

# Case study

## Securing funding for traditional owners to protect cultural and environmental heritage in Victoria

The preservation of cultural and environmental heritage in Victoria is at a critical juncture. The systematic exclusion of Traditional Owners from decision-making processes has exacerbated the challenges. By securing the necessary funding and re-establishing their role as land stewards, the Traditional Owners can ensure that both the environment and their cultural heritage are protected for future generations.

This case study provides a framework for training participants in developing a business case that supports the funding and inclusion needs of Victoria's Traditional Owners in their efforts to safeguard their land and culture.

### Background

In Victoria, Australia, Traditional Owners—Indigenous communities who have managed the land for tens of thousands of years—are facing significant challenges in preserving their cultural heritage and the natural environment. Due to increasing urbanisation, agricultural expansion and infrastructure development, there has been mounting pressure on the land, leading to environmental degradation and threats to sacred sites.

Historically, the Traditional Owners have been the custodians of some of Victoria's most ecologically significant and culturally rich landscapes. Their sustainable land management practices have preserved the region's biodiversity and cultural sites for generations. However, these communities have been systematically excluded from decision-making processes concerning land use and environmental management since colonisation until recent years. This exclusion has resulted in poorly informed decisions that neglect the cultural and environmental knowledge of the Traditional Owners, exacerbating the degradation of the land and endangering cultural heritage.

The community leaders are now seeking financial support to reassert their role in land management, protect cultural heritage and ensure the sustainability of their environment in the face of modern challenges.

### Problem statement

The Traditional Owners in Victoria are under-resourced and have been systematically removed from the processes that govern land and environmental management. This exclusion has led to increased environmental degradation and the neglect of cultural sites. The Traditional Owners urgently need resources and recognition to reclaim their role as land stewards and protect their cultural heritage.

### Objective

The primary objective is to secure funding that will enable the Traditional Owners to:

- Re-establish their leadership and involvement in land management practices that protect the environment and cultural heritage.
- Support community-led conservation projects aimed at restoring ecosystems and safeguarding cultural sites.
- Preserve and protect sacred sites from the impacts of unchecked development and agricultural activities.
- Enhance the capacity of the Traditional Owners to engage in sustainable economic opportunities aligned with their cultural values and traditions.

### Key stakeholders

- Traditional Owners: Indigenous communities who are the custodians of Victoria's land and Aboriginal culture.
- State and Federal Government Agencies: Entities responsible for policy and funding decisions that should involve Traditional Owners.
- Environmental NGOs: Partners in conservation, restoration and advocacy efforts who can support the re-integration of Traditional Owners into land management.

- **Agricultural and Development Sectors:** Industries that operate in Victoria have historically influenced land use without adequate input from Traditional Owners.
- **Local and International Donors:** Entities interested in supporting Indigenous-led land management and conservation efforts.

## Proposed solutions

1. **Establishment of a Victorian Indigenous Land Management Fund:** Creating a dedicated fund to support Traditional Owners in reclaiming their role in managing their land, including funding for rangers, environmental monitoring and cultural site preservation.
2. **Reintegration of Traditional Owners in Decision-Making Processes:** Working with government agencies and NGOs to ensure that Traditional Owners are actively involved in all land use and environmental management decisions.
3. **Sustainable Economic Development Initiatives:** Developing eco-tourism, bush food enterprises and other sustainable economic activities that generate income for the community while protecting the environment and cultural sites.

## Potential benefits

- **Environmental Protection:** Preserving Victoria's unique ecosystems by integrating Traditional Owners' knowledge with modern conservation practices.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Safeguarding sacred sites and maintaining cultural practices that are integral to the identity of Victoria's Traditional Owners.
- **Restoration of Traditional Authority:** Ensuring that Traditional Owners are recognised and involved as key decision-makers in matters concerning their land.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Providing Traditional Owners with sustainable economic opportunities that respect their cultural values and foster economic independence.
- **Enhanced Community Wellbeing:** Improving the quality of life for Traditional Owners by ensuring their land and culture are protected and their voices are heard in decision-making processes.

## Challenges

- **Funding Acquisition:** Securing consistent and adequate funding to support long-term projects in a competitive funding environment.
- **Overcoming Systematic Exclusion:** Reversing Traditional Owners' historical and ongoing exclusion from land management decisions and ensuring their meaningful involvement.
- **Balancing Development and Preservation:** Navigating the complex challenges of balancing economic development with environmental and cultural preservation in a rapidly changing landscape.
- **Community Engagement:** Ensuring inclusive decision-making processes within the Traditional Owner communities to reflect their diverse perspectives and aspirations.

## Next steps

The Traditional Owners, alongside their partners, need to develop a comprehensive business case to present to potential funders and stakeholders. This business case should highlight the environmental and cultural significance of the land, outline the proposed projects in detail and provide a thorough analysis of the financial requirements and anticipated benefits. It should also include a plan for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the funded initiatives, ensuring transparency and accountability.