

Snapshot: Preparing a vision and a preamble



It is important for organisations to **prepare a vision** that encapsulates your values and where you see yourselves in the future. This vision can be supported by a 'preamble' that explains the vision in the context of the organisation or community.

For example Western Arnhem Shire has a vision: 'Strong communities working together to improve our lives.' On its journey to becoming a shire council, the West Arnhem Shire Transitional Committee also prepared a draft preamble, developed by Indigenous community leaders and organisations in Arnhem Land.

It explains their governance vision and commitment to a regional form of local government with foundations in their traditional culture and system of governance, but it also has strong links and legitimacy in the non-Indigenous world around them.

This preamble is shaped in accordance with the visions, needs and aspirations of the people of the West and Central Arnhem and the Kakadu areas of the Northern Territory. This area is in transition to a Regional Shire to be known as the West Arnhem Shire. The preamble is grounded in the traditional Aboriginal law, language and systems of self-governance for the region. It brings this view to the implementation of local government administrative systems that provide service delivery to all peoples of our area. It provides understanding and support for legislation which links our local communities and governance to the other two tiers of government within our nation.

The Aboriginal world is structured by moieties. Moiety is an important means by which our world is structured. There are two moieties, Duwa and Irritja. People are born with a 'skin' which they inherit, and through which we have rights and responsibilities within the community. Each skin is either Duwa or Irritja moiety. Moieties are the basis of a system of Aboriginal governance in which 'traditional owners' (called Gijan) and 'custodians' (called Junggayin) have custodial relationships to each other. This system of reciprocal rights and responsibilities is pervasive, since all people are owners for some tracts of land and for particular ceremonies, and custodians for others. Land and Bininj (or Arrarrkpi) knowledge is our power. This is the traditional Aboriginal system.

Respect for the elders and traditional owners of the land encompassed within our Shire is a primary tenet of our approach to our constitution. The way of life of Bininj people is expressed through family life, which is our relationship to kin and country. The elders have the cultural knowledge. Our intention is that younger and middle-aged people with appropriate communication skills and demonstrated respect for culture, will work under the directions of the elders and traditional land-owning groups in communicating and explaining Aboriginal (Bininj) ways to non-Aboriginal (Balanda) people, and also provide the traditional owners and elders with explanations and understanding of non-Aboriginal ways. In establishing the regional Shire we commit ourselves to the following aims:

- *To ground the constitution in the traditional Aboriginal culture, law, language, power structures and systems of self-control (governance) of the region, using that traditional*

system to strengthen the legitimacy of the regional Shire, and using the Shire to strengthen our traditional systems of governance.

- To put in place a system where people of our region make the decisions and take responsibility, with Bininj and Balanda working as equals.*
- To fairly represent all the people within our Shire, and become a strong advocate for the region with other tiers of government for the many issues that are unique within our area.*
- To provide a good governance role model by applying correct and fair guidance and policy direction for the conduct of our core functions. To have the Shire play a proactive role in identifying the key issues in education, economic development, health, housing and any other important community issue that will contribute to the long-term benefit of all of our residents. Once identified, to lobby strongly with other tiers of government for the provision of expertise and funding to provide the best long-term outcomes for our families and children.*
- To focus on strengthening our cultures, governance and family structures, so that we can create an environment in which our economic future and links to land are strong. Through this vision and commitment we seek to maintain observance and respect for traditional values, and to join the responsibilities and structures of traditional authority with those of local government, to achieve a high quality of life and a wide range of opportunities and choices for all residents of our region.*

Read about West Arnhem Shire Council, their history and governance:

http://epress.anu.edu.au/caepr_series/no_29/html/ch04s05.html