services, there were many other agencies and groups active in this area (chambers of commerce, small business centres, Shire economic development officers, Regional Development Commissions, farmers' groups, etc.) and that while they often worked with these groups, the output targets might lead to competition, overlap and duplication. Second, smaller towns only had a limited catchment of businesses and so the activity/event requirements were too onerous ('there are only so many MYOB courses you can run'). Third and perhaps most important, many centres felt that the business development aspect was being emphasised at the expense of their social and community development role. This view was endorsed by several (but not all) government stakeholders.

- *Counting what matters*: The AWACRC report lists six pages of activities that they claim were outside the contract. Even if this is an exaggeration, our visits certainly indicated that many centres felt that the contract measures did not include some of their most important services and activities (e.g. publishing or assisting with the community newspaper or newsletter). Ongoing (as opposed to new) relationships and service contracts were considered to be particularly undervalued.

A final criticism related to resourcing – all centres were grateful for the initial large increase in budgets from RFR funds, but some claimed that their funding had been reduced in the past couple of years. It was difficult to determine the extent of any such cutbacks as most were related to the decision to redistribute funding for trainees across the network. centres that previously employed more than one trainee were particularly critical, as trainees were seen as vital to the Centre, to the community and as a tangible outcome for the CRC in promoting social and economic development. Some managers noted that other centres had still not employed any trainees, while their own centres had potential trainees ready to be employed. The sequential nature of traineeships also meant that there was no or minimal hand-over or transition period between trainees which lessened the effectiveness of the Centre.

Nevertheless, the immediate post-Review storm has been largely weathered and a period of 'normalcy' of operating under the contract has been in place for several months now. Centres understand that contracting is here to stay and that it has many positive aspects. The centres are firmly of the view that they remain highly valued and valuable contributors to their communities and local businesses and to all levels of government. They believe that the CRN is under-utilised by governments, not-for-profit organisations and other service providers.

11.2 DRD's role and relationship with the CRN

The Department of Regional Development (and its predecessors) has had responsibility for the Community Resource Network program since its inception as the Telecentres program in the early 1990s. The Trust, in its 2013 Review, recommended (recommendation 2.2) that the Department remain the lead agency for delivering the program, and in so doing investing Royalties for Regions funds.

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In this evaluation, we were asked to comment on DRD's role and relationship with the CRN, including whether DRD's lead agency role remained appropriate, and to explore options for oversight of program delivery.

In our discussions, there was no suggestion from any stakeholder that any agency other than DRD should be lead agency for the CRN program. The CRN's regional spread and its funding from Royalties for Regions makes it logical that DRD should continue to be the lead agency.

Furthermore, there was general acceptance that the shift to a contract model, as opposed to a grant model, was appropriate given the government's *Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy*. As noted, although there were several teething problems with implementation, several positive aspects of the contract model with CRCs were evident. Other government agencies such as SBDC and Department of Local Government and Communities have moved down this contracting track as well.

The shift to the contract model has meant a change in the way DRD delivers the program and relates to the CRCs. The Department has become a contract manager, and as such has been heavily involved in devising template contracts, performance measures, and stricter governance and accountability systems. The role of Regional Development Coordinators has changed so that they are now more focused on helping centres to meet their contract obligations and less involved in business development and internal advocacy. DRD no longer considers it appropriate for it to directly provide many of the broader support functions that it previously provided for the CRN and individual CRCs, as this would blur with its role as contract manager and funder.

The AWACRC received widespread (but not universal) support from CRC managers, mainly for its advocacy work, although it is recognised by all that the Association operates on a shoestring, based on the volunteer labour of its Board members. We were reminded that the Trust Review recommended (recommendation 10c) that the Department review "the support for and funding of the AWACRC to strengthen its role as a peak body and source of professional advice to the Network".

As noted above, there is a clear role for network functions to be delivered as a way of improving the impact of the CRN program. A good start has been made with the appointment of Linkwest to work with AWACRC to provide advice on HR and IR (year 1) and governance (year 2). Our discussions with Linkwest indicated that they have been funded by AWACRC to provide services additional to these. However, the take-up of Linkwest's services has not been universal, and many centres remain to be convinced of its utility.

These network functions could include:

- *Business development*: we noted above that many government agencies are unaware of the CRN, or do not know how to efficiently and effectively engage with it, given its large membership base across regional WA. In addition, most centres are reactive rather than actively seeking out opportunities to provide support for agencies to deliver training and other services on their behalf. An effective network organisation could be

active in seeking out, facilitating and negotiating new business from government and – as pointed out in Chapter 9 – Not-for-profit organisations.

- *Co-governance*: while DRD is the contract manager and hence functionally separate from the CRCs and CRN, there are clearly aspects of the relationship that need co-managing. In particular, devising appropriate contracts and effective performance measures is most effectively undertaken in consultation with the network, rather than being imposed by the contract manager. Similarly, if and when problems arise with contracts, or with individual centres, it is useful to both the Department and the centres if the network can be involved in resolving the issues cooperatively.
- *Learning*: depending on who runs the network, there are opportunities to tap into their other (state and national) networks and learn from their experiences in furthering the work of the CRN.
- *Network support*: there are many functions that a network can provide for its members, including website development, budgeting, reporting, marketing, advice on legislation and regulations, etc.
- *Advocacy and peak representation*: the CRN, through the Association, already has strong representation within government. However, there may be more opportunities to get the CRC voice across to agencies and ministers.

Our discussions with centres and government agencies lead us to believe that in some respects, it could be said that for CRCs, the 'sum of the parts is greater than the whole' – when the reverse should be the case. In other words, the existence of the network should in principle deliver efficiencies, synergies and the possibility of leveraging greater capacity, activity and impact across regional WA than could be achieved by the CRCs acting alone. However, the localised nature of CRCs has meant that these network possibilities have yet to be fully achieved. While there is a strong internal, informal, network, the outward-facing elements of the network – such as business development, learning and co-governance – are currently under-utilised. There is also unrealised potential for participating and learning from other networks, such as neighbourhood centres.

One area where there appears to be an opportunity for improvement relates to communications between the individual CRCs and DRD. There have been a number of instances throughout this review process where CRCs made comments that were at odds with the reported communications made by DRD. This is to be expected to some degree with a wide network and the number of people involved. However, a more targeted and strategically oriented communications plan may assist in reducing this communications gap in future.

A number of options have been suggested to us during this research about how to bolster the network and in so doing, support CRCs and improve the effectiveness of the program and of DRD's management of it.

One option is for DRD to take the network back in-house, or at least to play a much more active role in business development. One interviewee noted that a government representative may have more knowledge about service needs and receive more attention from other state agencies than a non-government group. However, this option was not supported by other interviewees and is in any case contrary to the direction of government policy towards the CRN and CRCs,

which is aimed at clearly delineating the different roles of contract manager (DRD) and service provider (CRCs).

A second option is to increase the resources available to the AWACRC, as suggested by the Trust in its Review. Currently, the Association relies almost entirely on volunteers who are already heavily involved with their own CRCs, although it uses its membership fees to fund some services, such as an annual conference as well as commissioning Linkwest for support services. It was suggested to us that the Association could be provided with a Project Officer in order to increase its services to members. Another interviewee suggested that this would be insufficient to extract full benefit from the network. It was also important to ensure that the outward-facing aspects of the network were attended to as much as the inward servicing aspects, and that providing incremental increases in resources to the Association would be likely in the first instance to focus on servicing the membership rather than expanding the network's activities and engagement with government and other organisations.

A third option which we prefer would be to engage a third party – working or possibly even merging with the Association – that was focused on delivering the network functions outlined above. Linkwest is currently providing some of these, but there are other Not-for-profit organisations in WA who could feasibly be capable of offering these services as well. They may be able to extract efficiencies from their existing operations to support the CRN.

We have not been able to determine the resource implications of these options, but clearly added investment in the network is required if its potential is to be fully realised.

11.3 Development of future procurements

While the CRC Network is extensive, it does not cover the whole of regional WA. The Trust recommended (as part of recommendation 4) that specific consideration be given to "whether local governments might work in partnership with RDL [now DRD] to establish CRCs in those parts of Western Australia where CRCs are currently under-represented". The evaluation specifications also asked the research team to provide a way forward to develop future procurements, based on an understanding of the sector and community needs.

The research team did not look systematically at the potential for new centres. Our discussions with DRD indicated that there is little interest currently in increasing the numbers of CRCs due to budgetary limitations. We received feedback from one or two centre managers critical of the suggestion in the Trust Review (p. 174) of a potential need for new CRCs in suburbs of Bunbury and Albany, given the existing availability of services in those regional cities.

Under the current procurement contract, DRD moved away from the 3-tier funding and reporting system that was formerly in place. That system was mainly based on the size and capabilities of the individual CRC. Under the new system, funding was based on a range of community indicators (urban population, unemployment, remoteness, Aboriginality, internet access). The variation in funding between centres ($106,000 to $123,000 per year) was not large and so did not impact too much on centres.

This assessment of community need was primarily economic and demographic. For future procurements, these indicators should be combined with an assessment of existing service provision in regional communities and their availability elsewhere (e.g. the distance to the nearest service if it is not available in town). DRD should work with CRCs, RDCs, the Department of Local Government and Communities, Tourism WA, State Library and other relevant agencies to conduct an audit of services in small regional towns in order to determine the presence of relevant contracted service providers as a way of identifying communities with the greatest need for CRCs.

In considering future procurements, another key issue – discussed briefly with some of the broader stakeholders – was the question of whether, and if so how, government should deal with the diversity of CRCs and their performance. In particular: should the department reward successful centres and punish failures? Under a contract system, the answer to this question would normally be 'yes, of course'. However, it is unclear to what extent 'failure' or 'success' is a function of a CRC's (poor/good) performance, or instead a function of the community in which the CRC is located. Clearly there are better and worse CRCs, and much depends on managers. But the context in which they operate also matters.

As one stakeholder mentioned in Chapter 9, it is much easier to be a 'perfect' CRC in a larger, thriving town. From our research, CRCs in the inland Mid-West were struggling more than most. However, the economic base of these towns was limited, the population was static or falling, and there was not necessarily much that the CRC could do to reverse this. The State Library pointed out the costs and difficulties it has had in servicing small towns in the Murchison region, and welcomed the possibility of working with DRD in addressing this collaboratively. De-funding CRCs in such towns may simply exacerbate their decline.

DRD should periodically revisit the segmentation of CRCs and devise regionally-sensitive indicators of need and performance, enabling 'like for like' comparisons of centres grouped according to characteristics such as population size, isolation, existing levels of service provision (government and NFP). This could be done collaboratively with the network and, potentially, Regional Development Commissions and local governments. CRCs would then be judged, and indeed could be encouraged to benchmark themselves, against other centres operating in similar contexts. Continued poor performance in these circumstances would then be a firmer basis for non-renewal of contracts.

The issue of determining future procurements for CRCs ideally needs to be viewed from a broader perspective of how the State Government is servicing regional WA. As noted in Chapter 9, the inadequacies and lack of coordination in regional delivery and infrastructure are well known. Removing centres from (or adding to) the CRC network, using government funds, should in principle be based on a whole-of-government view of existing and future commitments to servicing of communities across regional WA. CRCs could provide a 'one stop shop' in some communities, offering training venues, video conferencing and office space to departments, as well as (potentially) ongoing services such as libraries, visitor centres etc. Such a 'place management' approach has long been advocated, mainly for remote indigenous communities, but the principle is the same for other parts of regional WA.

A way forward is for DRD to convene a regular working group of key service agencies (state government, local government and Not-for-profits), to map the current status of service delivery and infrastructure across all of regional WA, and to then map that information across the existing CRC network to see where the gaps are. On that basis, it is likely there would potentially be more justification for switching some funding from larger, better serviced towns (predominantly in the south-west coastal region) to smaller and/or newer CRCs. Any move along these lines is obviously fraught with difficulty and would need to be justified on the basis of objective measures of service availability. Any changes to funding would sensibly be phased in over time to give CRCs and communities' time to adjust.

11.4 Real cost of delivering the range of services currently contracted by DRD

As foreshadowed in Chapter 4, describing the research stages, answering the question of the 'real cost' definitively proved too difficult in the context of this project as the data available for such activity was not available. In order to analyse the true cost of service for specific products or services, a number of data points need to be available with certain attributes. These include:

- Appropriately identified costs allocated equitably to products/services using a recognised costing system such as Activity Based Costing (ABC);
- A recognised and appropriately defined set of activities (goods or services) to be costed;
- An accurate assessment of likely activity levels (i.e. how many of each good and service is likely to be provided); and
- The likely timing of the delivery of these activities.

Further, in order to facilitate engagement with the cost of service delivery in these organisations, it would be of great benefit to have an identified, clear and specific set of outputs agreed between funder and CRC in order to allow the funder to ascertain governance information such as with respect to Value for Money and to be able to compare such information with other, similar providers.

In reality, though, this aspect of the project was inhibited by the lack of a defined set of activities being costed, a lack of appropriately defined accounting information and, although less importantly, a lack of a strategic overview against which to apprise the allocation of resources and the financial decisions being taken by CRCs.

Finally, the CRCs are all very different in terms of who they serve, what they provide and how they go about what they do. Therefore, comparative data is also a significant issue and important in the context of the observations made elsewhere in this report pertaining to strategic objectives and groups of CRCs:

This issue of data availability warrants further consideration. Determining costs of services requires both costs and service volume data by service:

$$service\ unit\ cost = \frac{annual\ service\ cost}{annual\ service\ volume}$$

Based on our experience with small/medium funded organisations and our investigations, the majority of survey respondents were generally unable to provide either the cost data or the volume data in a way that would facilitate a meaningful analysis of output costs and Value for Money. We were concerned that quality of data may lead the researchers and, ultimately, the readers of this report to take away conclusions that are not valid.

However, we do not suggest that CRCs attempt to develop this capability at the present time for the following reasons:

- the services provided by CRCs and the manner and pattern in which they are supplied and consumed do not lend themselves to unit costing;
- each CRC is also markedly different (by virtue of substantive features like geography, demographics, local issues, personnel, services provided for non-government funding) so benchmarking unit costs would not be meaningful;
- CRC performance and or justification for the CRN program as a whole should be measured by reference to the impact they have compared to the impact they are expected to have. This formula is likely unable to be quantified at this time because of the lack of an agreed strategic direction, properly constituted outcomes or identified outputs likely to ensure success in terms of outcomes; and
- any costing and pricing exercise costs money and time that might be better utilised elsewhere. While the development of costing data is useful from a governance and procurement perspective, the cost of development may not outweigh the benefit derived from the development of such information.

The penultimate point above goes to strategy; specifically, the purpose of the CRN network and each individual CRC in the context of an overarching DRD strategy.

11.5 Evaluation of community need and consideration of Community Level Outcomes

The current Community Level Outcomes which underpin the contracted CRC services are:

1. Development of vibrant and sustainable regional communities.
2. Individuals, businesses and other organisations have improved access to government and community information they need.
3. Individuals are engaged in appropriate, targeted services that build their capacity.
4. Businesses and other organisations are engaged in appropriate, targeted services that build community capacity and improve the community's economic health.

These outcomes target individuals, businesses and other organisations, and relate to the provision of information, of services, and building community capacity. They reflect the

objectives of Royalties for Regions and the new Regional Development Strategy. They remain broadly appropriate.

Access to information remains a core part of what CRCs do. Similarly, service provision and knowledge acquisition and capacity building (through training, for example) are also fundamental aspects of the CRN.

One aspect that is less obvious is the role of CRCs in connecting people and organisations – the 'social glue' that was often talked about in interviews. This is invariably less easy to define and measure, but nevertheless important, and would counter-balance the apparent focus on economic and business outcomes and outputs that many stakeholders felt had been written into the contracts.

Devising Service Level Outputs to connect to these Community Level Outcomes is no easy task. As noted, many stakeholders and centres were critical of the level of detail required, the apparent lack of differentiation ('one size fits all') and somewhat tenuous connection between the output measured and the outcome being sought. For many, some of the main elements of their operations (e.g. advising and assisting community groups, partnering with external organisations) were missed.

The Department should provide a clearer statement of strategic purpose for the CRN under which a revised set of outcomes and outputs can fit. A number of stakeholders noted that a clear strategy was currently lacking. However, in doing so, the Department also needs to be aware that a substantial part of its funding for CRCs in effect constitutes a form of block funding, and may not be as easily converted to outcomes and outputs as in other government service contracts. A key role of the CRCs is to act as a basic platform for delivering services, such as government information, access to core ICT and printing/publishing facilities, and a venue from which other organisations can provide a service. Therefore, consideration might be given to a two-tier contract, with each CRC receiving a fixed amount in return for providing this platform, along with a separate amount for added service provision negotiated with the Department and based on community need.

We suggest the Department work with the network (the Association and/or the suggested third party network provider – see above) to devise a revised set of outcomes and outputs, tailored to each region and category of centre, to better reflect the Department's desire for information access, knowledge acquisition, service provision and relational connectedness that are the hallmarks of CRCs.

11.6 Recommendations

1. Given the widespread recognition and utilisation of CRCs and the positive feedback from community and business users, **the CRN program should be continued**.

2. **DRD should remain the lead agency** for the delivery of the CRN program.

3. **A third party should be engaged in order to more fully realise the benefits and opportunities presented by the network functions of the CRN**, such as: business development, co-governance, learning, network support and advocacy and peak representation. This party would work with DRD, the Association of WA CRCs and individual CRCs to establish a CRN strategic framework that would then drive local goals and seek to prioritise those goals according to regional and state priorities. This strategic framework may also consider CRC location and primary focus areas in the medium to longer term. Advantages of engaging such a party include:

   a. They would be an independent driver of outcomes;
   b. They would develop a comprehensive knowledge of the CRN and be in a position to develop State-wide strategies with CRCs; and
   c. This would lead to better outcomes based planning practice and more effective, strategic prioritisation of objectives.

4. **The process for developing future procurements should commence with a clear statement of the overall identity, strategic direction and purpose of the CRN.** A core part of the rationale for CRCs should continue to be community development, along with service provision for individuals, families, groups and businesses. Outcome and output measures would then be driven by the strategic purpose of the CRN program and developed with each CRC to reflect the needs and circumstances of the communities in which each CRC operates. To assist with performance and contract management, groupings of similarly-situated CRCs should be identified in terms of community demographics and service needs/gaps. These groupings should be regionally-sensitive and enable like-for-like comparisons where possible. However, they may also be problem-centric in that some CRCs—regardless of their regional location—may have similarities in terms of service priorities which may see them more logically grouped in this way rather than by geography.

5. **Procurements should be driven by community need**, which is most appropriately measured by mapping information about existing service provision (by governments and NFPs), population size, demographic characteristics, isolation, economic activity, employment etc., and prioritised at the CRN level. This will assist in determining where service gaps (and overlaps) exist, where the needs are greatest, and where resources ought to be directed for best outcome across the State's priority areas.

6. **A working group of key service agencies from State and local governments, and Not-for-profit organisations, should be formed to assist DRD in undertaking this mapping process**, in order to prioritise support for existing and new CRCs. This will allow DRD to take into account the plans of other agencies and NFP service providers in each regional community. This will likely impact service types, service resourcing and CRC location over the medium to longer term.

7. **A two-tier funding approach for the CRN should be considered**, consisting of:

a. Block funding to provide the basic service delivery platform infrastructure for each CRC (venue, meeting and training rooms, government information, videoconferencing facilities, etc.); and

b. Additional funding for service provision as determined in negotiations between DRD and each CRC, based on community need, realistic service outcomes and CRN priorities, as informed by the needs-based analysis undertaken through Recommendations 5 and 6.

8. **There is a need to develop and deliver sector-specific financial management training capacity** in order to refine and enhance the financial decision making capacity of the CRCs which would then allow them to more effectively manage resource allocation and efficiency development.

9. Building on recommendation 8, the **adoption of the National Standard Chart of Accounts (NSCOA)**, as mandated by the WA Department of Finance, would allow for better financial data to be developed and for better financial assessment of sustainability and efficiency.

10. **A communications plan aligned with DRD's strategic objectives for the CRN program should be instigated.** This would assist in removing the instances observed in this study where miscommunication resulted in misinformation being reported by a number of interview participants.

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Appendices

Appendix One – CRC Network (CRN)

The following table identifies the 93 member organisations of the Western Australian CRC Network.

Title	Town	Region
Augusta Community Resource Centre	Augusta WA 6290	South West
Beacon Community Resource Centre	Beacon WA 6472	Wheatbelt
Bencubbin Community Resource Centre	Bencubbin WA 6477	Wheatbelt
Beverley Community Resource Centre	Beverley WA 6304	Wheatbelt
Boddington Community Resource Centre	Boddington WA 6390	Peel
Boyup Brook Community Resource Centre	Boyup Brook WA 6244	South West
Bremer Bay Community Resource Centre	Bremer Bay WA 6338	Great Southern
Bridgetown Community Resource Centre	Bridgetown WA 6255	South West
Brookton Community Resource Centre	Brookton WA 6306	Wheatbelt
Broome Community Resource Centre	Broome WA 6725	Kimberley
Bruce Rock Community Resource Centre	Bruce Rock WA 6418	Wheatbelt
Brunswick Junction Community Resource Centre	Brunswick WA 6224	South West
Coolgardie Community Resource Centre	Coolgardie WA 6442	Goldfields-Esperance
Coorow Community Resource Centre	Coorow WA 6515	Mid West
Corrigin Community Resource Centre	Corrigin WA 6375	Wheatbelt
Cue Community Resource Centre	Cue WA 6640	Mid West
Cunderdin Community Resource Centre	Cunderdin WA 6407	Wheatbelt
Dalwallinu Community Resource Centre	Dalwallinu WA 6609	Wheatbelt
Dandaragan Community Resource Centre	Dandaragan WA 6507	Wheatbelt
Denmark Community Resource Centre	Denmark WA 6333	Great Southern
Dongara Community Resource Centre	Dongara WA 6525	Mid West
Donnybrook Community Resource Centre	Donnybrook WA 6239	South West
Dowerin Community Resource Centre	Dowerin WA 6461	Wheatbelt
Frankland River Community Resource Centre	Frankland River WA 6396	Great Southern
Gascoyne Junction Community Resource Centre	Gascoyne Junction WA 6705	Gascoyne
Gingin Community Resource Centre	Gingin WA 6503	Wheatbelt
Gnowangerup Community Resource Centre	Gnowangerup WA 6335	Great Southern
Goomalling Community Resource Centre	Goomalling WA 6460	Wheatbelt
Greenbushes Community Resource Centre	Greenbushes WA 6254	South West
Harvey Community Resource Centre	Harvey WA 6220	South West
Hopetoun Community Resource Centre	Hopetoun WA 6348	Goldfields-Esperance
Hyden Community Resource Centre	Hyden WA 6359	Wheatbelt
Jerramungup Community Resource Centre	Jerramungup WA 6337	Great Southern
Jurien Bay Community Resource Centre	Jurien Bay WA 6516	Wheatbelt
Kalannie Community Resource Centre	Kalannie WA 6468	Wheatbelt
Kalbarri Community Resource Centre	Kalbarri WA 6536	Mid West
Kambalda Community Resource Centre	Kambalda WA 6442	Goldfields-Esperance

Title	Town	Region
Katanning Community Resource Centre	Katanning WA 6317	Great Southern
Kellerberrin Community Resource Centre	Kellerberrin WA 6410	Wheatbelt
Kondinin Community Resource Centre	Kondinin WA 6367	Wheatbelt
Koorda Community Resource Centre	Koorda WA 6475	Wheatbelt
Kulin Community Resource Centre	Kulin WA 6365	Wheatbelt
Kununurra Community Resource Centre	Kununurra WA 6743	Kimberley
Lake Grace Community Resource Centre	Lake Grace WA 6353	Wheatbelt
Lancelin Community Resource Centre	Lancelin WA 6044	Wheatbelt
Laverton Community Resource Centre	Laverton WA 6440	Goldfields-Esperance
Leeman & Greenhead Community Resource Centre	Leeman WA 6514	Mid West
Leonora Community Resource Centre	Leonora WA 6438	Goldfields-Esperance
Manjimup Community Resource Centre	Manjimup WA 6258	South West
Marble Bar Community Resource Centre	Marble Bar WA 6760	Pilbara
Meekatharra Community Resource Centre	Meekatharra WA 6642	Mid West
Menzies Community Resource Centre	Menzies WA 6436	Goldfields-Esperance
Merredin Community Resource Centre	Merredin WA 6415	Wheatbelt
Mingenew Community Resource Centre	Mingenew WA 6522	Mid West
Moora Community Resource Centre	Moora WA 6510	Wheatbelt
Morawa Community Resource Centre	Morawa WA 6623	Mid West
Mount Barker Community Resource Centre	Mount Barker WA 6324	Great Southern
Mukinbudin Community Resource Centre	Mukinbudin WA 6479	Wheatbelt
Mullewa Community Resource Centre	Mullewa WA 6630	Mid West
Nannup Community Resource Centre	Nannup WA 6275	South West
Narembeen Community Resource Centre	Narembeen WA 6369	Wheatbelt
Newdegate Community Resource Centre	Newdegate WA 6355	Wheatbelt
Norseman Community Resource Centre	Norseman WA 6443	Goldfields-Esperance
Northcliffe Community Resource Centre	Northcliffe WA 6262	South West
Nullagine Community Resource Centre	Nullagine WA 6758	Pilbara
Nungarin Community Resource Centre	Nungarin WA 6490	Wheatbelt
Pemberton Community Resource Centre	Pemberton WA 6260	South West
Perenjori Community Resource Centre	Perenjori WA 6620	Mid West
Pingelly Community Resource Centre	Pingelly WA 6308	Wheatbelt
Pingrup Community Resource Centre	Pingrup WA 6343	Great Southern
Pinjarra Community Resource Centre	Pinjarra WA 6208	Peel
Quairading Community Resource Centre	Quairading WA 6383	Wheatbelt
Ravensthorpe Community Resource Centre	Ravensthorpe WA 6346	Goldfields-Esperance
Serpentine Jarrahdale Community Resource Centre	Mundijong WA 6123	Peel
Shark Bay Community Resource Centre	Denham WA 6537	Gascoyne
Southern Cross Community Resource Centre	Southern Cross WA 6426	Wheatbelt
Tambellup Community Resource Centre	Tambellup WA 6320	Great Southern
Toodyay Community Resource Centre	Toodyay WA 6566	Wheatbelt

Title	Town	Region
Wagin Community Resource Centre	Wagin WA 6315	Wheatbelt
Walpole Community Resource Centre	Walpole WA 6398	South West
Wandering Community Resource Centre	Wandering WA 6308	Wheatbelt
Waroona Community Resource Centre	Waroona WA 6215	Peel
Wellstead Community Resource Centre	Wellstead WA 6328	Great Southern
West Arthur Community Resource Centre	Darkan WA 6392	Wheatbelt
Westonia Community Resource Centre	Westonia WA 6423	Wheatbelt
Wickepin Community Resource Centre	Wickepin WA 6370	Wheatbelt
Williams Community Resource Centre	Williams WA 6391	Wheatbelt
Wongan Hills Community Resource Centre	Wongan Hills WA 6603	Wheatbelt
Wyalkatchem Community Resource Centre	Wyalkatchem WA 6485	Wheatbelt
Wyndham Community Resource Centre	Wyndham WA 6740	Kimberley
Yarloop Community Resource Centre	Yarloop WA 6218	South West
Yongergnow-Ongerup Community Resource Centre	Ongerup WA 6336	Great Southern
York Community Resource Centre	York WA 6302	Wheatbelt

Appendix Two – CRCs Visited

The CRCs listed in this table constitute the group of CRCs chosen to be invited to participate in the evaluation process.

CRC	Region	Population	Local Government
Augusta	South West	1,420	Augusta
Boddington	Peel	2,471	Boddington
Bremer Bay	Great Southern	242	Jerramungup
Brunswick Junction	South West	797	Harvey
Corrigin	Wheatbelt	1,104	Corrigin
Frankland River	Great Southern	380	Cranbrook
Harvey	South West	2,606	Harvey
Hyden	Wheatbelt	281	Kondinin
Jerramungup	Great Southern	1,085	Jerramungup
Kondinin	Wheatbelt	1,059	Kondinin
Kulin	Wheatbelt	847	Koorda
Kununurra	Kimberley	4,573	Wyndham-East Kimberley
Laverton	Goldfields-Esperance	1,357	Laverton
Manjimup	South West	4,164	Manjimup
Marble Bar	Pilbara	194	East Pilbara
Menzies	Goldfields-Esperance	422	Menzies
Mingenew	Mid West	486	Mingenew
Mullewa	Mid West	425	Geraldton
Nannup	South West	1,316	Nannup
Northcliffe	South West	412	Manjimup
Nullagine	Pilbara	217	East Pilbara
Ongerup	Great Southern	119	Gnowangerup
Perenjori	Mid West	924	Perenjori
Pinjarra	Peel	4,255	Murray

CRC	Region	Population	Local Government
Shark Bay	Gascoyne	988	Denham
Tambellup	Great Southern	1,167	Broomehill-Tambellup
Wagin	Wheatbelt	1,932	Wagin
Walpole	South West	321	Manjimup
Wandering	Wheatbelt	453	Wandering
Wellstead	Great Southern	296	Albany
West Arthur (Darkan)	Wheatbelt	910	West Arthur (Darkan)
Williams	Wheatbelt	953	Williams
Wyndham	Kimberley	669	Wyndham-East Kimberley

Appendix Three – Evaluation Task and Methodology

This appendix provides a comprehensive summary of the Key Questions put by the Department, the research method adopted in order to gather the necessary empirical evidence and the evidence sought.

Task	Method	Evidence sought
1. Evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the changes to the CRN, with the implementation of the Review recommendations, specifically:		
a. CRN provision of access to, and delivery of, government services to their local communities;	**Desktop analysis** of range and scope of government services currently provided within sample CRCs. **Individual interviews** with relevant government departmental representatives who currently, or in the recent past, deliver services in partnership with sample CRCs.	Types of use, benefits, barriers and current and future needs
b. CRN services to build human capacity to support communities – specifically in terms of contracted social and business development services;	**Desktop analysis** of range and scope of human and community capacity building through contracted social and business engagement in sample CRCs. **Interviews and/or group discussions** with social and business sectors in sample CRCs	Types of engagement/ participation, benefits, barriers, perceptions of contribution to local/ regional development and current and future needs
c. CRN connectedness with broader government agenda and the alignment of CRN services with the objectives of the _Royalties for Regions Act 2009;_	Analysis of service delivery and policy alignment with RfR Act informed by **desktop and interview/focus groups** content analysis	N/A
d. Community and key stakeholder feedback regarding value and impact of CRN program;	**Individual interviews and focus groups** involving key stakeholders (including CRC staff and management) with either separate community focus group/s or **telephone survey** of randomly selected sample of households within identified CRC catchment	Current use of CRC, benefits, barriers, impacts on local /regional development and service provision
e. Community and key stakeholder perceptions of future needs in terms of CRN services.	**Individual interviews and focus group**s involving key stakeholders (including CRC staff and management) and a separate community focus group and/or **telephone survey** of randomly selected sample of households within identified CRC catchment	Perceptions of future individual and community needs in relation to CRCs

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Task	Method	Evidence sought
2. Provides comment on DRD's role and relationship with the CRN, including an assessment of the appropriateness of DRD to continue as the lead agency for the delivery of the CRN program with exploration of alternative options for oversight of the program delivery.	**Interview and/or focus discussion** with key stakeholders within DRD and/or identified by DRD. **Interviews and/or focus discussion** with AWACRC and its Board **Development of** Not-for-profit profile for regions in which the sample CRCs operate as a frame for assessing future arrangements for the delivery of the CRN program.	Examples of collaboration, interaction, leadership and oversight (positive and negative) Not-for-profit and charities profiles within the regions reviewed including primary activities and the identification of prospective partner organisations.
3. Provides DRD a way forward to develop future procurements, with a strong understanding of the sector as well as community needs.	Recommendations informed by **desktop and research findings**	N/A
4. Analysis of the real cost of delivering the range of services currently contracted by DRD	**In-house development** and utilisation of the following to ascertain the real cost of delivery: • Development of a costing and pricing data collection tool • Including the development of a standard nomenclature and a set of definitions in order to communicate with study participants what data is wanted and to allow for a legitimate comparison and contrast across CRCs • Aggregation and averaging model that has high comparability and identifies both alternate income sources and direct and indirect costs allowing for an assessment of real cost of service delivery of the CRN.	N/A
5. Evaluation of community need to provide recommendations about the Community Level Outcomes DRD should consider underpinning the future procurement of services from the CRN (aligned to *Partnership Policy*)	Outcomes measurement tool. Develop cost/benefit model and undertake assessment. Informed by findings from earlier stages (above)	

Appendix Four – Outline of Project Phases

PHASE	PURPOSE	KEY ACTIVITIES	TIME
I Project start-up	Ensure a good understanding of the project requirements	Project start-up meeting/s Submit ethics approval Finalise project plan	July
II Desktop analysis	Collate and analyse information on CRN	Conduct desktop analysis Identify key stakeholders Develop financial data collection tool and pilot it via a selection of CRCs from the sample	July-August
III Data collection and analysis	Collect and analyse data on CRN such as services, HR, finances	Analysis of ORD and CRN databases (If necessary).email survey of CRCs Forward financial data collection tool and supervise its population	July-September
IV Initial stakeholder consultation	Develop consultation framework and initiate contact	Undertake metropolitan meetings Phon.e and email regional contacts	July-August
V In-depth stakeholder Consultation	Ensure inclusion of all stakeholder perspectives	Undertake regional field trips to consult with targeted stakeholders Contract transcription services	July-October
VI Telephone survey	Capture community perspectives on CRN	Develop survey; organise with contractor to distribute and analyse survey	August-September
VII Analysis of stakeholder consultation & data	Collate all information gathered throughout the evaluation process	Analyse and synthesise results from stakeholder consultations and desktop analysis	October-November
VIII Draft Report	Report evaluation findings clearly and succinctly	Prepare written report bringing together all findings	Mid-November
IX Final Report	Report evaluation findings clearly and succinctly	Respond to comments on draft report; prepare final report	Mid-December
IX Project follow-up and close-out	Present findings Close the project	Give presentation to ORD Acquit project	Mid-December

Appendix Five – Qualtrics Survey Questions

QUALTRICS SURVEY: DRD CRCs (CRCS NOT VISITED)

Q1 Name of CRC (Please provide to ensure only one response per CRC)

THE SURVEY HAS EMBEDDED SAVE AND CONTINUE FEATURE. IF YOU START THE SURVEY YOU CAN RETURN TO IT BY CLICKING ON THE LINK IN THE EMAIL. HOWEVER YOU WILL NEED TO PROGRESS >> THE SURVEY TO PAGE 2 PRIOR TO LEAVING THE SURVEY FOR THIS TO OCCUR.

Q2 Please describe significant changes within your Community Resource Centre (CRC) since the introduction of contractual arrangements with DRD (post the 2013 CRN Review). If no changes, please indicate not applicable (N/A). Please note: The boxes below allow for up to 500 words but will appear in a wrap-around format.

	Responses (1)
Infrastructure (e.g. changed location; upgrade) (1)	
Governance (e.g. new management committee; management training) (2)	
Reporting (e.g. quality/quantity of reporting) (3)	
Partnerships (e.g. new partnerships; cessation of partnerships) (4)	
Personnel (e.g. changes in key staff) (5)	
Support Services (e.g. Linkwest) (6)	
Other changes not identified above (7)	

Q3 Regarding Service Delivery, please identify any changes since the introduction of contracts under the following categories. Please note: The boxes below allow for up to 500 words but will appear in a wrap-around format.

	Responses (1)
Services conducted through CRC funding (e.g. business and community development, training) (1)	
Services undertaken on a user pays basis (e.g. fee-for-service activities) (2)	
Services contracted with other organisations/agencies (e.g. contracted government services such as Australia Post, licensing) (3)	

Q4 What have been the major benefits arising from being contracted by DRD?

Q5 What have been the major challenges arising from being contracted?

Q6 What have been the significant outcomes of fee-for-service implementation?

Q7 What do you consider are the significant contributions your CRC makes to the local community?

Q8 What do you consider are the significant contributions your CRC makes to local businesses?

Q9 Are there extra services or roles that you consider the CRC Network could provide?

Q10 How would you describe your CRC's relationship with your Shire/Town/City Council?

❍ Poor
❍ Fair
❍ Neutral
❍ Good
❍ Very good

Q11 Please describe the types of support your CRC receives from local government (e.g. building rental, utilities etc.)

Q12 How many members does your CRC have? (If unsure, please provide an estimate)

Q13 In what ways do you encourage community to become members?

Q14 How would you describe the financial position of your CRC?

Q15 What was the CRC's total income for each of the following financial years?

	$ (1)
2012/2013 (1)	
2013/2014 (2)	
2014/2015 (3)	

Q16 Please complete the following (Note the percentages should add to 100%)

	2012/13 % (1)	2013/14 % (2)	2014/15 % (3)
Percentage of Income from CRC Grant (1)			
Percentage of Income from Other Government Agencies (e.g. Australia Post): (2)			
Percentage of Income from User Pays (Including contracts with private sector organisations): (3)			
Percentage of Income from Other Sources (e.g. Interest) (4)			
Check Total (5)			

Q17 Please name sources of Income from Other Government Agencies. e.g. Australia Post

Q18 What were the total expenses for your CRC for the following financial years? (It does not matter when your financial year ends).

	2012/2013 (1)	2013/2014 (2)	2014/2015 (3)
Employees (Including Super & Leave) (1)			
Rent and Accommodation Expenses (2)			
Insurances (3)			
Accounting & Audit (4)			
Contractors (Other than Above Expenses) (5)			
Utilities (Electricity, Water, Gas, Cleaning) (6)			
Stock Purchases (Anything resold) (7)			
Motor Vehicle Expenses (Include Maintenance) (8)			
Any Other Expenses (9)			
Total Expenses (10)			

Q19 If your Centre provides Westlink services, please give details on the activities (e.g., event simulcasts, training, other) and the number of users.

Q20 What do you think about Westlink content?

Q21 What content would you like Westlink to provide?

Q22 If the same content was available through online services like YouTube, would your CRC and community be more likely to use it?

Q23 Do you have further comments or suggestions?

Appendix Six – CATI Survey Questions

CURTIN CRC SURVEY FINAL

Introduction: Hello, my name is … from *Ask Australia* Market Research, on behalf of Curtin University. We are conducting a survey to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the Community Resource Network across WA in terms of providing access to government services, social and business development and in meeting community need. Your opinions will inform future policy and funding directions for regional WA.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes, could I please speak to the youngest person at home at the moment who is over the age of 18?

1. Yes, interested
2. No

Age Which of the following age groups do you belong to?

1. 18 – 29
2. 30 – 39
3. 40 – 49
4. 50 – 59
5. 60 – 69
6. 70 and over

Gender [INTERVIEWER: Record gender]

1. Male
2. Female

Q1 Are you aware of the Community Resource Centre or CRC in your town, you may also know it as a Telecentre?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Unsure

(If Q1 = yes)

Q2 Have you, or a member of your household, used or visited the CRC in your area in the last two years? (Multiple response)

1. Yes, I have
2. Another household member has
3. No

4. Unsure

(If Q2_1 or Q2_2 = yes, else go to Q8)

Q3 How often would you/they have visited the CRC in that time?

1. Once a week
2. Once a fortnight
3. Once a month
4. Once in the last 3 months
5. Once in the last 6 months
6. Once in the last year
7. Once in the last two years (or less frequently)
8. Unsure

Q4 What CRC services have you/they used? (Multiple response, do not read)

1. Printing/Photocopying
2. Laminating
3. Binding
4. Faxing/Forms/Business stationery
5. Computer/Hotspot/Wi-Fi/Internet use
6. Computer training
7. Media conversion/transfer
8. Adult education training
9. Employment services
10. Access to Government service agencies (specify)
11. Westlink TV
12. Meeting Room hire
13. Projector/Screen hire
14. Local business/tourism promotion
15. Community/social events (specify)
16. Other (specify)

Q5 What other services are you aware of that the CRC provides? (Multiple response, do not read)

1. Printing/Photocopying
2. Laminating
3. Binding
4. Faxing/Forms/Business stationery
5. Computer/Hotspot/Wi-Fi/Internet use
6. Computer training
7. Media conversion/transfer
8. Adult education training

9. Employment services
10. Access to Government service agencies (specify)
11. Westlink TV
12. Meeting Room hire
13. Projector/Screen hire
14. Local business/tourism promotion
15. Community/social events (specify)
16. Other (specify)
17. None/Unsure

Q6 Do you access the CRC for personal use, business, or both?

1. Personal use only
2. Business use only
3. Both
4. Unsure

Q7 In what ways do you think the Community Resource Centre could better service you and your community and local business? [Open-ended response]

READ DESCRIPTION: (If Q1 or Q2 = 3 or 4, not aware/not used)

The WA Community Resource Network includes over 100 rural, regional and remote Community Resource Centres (CRCs). These Not-for-profit centres are managed and operated in their local community. CRCs provide a wide array of information and community based services to local people, businesses and visitors in regional WA with the aim of connecting people to services.

 (If Q1 or Q2 = 3 or 4, not aware/not used)

Q8 You mentioned that you don't currently use your Community Resource Centre, why do you say that? (Do not read)

1. Wasn't aware of it
2. Don't know what services they offer
3. Doesn't cater for my needs (specify)
4. Cost of services
5. Using other services that meet my needs (specify)
6. No need for these services
7. Other (specify)
8. Unsure

Q9 Are there any additional services that would encourage you to use the CRC? [Open-ended response]

(Q10 Ask all)

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Q10 How do you think the CRC could better promote its services to you and your community? [Open-ended response]

(Q11 Ask all)

Q11 Which CRC activities/services are/would you be prepared to pay for? (Read out)

1. Printing/Photocopying
2. Laminating
3. Binding
4. Faxing/Forms/Business stationery
5. Computer/Hotspot/Wi-Fi/Internet use
6. Computer training
7. Media conversion/transfer
8. Adult education training
9. Employment services
10. Meeting Room hire
11. Projector/Screen hire
12. Local business/tourism promotion
13. Community/social events (specify)
14. Other (specify)

For each of the above:

1. Yes
2. No
3. No need for this
4. Unsure

Q11a Does your household have a VAST (Viewer Access Satellite Television) satellite receiver?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Unsure

(If yes)

Q11b And do you, or other members of your household, watch Westlink TV on Channel 602?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Unsure

(Q12 Ask all)

Q12 Do you believe that the CRC supports local business? (Do not read)

1. Yes
2. No
3. Unsure
4. They compete with local business

Q13 And lastly, a few questions about yourself…

Do you sit on a community or sporting group management board/committee or volunteer your time in any other ways?

1. Yes (specify)
2. No
3. Unsure

INCOME

Just so we can have an accurate sample, can you tell me the total annual income before tax for your whole household, please stop me when I get to the appropriate income bracket.

1. Under $40,000
2. $40,001 - $60,000
3. $60,001 - $80,000
4. $80,001 - $100,000
5. $100,001 - $120,000
6. Over $120000
7. Unsure [DNR]
8. Refused [DNR]

WORK

Are you currently:

1. Self employed
2. In full time paid work
3. In part time paid work
4. Casually employed
5. In full time home duties
6. Retired
7. Student
8. Unemployed
9. Prefer not to say

(If 1-4 in WORK ask)

OCCUPATION

And what type of job do you do, I don't need to know the company, but just the type of work you do, for example plumber, teacher, etc? (Open-ended)

EDUCATION

What is the highest level of education you have completed? [READ IF NEEDED]

1. Some high school
2. Completed high school to year 12
3. Trade or TAFE Qualification
4. University undergraduate or bachelor's degree
5. Postgraduate course or graduate diploma
6. Master's degree
7. Doctorate degree
8. Don't know/None specified

CHILDREN1

Are you a parent with dependent children living at home?

1. Yes (specify number of children at home)
2. No/unsure

CHILDREN2

Are your children: (multiple response)

1. Below school age
2. In primary school
3. Of high school age
4. Refused [DNR]

HOUSEHOLD

Which of these best describes the household in which you live?

1. Couple with no children
2. Couple with children
3. One parent family
4. Single person household

5. Group household (non-family)
6. Other type of family household (specify)
7. Don't know
8. Refused

LANGUAGE

Do you speak a language other than English at home?

1. No, English only
2. Yes (specify)
3. Prefer not to say

ATSI

Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Straight Island descent?
1. Yes
2. No
3. Prefer not to say

SUBURB: Which suburb do you live in?

POSTCODE: And your postcode?

DURATION

How long have you lived in (town)?

1. Less than 2 years
2. 2 to 5 years
3. 5 to10 years
4. More than 10 years
5. Unsure [DNR]

CRC: Can you tell me the location of your nearest CRC?

1. Location (specify)
2. Unsure

END Thank you very much for your time. This survey was commissioned by Curtin University and the Department of Regional Development.

REGION: (from sample data)

Appendix Seven – Random Survey (Data summary)

PART A

Demographic Q1 (n = 2400)

Age group
- Over 70 years: 24.5% (588)
- 50-59 years: 23.0% (553)
- 60-69 years: 23.0% (551)
- 40-49 years: 16.1% (387)
- 30-39 years: 9.5% (228)
- 18-29 years: 3.9% (93)

Table 11: Age groupings of survey respondents by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-29	93	3.9	3.9	3.9
30-39	228	9.5	9.5	13.4
40-49	387	16.1	16.1	29.5
50-59	553	23.0	23.0	52.5
60-69	551	23.0	23.0	75.5
70 and over	588	24.5	24.5	100.0
Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Demographic Q2 (n = 2400)

Sex
- Female: 62.5% (1499)
- Males: 37.5% (901)

Table 12: Sex of survey respondents by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	901	37.5	37.5	37.5
Female	1499	62.5	62.5	100.0
Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Demographic Q3 (n = 2400)

Total annual income

- Under $40,000: 27.5% (659)
- Over $120,000: 13.4% (321)
- $40,000 – 60,000: 13.0% (312)
- $80,001 - $100,000: 10.1% (242)

Table 13: Annual Income of survey respondents by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Under $40,000	659	27.5	27.5	27.5
$40,001 - $60,000	312	13.0	13.0	40.5
$60,001 - $80,000	224	9.3	9.3	49.8
$80,001 - $100,000	242	10.1	10.1	59.9
$100,001 - $120,000	172	7.2	7.2	67.0
Over $120,000	321	13.4	13.4	80.4
Unsure	174	7.2	7.2	87.7
Refused	296	12.3	12.3	100.0
Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Demographic Q4 (n = 2400)

Work

- Retired: 34.7% (833)
- Self-employed: 20.5% (493)
- Full time paid work: 18.8% (452)
- Part time paid work: 11.8% (283)

Table 14: Type of work by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Self-employed	493	20.5	20.5	20.5
In full time paid work	452	18.8	18.8	39.4
In part time paid work	283	11.8	11.8	51.2
Casually employed	109	4.5	4.5	55.7
In full time home duties	108	4.5	4.5	60.2
Retired	833	34.7	34.7	94.9

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Student	25	1.0	1.0	96.0
Unemployed	72	3.0	3.0	99.0
Prefer not to say	25	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Demographic 5 (multiple response)

Occupation
- Farmer/farm manager/agriculture: (19.8%)
- Professional: Education (teacher): (10.6%)
- Clerical/ Public servant: (8.6%)
- Managers/Administrators: (6.9%)
- Professionals: Health (5.0%)
- Hospitality/Catering: (4.0%)
- Sales: (4%)
- Trades: (3.4%)

Demographic 6 (n = 2400)

Highest level of education
- Some high school: 31.3% (752)
- Trade or TAFE: 25.4% (610)
- Completed Year 12: 17.5% (420)
- University undergraduate or Bachelor's degree: 16.0% (385)

Table 15: Highest level of education by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Some high school	752	31.3	31.3	31.3
Completed high school to year 12	420	17.5	17.5	48.8
Trade or TAFE Qualification	610	25.4	25.4	74.3
University undergraduate or bachelor's degree	385	16.0	16.0	90.3
Postgraduate course or graduate diploma	156	6.5	6.5	96.8
Master's degree	32	1.3	1.3	98.1
Doctorate degree	10	.4	.4	98.5

Unsure/Prefer not to say	35	1.5	1.5	100.0
Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Demographic 7a (n = 2400)

Description of household composition

- Couple with no children: 46.1% (1107)
- Couple with children: 28.8% (691)
- Single person household: 17.9% (429)
- One parent household: 3% (73)

Table 16: Description of household composition by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Couple with no children	1107	46.1	46.1	46.1
Couple with children	691	28.8	28.8	74.9
One parent family	73	3.0	3.0	78.0
Single person household	429	17.9	17.9	95.8
Group household (non-family)	20	.8	.8	96.7
Other type of family household	58	2.4	2.4	99.1
Unsure	3	.1	.1	99.2
Refused	19	.8	.8	100.0
Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Demographic 7b (n = 800)

Children in household

Of the 800 respondents with children:

- Below school age: 17.8% (142)
- In primary school 41.2% (330)
- Of high school age 38.1 (305)
- Refused: 2.9% (23)

Table 17: Children in the household by frequency and percent

	Responses	Percent of Cases

	N	Percent	
Below school age	142	17.8%	22.7%
In primary school	330	41.2%	52.7%
Of high school age	305	38.1%	48.7%
Refused	23	2.9%	3.7%
Total	800	100.0%	127.8%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Demographic 8 (n = 2400)

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent

- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Island descent 1.6% (38)
- Non-Aboriginal or TSI: 97.8% (2347)
- Prefer not to say: 0.6% (15)

Table 18: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island descent by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	38	1.6	1.6	1.6
No	2347	97.8	97.8	99.4
Prefer not to say	15	.6	.6	100.0
Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Demographic 9 (n = 2400)

Language spoken at home

- English: 95.9% (2302)
- Language other than English: 3.7% (89)

Table 19: Language spoken at home by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	89	3.7	3.7	3.7
No	2302	95.9	95.9	99.6
Prefer not to say	9	.4	.4	100.0

Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Demographic 10 (n = 2400)

Length of time in current location
- More than 10 years: 70.5% (1692)
- 5-10 years: 397 (16.5%)
- 2-5 years: 8.7% (209)
- Less than 2 years: 3.3% (79)

Table 20: Length of time in current location by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 2 years	79	3.3	3.3	3.3
2-5 years	209	8.7	8.7	12.0
5-10 years	397	16.5	16.5	28.5
More than 10 years	1692	70.5	70.5	99.0
Unsure	23	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Demographic 11 (n = 2400)

Table 21: Respondent numbers by region

Regions	Actual
Gascoyne	19
Goldfields-Esperance	105
Great Southern	341
Kimberley	110
Mid West	192
Peel	299
Pilbara	0
South West	536
Wheatbelt	798
Total	2400

PART B: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q1 (n = 2400)

Awareness of CRC in their town
- 90.0% (2159) aware of CRC in their town
- 9.4% (225) unaware
- <1% (16) unsure

Table 22: Awareness of CRC in their town

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	2159	90.0	90.0	90.0
No	225	9.4	9.4	99.3
Unsure	16	.7	.7	100.0
Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Q2 (n = 2400)

Location of your nearest CRC
- Location name same as nearest CRC: 85.6% (2054)
- Location name different from CRC name e.g. other town/community not necessarily part of Shire 7.5% (177)
- Unsure: 5.5% (126)
- No such CRC: 0.3% (7)
- Preferred not to answer: 1.5% (37)

Q3 (n = 1651) (multiple responses)

Use or visit to a CRC in the last two years
- Yes, I have: 57.9% (1250)
- No: 23.0% (502)
- Both myself and other household member/s have: 15.3% (331)
- Another household member has: 3.2% (70)
- Unsure: 3.0% (6)

Table 23: Accessed CRC in the past two years

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Yes, I have	1250	52.1	57.9	57.9
	Another household member has	70	2.9	3.2	61.1
	Both myself and other household member/s have	331	13.8	15.3	76.5
	No	502	20.9	23.3	99.7
	Unsure	6	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	2159	90.0	100.0	
Missing	System	241	10.0		
Total		2400	100.0		

Q4 (n = 1651)

Frequency of visits to CRC

- Once a month: 15.1% (363)
- Once in the last 3 months: 13.7% (329)
- Once a week: 10.8% (259)
- Once in the last 6 months: 9.1% (218)
- Once in the last year: 7.8% (187)
- Once a fortnight: 7.0 %(168)
- Once in the last two years: 4.8% (114)
- Unsure: 0. 5% (13)

Table 24: Frequency of visits to a CRC over the past two years

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Once a week	259	10.8	15.7	15.7
	Once a fortnight	168	7.0	10.2	25.9
	Once a month	363	15.1	22.0	47.8
	Once in the last 3 months	329	13.7	9.9	67.8
	Once in the last 6 months	218	9.1	13.2	81.0
	Once in the last year	187	7.8	11.3	92.3
	Once in the last two years	114	4.8	6.9	99.2
	Unsure	13	.5	.8	100.0
	Total	1651	68.8	100.0	
Missing	System	749	31.2		

Total	2400	100.0		

Q5 (Multiple response)

CRC services accessed

- Printing/photocopying: 21.6%
- Computer/Hotspot/Wifi: 14.9%
- Access to government services: 9% (these included: Centrelink, Medicare, Licencing (MV and drivers) TransWA (ticket bookings))
- Community social events: 6.5% These included: children's holiday programs, workshops and short courses, guest presenters, cinema/films and regular events such as morning tea;
- Computer training: 5.6%
- Faxing/forms/business stationery: 4.8%
- Adult education training: 4.4%
- Laminating: 4.1%
- Meeting room hire: 3.4%
- Local business/tourism promotion: 2.4%
- Binding: 2.0%
- Media conversion/transfer: 2.0%
- Employment services: 2.0%
- Projector/screen hire: .05%
- Westlink TV: .04%
- Other: 16.4% (this included: library book exchange, local newspaper/sheet, bank, information and advice, health services, post office, information and purchase point for train/bus tickets; motor registration/licencing; Births/deaths/marriages; passport)

Table 25: Comparative table of use and awareness of services provided by CRCs (Q5 & Q.6)

	Serviced type	Use of services provided			Awareness of services provided		
		Responses			Responses		
CRC services	Printing/Photocopying	N	Percent	Percent of Cases	N	Percent	Percent of Cases
	Printing/Photocopying	744	21.6%	45.9%	423	11.8%	30.0%
	Laminating	140	4.1%	8.6%	155	4.3%	11.0%
	Binding	68	2.0%	4.2%	85	2.4%	6.0%
	Faxing/Forms/Business stationery	165	4.8%	10.2%	134	3.7%	9.5%
	Computer/Hotspot/Wi-Fi/Internet use	513	14.9%	31.6%	516	14.4%	36.6%

	Computer training	191	5.6%	11.8%	409	11.4%	29.0%
	Media conversion /transfer	69	2.0%	4.3%	78	2.2%	5.5%
	Adult education training	151	4.4%	9.3%	288	8.0%	20.4%
	Employment services	68	2.0%	4.2%	181	5.0%	12.8%
	Access to Government service agencies	310	9.0%	19.1%	347	9.7%	24.6%
	Westlink TV	15	0.4%	0.9%	37	1.0%	2.6%
	Meeting Room hire	116	3.4%	7.2%	146	4.1%	10.3%
	Projector/Screen hire	17	0.5%	1.0%	30	0.8%	2.1%
	Local business/tourism promotion	84	2.4%	5.2%	102	2.8%	7.2%
	Community/social events	222	6.5%	13.7%	229	6.4%	16.2%

Q6 (Multiple response)

Awareness of other services that the CRC provides

- Computer/Hotspot /Wifi: 14.4%
- Printing/photocopying: 11.8%
- Computer training: 11.5%
- Access to government services: 9,7% (these included: Centrelink, Medicare, Licencing (MV and drivers) TransWA (ticket bookings))
- Adult education training: 8.0%
- Community social events: 6.4% (These included: children's holiday programs, workshops and short courses, guest presenters, cinema/films and regular events such as morning tea)
- Employment services: 5.0%
- Laminating: 4.3%
- Meeting room hire: 4.1%
- Faxing/forms/business stationery: 3.7%
- Local business/tourism promotion: 2.8%
- Binding: 2.4%
- Media conversion/transfer: 2.2%
- Westlink TV: 1.0%
- Projector/screen hire: .08%

Q7 (n = 1651)

Type of use

- Person use only: 38% (912)
- Both (personal and business): 23.3% (558)
- Business use only: 5.5% (131)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Personal use only	912	38.0	55.2	55.2
	Business use only	131	5.5	7.9	63.2
	Both	558	23.3	33.8	97.0
	Unsure	50	2.1	3.0	100.0
	Total	1651	68.8	100.0	
Missing	System	749	31.2		
Total		2400	100.0		

Q8 (Open-ended response)

Ways CRC could better service community and local business

- Advertise and/or promote service better with more detail on specific services: (57)
- Extend opening hours: (42)
- Provide more workshops/training seminars (41) incorporating specific identification of computer/technology courses: (23)
- Improve customer service/expertise: (34)
- More service/programs and events: (24)
- Lower prices and more free services: (23)
- More funding for CRCs: (22)
- Improved business/facilities/location: (22)

Q9 (n = 612)

Reasons for not accessing a CRC

- No need for these services: 69.9% (428)
- Don't know what services they offer: 10.9% (67)
- Using other services that meet needs: 3.9% (24)
- Doesn't cater for my needs: 2.0% (12)

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- Other 12.9%: (79) including 'not wheelchair or access friendly' (4); 'no computer or useful facilities'; 'needed more advance computing skills'; 'too far away'; 'CRC staff under-skilled; opening hours don't suit; service users too young or too old.

Table 27: Reasons for not accessing a CRC

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Don't know what services they offer	67	10.9%	11.3%
Doesn't cater for my needs	12	2.0%	2.0%
Cost of services	2	0.3%	0.3%
Using other services that meet my needs	24	3.9%	4.0%
No need for these services	428	69.9%	71.9%
Other	79	12.9%	13.3%
Total	612	100.0%	102.9%

Q10 (Open-ended response)

Additional services that would encourage use of CRC

- More services and facilities: (20)
- Computer/internet/technology training and assistance (20)
- More short course training/seminars: (14)

Q11 (Open-ended response)

Ways CRC could better promote its services

- Advertise in local paper: (276)
- Facebook and social media: (118)
- Posters flyers at shop or local notice board: (106)
- Radio promotion: (101)
- More detail about services provided: (99)
- Letterbox drop and mail-out: (88)

Q12 (multiple response)

User pays

- Printing/photocopying: 10.0%
- Laminating: 9.5%
- Media conversion/transfer: 8.7%
- Binding: 8.6%
- Adult education training: 8.3%
- Community/social events: 8.0% (specifically films, concerts, funding raising events, children's holiday programs
- Computer training: 7.9%
- Faxing and business stationary: 7.8%
- Meeting room hire: 7.3%

Table 28: Types of service respondents willing to pay for by frequency and response

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Printing/Photocopying	1145	10.0%	72.4%
Laminating	1087	9.5%	68.8%
Binding	979	8.6%	61.9%
Faxing/Forms/Business stationery	888	7.8%	56.2%
Computer/Hotspot/Wi-Fi/Internet use	692	6.1%	43.8%
Computer training	906	7.9%	57.3%
Media conversion/transfer	999	8.7%	63.2%
Adult education training	948	8.3%	60.0%
Employment services	528	4.6%	33.4%
Meeting Room hire	839	7.3%	53.1%
Projector/Screen hire	823	7.2%	52.1%
Local business/tourism promotion	679	5.9%	42.9%
Community/social events	910	8.0%	57.6%
Total	11423	100.0%	722.5%

Q11a (n =2400)

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- Yes: 37.0% (887)
- No: 58.3% (1398)
- Unsure: 4.5% (115)

Table 29: Access to VAST by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	887	37.0	37.0	37.0
No	1398	58.3	58.3	95.2
Unsure	115	4.8	4.8	100.0
Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Q11b (n = 887)

Viewers of Westlink TV (Channel 602)

- Yes: 5.8% (140)

- No: 29.8% (716)

- Unsure: 1.3% (31)

Table 30: Viewers of Westlink TV by frequency and percent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Yes	140	5.8	15.8	15.8
	No	716	29.8	80.7	96.5
	Unsure	31	1.3	3.5	100.0
	Total	887	37.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1513	63.0		
Total		2400	100.0		

Q12 Do you believe that the CRC supports local business? (n = 2400)

- Yes: 74.5% (1787)

- No: 4.3% (102)

- Unsure: 21.0% (505)
- Compete with local businesses .3%

Table 31: Role of CRC in supporting local business by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	1787	74.5	74.5	74.5
No	102	4.3	4.3	78.7
Unsure	505	21.0	21.0	99.8
They compete with local business	6	.3	.3	100.0
Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Q. 13 Do you sit on a community or sporting group management board/committee or volunteer your time in any other ways? (n = 2400)

- Yes: 54.2% (1301)
- No: 45.4% (1093)
- Unsure: .3% (6)

Table 32: Volunteering by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	1301	54.2	54.2	54.2
No	1093	45.5	45.5	99.8
Unsure	6	.3	.3	100.0
Total	2400	100.0	100.0	

Q13b (Open ended response)

Details of volunteering

- Sporting events and teams: (352)
- Committee/Board members (371) including as Committee members of CRCs (33)
- Volunteering unspecified(occasional fundraising, event specific): (269)
- School P&C, tuckshop: (152)
- Volunteer service organisations: e.g. Lions, Rotary, CWA: (132)
- FESA or air/sea rescue: (121)

Q14 (Open ended response)

Other comments (in order of mention)

- Excellent service, essential, retain and keep funding: (567)
- Staff and management are good: (119)
- Like services offered: (94)
- Under-utilised, need more promotion: (61)
- Staff and management need upskilling: (27)
- Unaware of them, don't use them or know enough about them: (29)
- Obsolete: (16)

Appendix Eight: Survey Instrument – Financial Information

1. How would you describe the financial position of your CRC?

2. What was your total income for each of the following financial years?

	$
2013	
2014	
2015	

3. Please complete the following (Note the percentages should add to 100%):

	%
Percentage of Income from CRC Grant	
Percentage of Income from Other Government Agencies (e.g. Australia Post):	
Agency Name: Centrelink	
Agency Name: Department of Transport commission	
Agency Name: Traineeship Contribution (Chambers & Commerce WA)	
Percentage of Income from User Pays (Including contracts with private sector organisations:	
Percentage of Income from Other Sources (e.g. Interest)	
Check Total	

4. What were the total expenses for your CRC for the following financial years? (It does not matter when your financial year ends)

	2013 $	2014 $	2015 $
Employees (Including Super & Leave)			
Rent and Accommodation Expenses			
Insurances			

	2013 $	2014 $	2015 $
Accounting & Audit			
Contractors (Other than Above Expenses)			
Utilities (Electricity, Water, Gas, Cleaning)			
Stock Purchases (Anything resold)			
Motor Vehicle Expenses (Include Maintenance)			
Any Other Expenses (Printing, etc.)			
Total Expenses			

Appendix Nine: Interview schedules for CRC visits

a) Management Stakeholders

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. General introductions – length of time the CRC has been established. How long has the coordinator been there? Management?

2. Please describe:
   - Types of engagement/activities
   - Participation (numbers, demographic of users, and community/business sector activities; partnerships)
   - Benefits
   - Barriers
   - Collaborations/partnerships e.g. neighbour centre, local government, sport and rec clubs

3. What contribution does the CRC make to this community?

4. What impact have recent government changes had on this CRC?

   - Service delivery (e.g. additional CRC activities; cessation of activities)
   - Infrastructure (e.g. changed location; upgrade)
   - Governance (e.g. new management committee; management training)
   - Reporting (e.g. quality/quantity of reporting)
   - Partnerships (e.g. new partnerships; cessation of partnerships)
   - Personnel (e.g. changes in key staff)
   - Support Services (e.g. Linkwest)
   - Other changes not identified above

5. What is currently working well within this CRC and should be maintained?

6. Please provide some examples of successes/challenges around fee-for- service?

7. What role would you envisage DRD playing into the future?

8. What role would you envisage the Association of WACRN playing into the future

9. How would you describe the financial position of this CRC?

10. How could this CRC become more sustainable?

11. Where is there scope for future development and what is the vision you have for it?

b) Business stakeholders

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1.   General introductions, type of business or social development stakeholder?

2.   Types of activities/use
      o   you engage in with the CRC
      o   you are aware exist within the CRC
   • Benefits of partnering with CRC
   • Barriers to service deliver or partnership
   • Current needs
   • Future needs

3.   Fee-for-service
   • Do they currently pay the CRC a fee-for-service?
   • Is this a competitive/reasonable rate?

4.   What activities/services would you consider it reasonable to fee-for-service?

5.   What do you consider is the CRC's contribution to local development and service provision?

6.   In what ways could the CRC be better utilised by this community?

c) Community Stakeholders

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. General introductions, live in town or outside of town, how long have they been involved with CRC

2. What activities do you participate in the CRC?

3. What are the benefits of having a CRC in your community?

4. What are the limitations?

5. Would you pay for services provided? What services would you be willing to pay for? What would be a reasonable fee?

d) Local governments

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. General introductions, position, involvement with CRC, any other CRCs in the Shire? Previous involvement in CRCs in other locations?

2. Do you have any formal arrangements/partnerships with CRC/s in the Shire?

3. Types of use/activities
    o The Shire engages in with the CRC
    - Benefits for the Shire of having CRC/s in the community
    - Barriers or limitations

4. Fee-for-service
    - Do they currently pay the CRC a fee-for-service?
    - Is this a competitive/reasonable rate?

5. What activities/services would you consider it reasonable to pay a fee-for-service?

6. What is the CRC's contribution to local development and service provision?

7. What is your estimate of in-kind contribution by the Shire to the CRC?

8. In what ways could the CRC be better utilised by this community?