What is the Toolkit?

The Toolkit is a software-based tool designed to help Aboriginal community groups (or communities participating in the Partnership Community Program) develop an understanding of the current level of wellbeing in their community and to set in place goals and actions to improve community wellbeing.

The Toolkit allows for a positive approach to community planning – it has been designed to focus on the strengths of a community, rather than its weaknesses.

The Toolkit generates a series of reports for a community that can form the basis of a formal community action plan. It can also assist a community to monitor its level of wellbeing over time and plan relevant actions to improve its wellbeing.

The Toolkit can help a community to discuss a range of issues that contribute to wellbeing. It can also empower communities by helping them to transform community knowledge into information that can be used in a collaborative planning process. The Toolkit process is intended to help communities to confidently negotiate with government and other partners to achieve community goals.

What does the Toolkit do?

The Toolkit guides a community group through a process of assessing the community’s wellbeing across eight key areas or ‘characteristics’ of Aboriginal community wellbeing. These characteristics make up the ‘Aboriginal Community Wellbeing Framework’ which forms the basis of the Toolkit.

The eight characteristics of Aboriginal community wellbeing are: Access to Country; Community Health and Safety; Cultural Identity; Economic Strength and Development; Education and Learning; Infrastructure and Services; Leadership, Empowerment and Influence and Sense of Community.

Using the results of the assessment spanning these eight areas, the Toolkit then guides the community group through a process of setting goals for areas identified as key priorities.

The final section of the Toolkit is designed to be used by the community group together with government and other partners to negotiate actions the community would like to undertake in partnership to achieve its key priority goals.
After each stage or ‘module’ of the Toolkit (including assessment, goals setting and action planning stages) a report is generated:

**Report 1**  Community self-assessment report – will include information about how the community assesses its current level of wellbeing. The self-assessment process prioritises the areas of wellbeing.

**Report 2**  Preparing for negotiation report – will include the community’s goals for the priority areas of wellbeing. This report will also include community-developed timeframes for achieving the goals and information drawn from existing community plans.

**Report 3**  Planning together report – will capture information about the actions and strategies that the community and its partners (such as government agencies) have agreed upon, in order to achieve the goals, strengthen wellbeing and improve service delivery.

These reports can then be used to form the basis of a more comprehensive community action plan.

**The Toolkit User Manual as a support tool**

The Toolkit User Manual has been developed to help people use the software. This will be available on the Toolkit CD. The User Manual also includes a paper-based version of the self-assessment process, a paper-based evaluation form, and a link to an online survey for evaluating the Toolkit.

**The Toolkit:**
- recognises factors that are specific to, and essential for Aboriginal community wellbeing such as having a strong sense of cultural identity and access to Country
- focuses on community perceptions and gives communities a strong say in determining what’s right for them, and
- provides output, at the end of each stage, in the form of reports that can be used to inform development of a community action plan.

**Who will use the Toolkit?**

The main users of the Toolkit will be communities participating in the Partnership Community Program. Community Program officers employed by Aboriginal Affairs NSW will be trained in facilitating the use of the Toolkit in communities. The Toolkit is designed to be used by a community engagement group as defined in the Partnership Community Governance Framework. However, the Toolkit is also available as a resource for communities, peak bodies and other interested parties who may not currently be participating in the Partnership Community Program.

The Toolkit is designed to be user friendly and a User Manual is available as an additional resource to help communities understand and use the Toolkit.

**How does the Toolkit support the Partnership Community Program?**

The Partnership Community Program establishes a basis for Aboriginal communities and government (State and Federal) to work together to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people through partnership, mutual accountability and strengthened local decision-making. The program aims to:
- improve service delivery and outcomes on the ground for Aboriginal people, and
- strengthen Aboriginal community wellbeing.

The Partnership Community Program recognises that Aboriginal people know best the needs of their communities, and that government agencies and Aboriginal communities need to work in partnership to improve outcomes on the ground.

Initially 40 Partnership Communities will be participating in the program. These communities represent approximately 45% of the Aboriginal population in NSW.
The Toolkit supports a number of recommendations from the Auditor General’s performance audit of the ‘Two Ways Together’ program\(^1\) such as:

- the Partnership Community Program has merit and should be supported by providing ongoing training for the community governance bodies
- that a process be developed which monitors NSW Government compliance with the requirement to work with the community governance bodies within the Partnership Community Program, and
- that Aboriginal people know best the needs and aspirations of their local communities.

The Toolkit:

- prepares communities to engage with government to jointly agree on a series of actions to best meet community goals and priorities
- changes the current way of implementing a plan in Aboriginal communities by getting the community involved early in the assessment, prioritisation and planning stages
- informs both the community and government decision-making processes, and
- helps communities to define what they need and how this will contribute to improving wellbeing.

**Groups not participating in the Partnership Community Program**

The Toolkit can also be an effective resource for communities not participating in the Partnership Community Program. For these communities, it is recommended that the Toolkit is used by an engagement group or equivalent – i.e. a group that:

- reflects the diversity of the community
- is representative of the interests of the entire community, and
- is supported to make decisions on behalf of the community.

**Toolkit evaluation**

The use and effectiveness of the Toolkit will be monitored and then reviewed two years after its launch. Anyone involved in the use of the Toolkit is welcome to contribute to its review so that it can continue to be refined to meet the needs of communities and engagement groups.

To help contribute to the evaluation of the Toolkit, it is important that information about engagement groups’ experiences using the Toolkit is collected (including feedback on how easy the software was to use, whether the software helps record useful information for communities, and ideas for its improvement). This information is best collected as soon as possible after an engagement group has used the Toolkit and the experience is fresh in the participants’ minds.

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\(^1\) NSW Auditor-General’s Report Two Ways Together - NSW Aboriginal Affairs Plan 2011
Further information and to provide feedback

For more information contact:

The Office of Environment and Heritage
Country, Culture and Heritage Division on 02 9585 6453.
or
The Office of Aboriginal Affairs NSW
Partnership Community Program Manager on 02 9219 0749.