

Final Project Report - Group 3, Arts & Culture

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in collaboration with the

Girringun Aboriginal Arts Centre

Girramay Country

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Just as people need Country, Country also needs people (*Country Needs People*, n.d.). As such, we would also like to acknowledge the people who we encountered, learnt from, yarned with, and ultimately those who have shaped our project into what it has become.

Firstly, we would like to thank our Project Lead, Whitney Casey, as well as the Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre's staff members Nephi Denham and Ashlenn Baylis for their patience, generosity and openness to yarning with us. We'd also like to express our gratitude to Nigel Baker, GAC's Finance Manager and Eddy Nye from the Wabu Jananyu plant nursery for their assistance with our project, as well as the deadly rangers who managed the logistics of hosting us on Girramay Country, particularly Keanu Congoo and Talisha Mothe.

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Executive Summary

Background

The Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre (GAAC) is one of the five key programs of the Girringun Aboriginal Corporation (GAC). It serves as a key pillar of cultural preservation, history-keeping and visual storytelling for the nine Traditional Owner groups that Girringun supports. As a business, it is also one of the only avenues through which Girringun generates its own income, while also playing a critical role for the community as a keeping-place museum. As an institution dedicated to preserving cultural heritage, the GAAC contributes to the stewardship of traditional cultural knowledge in the region, and therefore has the potential to play a significant role in the way that it is passed down from elders to the younger generations. With this in mind, we feel the GAAC is well positioned to become a key provider of youth engagement initiatives for GAC in the future, but also recognise that financial sustainability is a powerful enabler of such prospective ventures.

Key Findings

Our observations, reflections and yarns while working on Country earlier in the semester led us to understand that the key challenges faced by the GAAC fall into two main categories: business needs and cultural goals. Specifically, our proposed actions aim to:

- Increase organic revenue for the GAAC by streamlining online sales through dropshipping.

This will reduce reliance on government funding and relieve the workload on staff.

- Enhance youth engagement with the GAAC through involvement in the art-making workshops at Muulga, as well as other youth-centred initiatives to facilitate cultural knowledge transmission between elders and young Traditional Owners (TO).
- Bridge the gap between the GAAC and other branches of Girringun through a unified work-experience program and collaboration on the pre-existing youth camps.

To maximise impact, our recommendations have been intentionally designed to be feasible within the current means of the GAAC, actionable over reasonable time periods, and multidimensional, such that they work towards an equilibrium between the two overarching challenges, making it easier and more efficient for the GAAC, and Girringun more broadly, to achieve its goals for the future.

Our work was informed by community perspectives and serves as a set of suggestions that we feel will help to bolster the GAAC's financial autonomy, which will in turn allow it to sustain long-term growth, dedicate more time and resources to youth engagement initiatives and continue to support its artists and stakeholders.

We recognise that our proposed initiatives will require gradual phasing-in and consistent evaluation and adjustment, but we hope that our report will serve as a useful body of research to stimulate successful developments.

Introduction

The Girringun Aboriginal Corporation, situated in Cardwell in Northern Queensland, is a grassroots organisation that represents nine distinct tribal groups: the Jirrbal, Warungnu, Gugu Badhan (inland), and Warrgamay, Bandjin, Girramay, Gulngay, Nywaigi, and Djiru (coastal) peoples. The delineation of tribal boundaries was established by the elders prior to the native title determination and has been documented in a cultural heritage database. These groups and their elders continue to serve as a guiding source of wisdom, with the work of the corporation always striving to better the interests of the nine groups and preserve their culture and traditions (Girringun Aboriginal Corporation, n.d.).

This corporation oversees an extensive area, encompassing 1.2 million hectares of saltwater and rainforest country. Within this vast region, Girringun operates across five specialised programs. These include the Rangers Program, who play a crucial role in land and sea management; the Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) initiative, which focuses on conserving and protecting significant landscapes; the Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement (TUMRA), aimed at sustainable marine resource management; Wabu Jananyu, the Biodiversity and Native Plant Nursery, dedicated to the preservation and cultivation of local flora; and the Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre, which supports the development and promotion of Indigenous arts and cultural heritage. Each group within the corporation contributes to the holistic stewardship of the land, ensuring the protection of cultural values, biodiversity, and traditional practices across their expansive territory.

Our group worked with the Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre, which was established in 2008 and is a major stronghold of culture, history and storytelling for the nine Traditional Owner groups that Girringun represents. The centre showcases the beautiful rainforest art traditions that are unique to the Girringun region, featuring a permanent collection of paintings, textiles, pottery, and traditional objects, with new works being created by local artists constantly. Key events in the Art Centre's calendar are the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF) and Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair (DAAF), at which they showcase the incredible work of their local artists, and they run bi-weekly art-making sessions for elders at the Muulga workshop.

Currently, the GAAC's main challenges are a lack of youth engagement, staff burnout and an overreliance on government funding to support their operations. Our project was centred around finding intelligent and feasible ways of addressing these issues as holistically and efficiently as possible.

Figure 1



Note. Photo of Murray Falls, Girramay National Park. Own work by Thomas Duff.

Description and Evolution of the Brief

"Don't eat the elephant fast, eat the elephant slow." (Aunty Kaylene Malthouse)

As with all reports, the final result is not a product of the initial brief, but the journey that transpired from it. Such is true of this report - which we have written not from what we knew twelve weeks ago, but what we have come to learn through working with the GAC on Girramay Country this semester.

As a team, we often wondered; what is the scope of this report? How can we render it useful to Giringun, the GAAC and their communities? The answers, we realised, can be found in the story of our evolving brief.

Initially, the brief began as two slides (see Figure 2) included in a slideshow presented by Whitney Rassip, Jade Pryor and Jordan Mooka in a large grey room in the NanoScience Tech Building on Gadigal Country.

Figure 2

Project 3: Arts & Culture - Exploring opportunities for young people to contribute to Giringun's Aboriginal Art Centre growth and development through youth arts and culture projects.

Background: Emerging from the rainforest canopy and a culture spanning countless generations, the work of Giringun artists is attracting a lot of attention. Established in 2008, the Giringun Art Centre is home to multi-award-winning artists and craftsmen. Located in Cardwell, Queensland, Giringun represents artists from nine Traditional Owner Groups: the Nywaigi, Gugu Badhan, Wargamay, Warungnu, Bandjin, Girramay, Gulngay, Jirrbal and Djiru people.

This project aims to find new ways to involve more young people in art making, one of the challenges that has been on the minds of the Giringun Aboriginal Art Centre coordinator and the artists who established the centre for some time.

In Semester 2, SLIC Students will work with the Giringun Aboriginal Art Centre Coordinator to:

- Participate in activities with artists and young Traditional Owners at the Giringun Art Centre art workshop at Muulga near Cardwell and gather information about the current and planned artist activities and identify areas of growth with a focus on increasing youth engagement.
- Review the previous strategic and business plan with the Art Centre Coordinator to explore product development opportunities to transition towards sustainable economic growth, including these goals:
 - Achieve organic growth - increasing self-sufficiency and achieving sustainable economic independence. Reducing reliance on government funding.
 - Identify ways to bridge the gap between youth and Elders through arts.
 - Create a pathways program to arts and culture industry careers through the Giringun Aboriginal Art Centre.
 - Define steps to implement a training and mentoring plan for Giringun Art Centre staff.

Final Report

The final student report will include materials developed under the direction of the Arts Coordinator.

Note. Transcription of presentation slides describing the project brief for the Arts & Culture Project, SLIC Semester 2, 2024. From "Introduction to Giringun Aboriginal Corporation (GAC)," by Giringun Aboriginal Corporation, 2024.

After being placed in a team together, our initial meeting was dedicated to outlining our approach for the fast-approaching field trip. We decided we didn't want to set any expectations or form preconceived ideas about solutions before yarning with GAC and GAAC staff. We wanted to centre listening and the community's agency at the core of our approach.

As soon as the field trip began, through conversations with our project leaders, we realised that in order to achieve the aim of engaging youth into the activities of the arts centre, their workloads needed to be streamlined in order to function more efficiently. We quickly started brainstorming along these two axes; asking ourselves how can business processes be streamlined for GAAC staff in order to allow for more time, energy and resources to be allocated to engaging young people?

During the trip, Aunty Kaylene Malthouse would often remind us; "Don't eat the elephant fast, eat the elephant slow", a reference to the way that large, complex problems should be tackled through considered, rational methods (K. Malthouse, personal communication, August 2024). Looking back, we realise this was the best and only way to approach the brief.

Starting from two slides, and through yarning between Girramay and Gadigal Country, our brief developed and evolved. When leaving Cardwell, we had committed to working on Whitney Casey's request for a Business Action Plan detailing objectives for the next 6, 12 and 36 months. We also left with the intention of discussing further about youth workshops that the GAAC could run, as well as solidifying the proposition of drop-shipping as a viable resolution to the encumbering systems in place for shipping simple merchandise orders.

Upon our return to Gadigal, the infeasibility of some of the initiatives we had discussed with GAAC's team became clear and we realised the scope may have been too broad. As a team, we realised that we needed to focus on Whitney Rassip's main advice of "working smarter" (W. Rassip, personal communication, August 2024) with the available resources, rather than promising huge changes that are beyond the scope of the organisation. We also came to the conclusion that working collaboratively across the program areas was going to be necessary in order to avoid overlapping resources in pursuit of a common goal, which is engaging young people. Thus, we began meeting and engaging across the student project groups in order to discuss and identify mutual suggestions.

Needless to say, the brief developed significantly. Had we "*eaten the elephant fast*", perhaps we would not have been able to properly consult the community, like we did in yarning with Raysonraj Sandhu (Whitney Casey's son), or Uncle Phillip Denham. Had we eaten the

elephant fast, we may not have been able to sit with Nephi Denham and gather information about how each order is packed, or heard elders share their thoughts at Muulga. Additionally, had we not taken the time to identify our own strengths and weaknesses, we would not have developed into the dynamic, passionate and hard-working team that we have become over the course of the semester.

Now, the brief has solidified into a clear two-pronged approach; one relates to Whitney Rassip's encouragement of "working smarter" with what is already at the disposal of GAAC - and thus looks at streamlining business activities to render the everyday tasks of running the centre more efficiently. This type of action is referred to as 'process support' by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (1997). The other pertains to Girringun's cultural goals, which are engaging their young people and keeping their culture alive through the important knowledge sharing and cultural storytelling that artmaking facilitates. Our finalised interpretation of the project brief is to seek a healthy equilibrium between these two challenges, a concept visualised in Figure 3.

Figure 3



Note. Graphic depicting the interrelation between business needs and cultural goals of the GAAC. Own work by Yuwen Chen.

How we Worked with Giringun

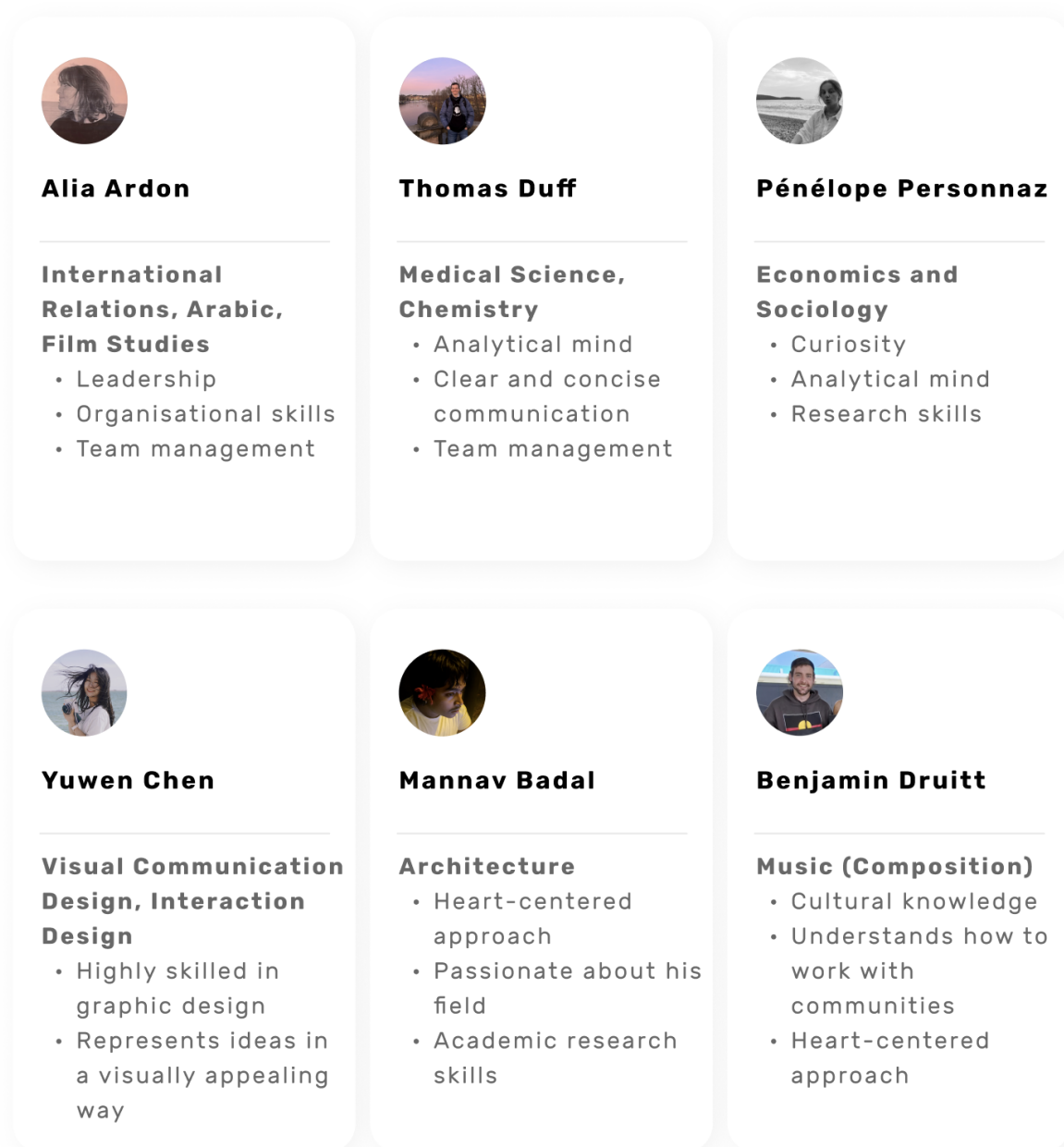
“It’s like cross cultural communication. If I talk to my mob we relate it to cultural things that the people can relate to. But it’s the same message.” (Uncle Leonard Andy)

The collaboration with Giringun was enriched by diversity, both in terms of the participants involved and the resources utilised. There were several challenges to the project, one being the timeframe was short, particularly the period spent on Country, and we couldn’t meet in person with our project leads while back in Sydney. As a result, most of our communication took place via email or Zoom and had to evolve at each stage of the collaboration. These constraints also had positive effects, as they encouraged us to learn as much as possible during our time on Country and to listen carefully at every opportunity.

Working with Girringun before our time on Country

Before visiting Girramay Country, the learning process was central to preparing for our collaboration. Within our group, the diversity of backgrounds and experiences led to varying levels of knowledge about Aboriginal history. Yuwen Chen and Pénélope Personnaz, as exchange students at the University of Sydney, hadn't been exposed to much information about Indigenous history before coming to Australia. Through tutorials, readings and SLIC discussions, they were able to learn more about Aboriginal history and our project overview before heading out into the field. The conversations we had with Uncle Valentine Nona and the Girringun staff were enlightening and laid the foundation for a respectful way of working together, embracing our differences. Uncle Phil Rist also conducted a safety and cultural protocol briefing, emphasising the importance of active, intentional listening and respect for Traditional Owners and Elders. As expressed by Edwards, this type of intercultural communication could result in a “curtain being drawn” if conversation is conducted irrespectively (Edwards, 1998). Uncle Phil also emphasised the need for patience, particularly with Elders, by allowing them time to speak and by being attentive. These exchanges also gave us a better understanding of Girringun's internal organisation.

Within our group, we had extensive discussions about how to structure our work on Country. The conclusion of these conversations was that open listening and dialogue would be essential (Janke, 2021). Our approach focused on three key concepts: listening, engaging and ultimately; learning. We also discussed our strengths and specialties to help inform our allocation of tasks, both before and during our time on Country (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Note. Diagram summarising the attributes of group members in the Arts and Culture team who collaborated with Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre. Own work by Yuwen Chen.

Working with Girringun during our time on Country

During our time on Country, the approach of working with Girringun didn't change, with listening, engaging and learning remaining central. Respect was also paramount, both for the people and the land. In addition, the working dynamic became more collaborative and pragmatic. Awareness of our differences was essential as it allowed us to adapt and collaborate respectfully. We each have different backgrounds and sensitivities, so it was crucial to approach the work thoughtfully and ensure the skills of our team members were best utilised.

When we arrived on Girramay Country, we had the opportunity to undertake the Family Wellbeing program led by Peter Coombes and Melissa Haswell. This program was an excellent way to be introduced to community, cultural safety and to ground us in our new environment, such that we could approach the collaboration with Girringun with intention.

On Country we met the members of the GAAC: Whitney Casey, Nephi Denham, and Ashlenn Baylis. They guided us through the Arts Centre and Muulga, while also sharing insights into the past and present challenges faced by the GAAC, such as engaging youth and balancing cultural preservation with business objectives. We realised that the GAAC staff were short on time, and the GAAC itself was short on funds. Therefore, any changes we proposed had to be simple in order to free up time for grant applications, art sales, and youth engagement. We also had valuable conversations with Aunty Kaylene Malthouse about these challenges, who gave us the perspective of elders, which was extremely helpful in refining our approach and finding a balance between preserving culture (Janke, 2021) and generating income (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 1997).

Working with Girringun after our time on Country

After returning from the field trip, our discussions with the members of the GAAC transitioned back to virtual meetings. During this time, we emphasised pragmatism by focusing on what was achievable. We exchanged extensively via email with Whitney Casey and Nigel Baker, Girringun's finance manager, to seek advice on our recommendations and the development of our Business Action Plan. They also shared highly useful resources pertaining to the GAAC, such as financial and strategic data from previous years and the projections for the next year. These helped us gain a more precise and comprehensive view of the GAAC's finances and potential improvements, notably regarding profit margins on art sales and transport costs.

Communication within our group was also crucial; we needed to maintain regular contact and consistent effort. We agreed to hold one to two meetings per week to collaborate, discuss our ideas, and review feedback from the Girringun staff. We were committed to ensuring that the outcomes of this work were genuinely useful for the GAAC, offering concrete and feasible recommendations.

What We Heard and Learnt

Being university students, we are taught to rely heavily on books, scholarly writing and written sources in order to grasp an understanding of history. Through our time on Country spent with Traditional Owners and engaging with the GAAC, our appreciation for mediums through which culture is preserved has widened. One of the key takeaways from our time spent with elders and community members in Girringun is that the western style of history-keeping does not align with traditional ways of sharing cultural knowledge (Berndt & Berndt, 1981). Languages of the nine Traditional Owner groups that make up Girringun are oral traditions, and thus it was apt that much of our learning on Country came from the yarns we shared together (Edwards, 1998).

It is with this in mind that, despite being a written report, we have strived to curate it in a way that privileges the voices and lived experiences of the people we met and interacted with on Girramay, Djiru, Nywaigi and Bandjin Country during our field-trip. Their voices and knowledge truly shaped our learning journey, and therefore, we have chosen to structure our reflections through their exact words of wisdom.

According to S. Grant (personal communication, September, 2024) in conversation with Alia and Thomas at the Cardwell Community Hall:

History needs to be taught. And it needs to be learnt.

One of the major lessons learnt from Aunty Sonya Grant was the fact that Elders are the key knowledge keepers and have been successful in doing so for more than 65,000 years (*UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* / *Australian Human Rights Commission*, n.d.).

Therefore, cultural teachings must come from them. This is where our conception of transgenerational art-making workshops at Muulga stemmed from, as this would be a perfect avenue for young Traditional Owners to engage with their community leaders, spend time on Country and learn traditional art practices in an authentic way (*Berne Convention / Legal Information Institute*, n.d.). We learnt that Girringun acknowledges that it has the potential to play an important role in finding ways to best empower young Traditional Owners to be the future knowledge keepers and to ensure the continuation of culture, that is, to “be a good ancestor” (see Figure 5).

Figure 5



Note. Photo of Whitney Rassip’s T-shirt with text in Maori and English: ‘Be a good ancestor’. Own work by Alia Ardon.

On the introduction day hosted by Girringun, we heard about the tropical storm being a totem for one of the local tribes, a belief that highlighted just how innately connected the Traditional Owners are with their ancestral homelands. Discussions with Uncle Leonard Andy about his life on a 168-acre plot of Djiru rainforest highlighted a similar message, that there is no one better qualified to use and protect the land than the Traditional Owners (Goodall, 2008).

According to Aramai (personal communication, 2nd September, 2024) in conversation with Thomas, Angad and Mo at Mungalla Station.

I see this country as a hardware store, a chemist, a supermarket, basically a shopping mall.

Our trip to Mungalla station was especially illuminating, with the drive through Nywaigi Country in Aramai's ute revealing to us that traditional owners see the land totally differently to its many visitors. They look at a tree and see where a Coolamon or Boomerang can be carved out, they know exactly which leaves can be used for soap or sandpaper, and monitor the undergrowth to decide when and where controlled burning should occur to maintain the health of the rainforest ecosystem (Baker et al., 2001).

These examples highlight just how critical it is that knowledge transfer from the old people to younger generations be conducted on Country (Maddock, 1986). The Arts and Culture team's suggestion to plan for art-making activities embedded into the Junior Ranger and TUMRA youth camps reflect this, with a program that includes material gathering e.g., Lawyer cane for weaving, followed by yarning with elders and learning traditional rainforest art practices amongst friends.

The other major learning arc we experienced throughout the semester related specifically to the functioning of the GAAC. A key takeaway from our discussions with Whitney Casey, Nephi and Ashlenn was that the GAAC is not only a cultural institution and keeping-place museum but also a business, and one that is currently financially supported by grant funding from the government. Furthermore, staff members are incredibly busy and lack the time required to develop youth-centred programs or commit to additional art fairs, something researchers Altman & Taylor have found to be a common adversity faced by Indigenous art centres (Altman & Taylor, 1990). Despite this, Girringun Aboriginal Corporation is blessed to have many fantastic artists who create some of the most unique and beautiful traditional art, some of whom we had the pleasure of meeting on our trip to Muulga. We have since learnt that Girringun is excited to look into ways of selling more art that doesn't come at the cost of additional manpower and will deliver greater financial flexibility to support the running of youth-focused initiatives and to compensate the artists for their works.

According to Uncle Phillip (personal communication, August, 2024) in conversation with Thomas and Alia at Muulga.

There will always be opportunity, and some of them may be golden, even diamond.

Our plans to further develop Girringun's online presence and capitalise on the demand for authentic Indigenous artwork through dropshipping is one of these 'golden opportunities' that we have explored throughout our research process.

Alongside this, we learnt about the importance of maintaining the cultural and intellectual property of the artists (Janke, 2021) and ensuring that increased commercialisation of Girringun art doesn't compromise its cultural authenticity, to borrow the words of Aunty Kaylene Malthouse (K. Malthouse, personal communication, August, 2024).

Finally, our group spent time with a few young members of the Girringun community, including Whitney Casey's son, Raysonraj Sandhu, who told us about his interest in native animals and how he would like to spend time with the Rangers to see how their drones work. These insights demonstrated to us that youth engagement needs to be youth-led and incentivised, so as to draw in young people organically, rather than forcing them to learn about their culture (Clancey, Drumore, & Metcalfe, 2024). The beautiful painted skateboard featuring K'gari created by Ashlenn Baylis' daughter, Kiarah, is testament to this idea of honest, independent expression of culture that Girringun, as a major Indigenous social and cultural organisation, can play a major role in cultivating.

Discussion and Suggested Actions

“There is work to do. We can be doing things a lot smarter. And at the end of the day, this is who it’s benefitting; our elders, young ones, children and members from the nine Traditional Owners Groups that make up Girringun.” (Whitney Rassip)

The following suggested actions were devised as a result of consultation and discussion with the staff of the Girringun Art Centre, as well as the broader Girringun community in response to the brief provided to the Arts and Culture team. These included the following:

- Achieve economic growth by increasing self-sufficiency and achieving sustainable economic independence. Reducing reliance on government funding.
- Identify ways to bridge the gap between youth and Elders through the arts.
- Create a pathways program to arts and culture industry careers through the Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre.
- Define steps to implement a training and mentoring plan for Girringun Art Centre staff.

Our four suggested actions have been broken down into feasible and actionable steps phased over the next 6, 12 and 24-36 months, and can be found in the Business Action Plan (Appendix Item 1), requested by the Art Centre's manager Whitney Casey.

Suggested Action 1: Enhancing Online Sales Through Dropshipping

The initial brief for the Arts and Culture team spoke to the necessity of achieving organic growth and lessening the GAAC's reliance on government funding.

Challenges faced by GAAC

Through consultation with the GAAC staff, our team understood that the first challenge faced by GAAC is that approximately 75% of income for the centre's activities are supported by government grants (see Appendix 3) - from which they are looking to diversify.

Along with this, we learnt through consultation with Nephi Denham, workshop facilitator at Muulga, that packing one order to ship from the GAAC is a long and encumbering process (see Appendix 2). Indeed, Whitney Casey also identified this during initial consultations, sharing that shipping merchandise in and out of Cardwell, as well as scattered providers for each item, meant that T-shirts and printed tea towels end up costing the GAAC more than they need to.

Therefore, we understood that one of the main challenges that the GAAC faces was that tending to the needs of the community as a cultural centre, as well as meeting the demands of business ownership are difficult to balance and require significant manpower.

To remedy these challenges the idea of dropshipping came to the forefront.

What is Dropshipping?

According to Bloomer, dropshipping is a method of selling merchandise whereby an organisation or business sets up a relationship with a factory of their choice, to which any order placed for their products is processed and shipped immediately from the factory facilities, and not from the business' premises (Bloomer, 2022).

Why Dropshipping?

This solution would address the issue of overworked staff by lessening their tasks, as well as creating a passive source of income for the Art Centre.

The Arts and Culture team would like to suggest developing a relationship with the Meanjin-based, small-business model oriented ‘The Print Bar’ (*The Print Bar*, n.d.) - which prioritises ethically produced and sourced T-shirts and products, while offering competitive profit margins and the opportunity to expand GAACs product line e.g., hooded jumpers, without requiring further administrative effort.

Figure 6



Note. Flowchart depicting the process of dropshipping. Own work by Yuwen Chen.

Next Steps

The next steps are outlined in the Business Action Plan (see Appendix 1), and are designed to be phased into the pre-existing systems and models of the GAAC - not replace them entirely. We suggest retaining the production of bespoke items (such as the Silk Scarves), while using dropshipping to streamline the production of items such as the T-shirts and printed tea towels.

Mainly, the first step will be to establish a relationship with a dropshipping company that can ensure the Indigenous Intellectual and Cultural Property (ICIP) of the Girringun Artists' whose art is featured on the GAAC merchandise is protected and respected (Janke, 2021). This is because, following research into Terri Janke's *True Tracks* and her conceptualisation of protecting ICIP, we deemed that it is vital for GAAC artists' work to be protected in any and all commercial ventures using visual representations of their work.

The *True Tracks* Protocols include following these steps (Janke, 2024):

1. Respect
2. Self determination
3. Consent and consultation
4. Interpretation
5. Cultural integrity
6. Secrecy and privacy
7. Attribution
8. Benefit sharing
9. Maintaining indigenous culture
10. Recognition and protection

One way to ensure the ICIP rights of GAAC artists are protected would be by developing consent forms that reflect the cultural protocols deemed appropriate by GAAC and its community. This consent form would then be discussed with, and signed by the dropshipping company that the GAAC is interested in proceeding with. A good example of previous ICIP consent forms developed in collaboration with Terri Janke, are those made with the Australian National University for the 'Deepening Histories of Place Program' (Director & McGrath, 2013).

The Arts and Culture team imagines that by opting to produce and sell merchandise through dropshipping methods, the GAAC will be able to re-invest funds previously allocated to production of merchandise towards advertising and marketing in order to boost website traffic and online sales, something previously mentioned in the GAAC Strategic Plan 2022-2024 (Girringun Art Centre, 2022).

Final Note

While completing this report, Whitney Casey has shared that she has already begun investigating dropshipping as a method of selling for the GAAC, which the Arts and Culture team was very pleased to hear.

Suggested Action 2: Transgenerational Art-Making Workshops

A key aim of the project and the collaboration with Girringun is to engage young Traditional Owners in keeping their culture alive. Girringun currently faces a lack of youth involvement in the Art Centre, an anxiety shared by many elders, including Uncle Claude Beeron who, in speaking about Girringun during a 2017 speech, stressed the importance of young TOs “following their culture” (Innes, 2021, p. 123). Thus, our second suggested action focuses on integrating them more actively into the art-making process through transgenerational workshops that bridge the gap between elders and youth. The artistic collaboration between generations will encourage storytelling, knowledge sharing, and cultural transmission, while increasing youth engagement (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 1997). Additionally, these workshops can serve as an educational opportunity for young people to learn about the prevalence of fake Aboriginal art in Australia and the significance of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) as young Traditional Owners (Altman & Taylor, 1991).

These transgenerational workshops can be incorporated within the existing framework of the GAAC given that art workshops with elders are already held twice a week at Muulga, managed by Nephi Denham. We propose that youth can gradually be integrated into these sessions to foster collaboration with elders, starting with pilot programs during the school holidays or occasions where some elders bring along their grandchildren.

Furthermore, excursions on Country offer substantial added value to the learning process. For example, the Yipirinya Aboriginal School in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), an independent school governed by an Aboriginal School Council in the Northern Territory, emphasises learning on

Country (Mitchell, 2022). Students at the school have the opportunity to learn in their native languages and visit the local Arrernte, Warlpiri, and Luritja Country for lessons on the use of traditional materials, sustainability and to strengthen their connection with the land (Barattucci, 2023). Regular reports from the school highlight the importance and effectiveness of on-Country learning for young people, particularly in terms of engagement (Holmes et al., 2024). This culturally informed approach has enabled young people to connect their identities with their homelands. Our suggested action draws inspiration from the projects led by Yipirinya School, recognising their positive outcomes in terms of wellbeing and engagement.

The Business Action Plan developed by our team outlines an action timeline spanning 3 to 36 months, with a gradual increase in youth involvement (see Appendix 1). In the first 3-6 months, our recommendation is to build connections with young Traditional Owners by facilitating art workshops at the pre-existing TUMRA and Junior Ranger Camps. These can serve as an introduction to traditional art-making techniques to spark interest in cultural preservation. Some Elders expressed their willingness to teach children how to use lawyer cane for weaving, to yarn with them, and to discuss traditional rainforest art practices in a friendly setting, a positive admission that gives credence to our suggestion.

If young TOs appreciate artmaking, they could be involved more regularly at the Muulga workshops. This increased involvement could eventually provide young participants with professional opportunities, as outlined in Suggested Action No. 3. After 12 months, Girringun could pilot a one-day art-making workshop on Country during school holidays with a small group of TO children and one or two elders. Youth who enjoyed the art-making sessions during the camp

can come to spend a day on Country with elders, gathering materials and learning traditional practices and knowledge about specific sites. If this one-day holiday workshop proves successful and manageable, the GAAC could extend the scope by hosting 4-5 workshops per year at Muulga or other locations in the local area, an expansion of the program that can be established over a period of 24 to 36 months. Organising transgenerational workshops during each holiday period would allow the GAAC staff time to plan and refine activities between sessions. This setup also offers parents the opportunity for a day of care for their children, while the children deepen their understanding of traditional knowledge and practices.

After 36 months, if these actions prove successful and are managed smoothly by the Art Centre staff, a GAAC-specific Art Camp could eventually be developed. Modelled after the TUMRA and Junior Ranger camps, this weekend-long event could focus on artmaking as a final step to engage youth more fully. Given the significant preparation and organisation required, the preceding initiatives will first be tested to assess their effectiveness and potential leading up to this camp, although contributions to the existing Giringun youth camps can be equally as effective.

Utilising some of the existing budget to finance the employment of a casual staff-member to support Nephi in the expansion of the Muulga workshops would be a logical next-step as the youth workshops start to take shape. Increased expendable income from the dropshipping venture should help to support this.

Suggested Action 3: Integration with Other Branches of Girringun

Our third suggested action is a broad one designed to help the GAAC become better integrated with the other major project areas of Girringun. We learnt from the Wabu Jananyu plant nursery that native plants like the Lemon Aspen and Davidson's Plum grow better together, through a polycultural approach, and we feel this concept can serve as a fantastic metaphor for Girringun's strength through unity, as voiced by Uncle Phil Rist (P. Rist, personal communication, August, 2024). As such, we feel that youth engagement is an outcome best achieved through unified ventures, rather than individualised programs within the separate branches of Girringun (see Figure 7).

Figure 7



Note. Digital artwork representing the poly-cultural metaphor for Girringun's strength through unity. Own work by Alia Ardon.

For example, facilitating art-making or cultural workshops (similar to what we experienced at Mungalla) at the TUMRA and Junior Ranger youth camps would be a fantastic way to build connections with young TOs and foster youth engagement. Some novel examples within this line of thinking include a community mural project or a one-day vacation care program where local kids can paint skateboards under the instruction of artists or elders connected with the GAAC. Youth-centred initiatives need to be designed in such a way as to incentivise and motivate the kids to get involved and remain interested, so adopting a hybrid approach whereby traditional art-making practices are applied to a modern medium such as painting a skateboard deck is a clever way of ensuring that cultural knowledge is delivered to a receptive audience.

Against this backdrop of incentivisation, a principal motivator of older youth is the prospect of employment, and hence another segment of our brief was centred around exploring and developing an employment pathway program to careers in the arts and culture industry. With this in mind, discussions with the finance project team yielded a potential framework through which the GAAC could play a role within a Girringun-wide work experience program. Aimed at Year 10 students (Queensland Government, 2021), this solution would allow Girringun to engage young people in a way that equips them for longer-term employment, giving them skills and inspiration through experiential learning that connects them with their culture (Finlayson, 1991). Prospective streams that Girringun could offer include horticulture at Wabu Jananyu, traditional methods of Landcare and marine monitoring with the Rangers, administration and finance skills in the Girringun office, and the Arts Centre can serve as a hub for cultural education and art-centre or museum management (see Figure 8). Once the pilot model is successful, arranging a system where students rotate through the different streams to try out various future careers could be an interesting possibility.

Figure 8

Note. Potential framework of work-experience opportunities that the Girringun Aboriginal Corporation could adopt. Own work by Yuwen Chen.

The fact that Girringun is so multifaceted makes it the perfect organisation for a well-established work-experience program, and we foresee this being an excellent avenue through which future employees can be scouted. The first steps for implementing such a pathway would be laying the groundwork within Girringun to ensure staff are equipped and willing to mentor young students for a period of around 1-2 weeks. Alongside this, communication with the local schools e.g., Tully high school, Ingham state high school etc. would be required to advertise the program and recruit students over the next 12 months.

In the context of the GAAC, work experience would not only be an excellent way of engaging youth in the arts industry, but also serve to reduce the workload on Whitney, Nephi and Ashlenn. We imagine that students would be able to help pack orders, prepare for workshops at Muulga, learn business management skills and be given some responsibility over the social media accounts through ‘Instagram takeovers’. Allowing students to voice their experiences through short videos and testimony of their time working at the Art Centre can be both empowering and enjoyable, and will help to boost social media activity. With only 4% of the Arts Centre’s Instagram followers under the age of 24 (Girringun Art Centre, 2022), we feel this would be a

logical way of utilising the digital literacy skills of the younger generations to help reach their own demographic.

Suggested Action 4: Enhancing Operational Efficiency

The aim of this recommendation is to ensure that the Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre can operate more efficiently, allowing it to implement the previous recommendations as effectively as possible. By improving operational efficiency, the GAAC can free up resources and time, which are essential for growth and long-term sustainability. Our suggested approach focuses on streamlining processes, particularly around order fulfilment and the digitisation of artworks for online sales.

Instigate a staff-wide yarning circle to discuss areas for improvement.

We propose that the GAAC initiates a self-audit of its current workflows and processes in the form of a staff wide yarning circle, a suggestion that was affirmed by our research (Altman & Taylor, 1991). This assessment can help identify bottlenecks and areas where time and resources may be saved. By better understanding the current operational landscape, the GAAC can create more efficient workflows, ensuring that resources are used optimally. This self-audit should prioritise high-impact areas, such as order packing, stock management and digital archiving of artworks.

Additionally, conversations between Whitney Casey, Nigel Baker and Whitney Rassip could be held to discuss how funding is best spent on advertising and marketing, particularly in the context of expanding online sales through dropshipping.

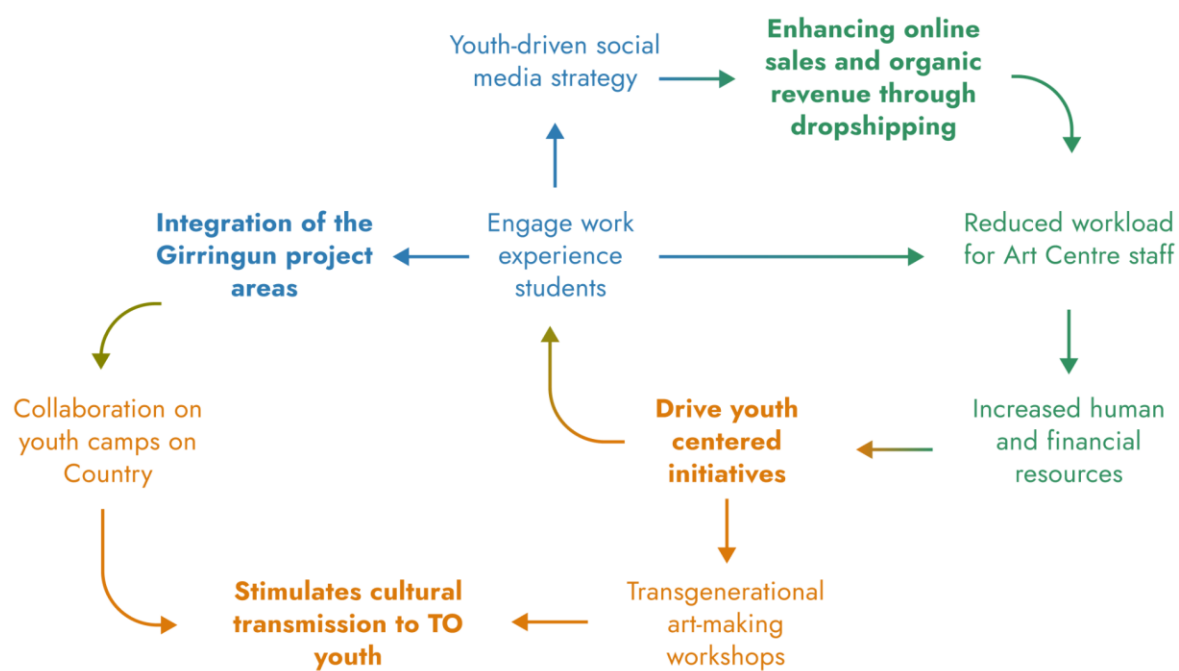
Completing operations manual

To enhance operational efficiency, we suggest finding time within the next 6 months to complete the Operations Manual that Whitney Casey has begun. We believe this will not only help with onboarding any new staff members, but also ensure a comprehensive guide to the operational processes of the GAAC exists. We expect that the staff-wide yarning circle will serve as a great opportunity to discuss and affirm the most effective strategies and processes, which can then be published in the manual.

Digitising artwork for expanded online sales

To further enhance online sales, we recommend that GAAC dedicate regular time throughout the year to digitising its extensive archive of artworks. By creating high-quality digital images of each piece, the centre can better showcase its collection online, making it more accessible to a global audience. This approach not only supports e-commerce but also preserves the artwork digitally, serving as a valuable archival resource. Furthermore, digital images, with the permission of the artist at the forefront, can be used in promotional materials and social media posts to help garner wider exposure for the GAAC, all while maintaining cultural sanctity (Fletcher, 1994).

By adopting these efficiency measures, the GAAC can create a more streamlined, resource-efficient operation that allows it to focus on its core missions while supporting sustainable growth and cultural preservation. This enhanced efficiency will also empower the centre to explore further opportunities in youth engagement, community integration, and economic independence.

Figure 9

Note. Flowchart depicting the integration of our recommendations and the way that they can have multidimensional impacts for the GAAC. Own work by Yuwen Chen.

Conclusion

“You all go, we stay here.” (Aunty Kaylene Malthouse)

Traditionally, conclusions are used to mark an end. The Arts and Culture team feel differently about this conclusion since we believe that this report actually signifies a *beginning* rather than an end.

Indeed, what our team was struck by when working with the GAAC is its incredible potential. The centre has all the elements necessary to foster meaningful connection to culture and ensure its continuation: world class artists, an equipped workshop space, a dedicated team, and a rich community.

When Aunty Kaylene shared, "you all go, we stay here" (K. Malthouse, personal communication, August 2024), we reflected on the responsibility of our work, and therefore strived to produce a valuable and useful document for Girringun and the GAAC that reflects the insights and reflections shared with us while on Country.

Considering this, our report simply identifies key ways for actionable changes to be made within existing organisational structures in order to achieve the key goals identified by the GAAC, those being developing innovative ways to bridge the gap between young Traditional Owners and Elders, all while increasing financial self-sufficiency and gaining independence from government funding.

Hence, and in the words of Uncle Phil Rist, we feel and hope that this is "*not an end, it is just a beginning.*" (P. Rist, personal communication, August 2024).

Our experiences working together as a team throughout the semester, and more broadly as an interconnected SLIC cohort have been beautiful and eye-opening. We are unanimous in stating that our time on Country was one of the most impactful experiences we've had as university students and are deeply grateful for the opportunity to contribute to and witness the workings of such an incredible organisation and cultural mission. We have learnt key lessons regarding cross-cultural listening and allyship that would not have been possible within the confines of a classroom, and which we will carry with us through our lives.

Figure 10



Note. Photo of Hinchinbrook Lookout, Warrgamay Country. Own work by Thomas Duff.

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Appendix 1: Business Action Plan

Business Action Plan

Philosophy of 'Finding Equilibrium'

Just like the 'principle of polyculture' employed at Wabu Jananyu, where different plants help each other grow, and the philosophy behind Process Unite; we've learnt that Giringun, both as a community and corporation, functions best as a united whole. As such, we feel that the Arts Centre's operational and cultural goals will be best met through multidimensional solutions that feed into both these categories.

Business Needs:
Building financial security,
integrating with other
Giringun branches, resolving
staff burnout.



Cultural Goals:
Securing the next generation of
artists & storytellers, facilitating
knowledge transfer between
generations.

Guiding Principles → Efficiency And Feasibility

Action plan Timeline

	3-6 months	12 months	24-36 months
Suggested Action 1 Enhancing online sales through dropshipping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a relationship with a dropshipping company. Giringun Art Centre should ensure ICIP of artists and artworks are protected in establishing this relationship. Potential candidate is 'The Print Bar', in Meanjin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition a few products online to chosen dropshippingplatform. Use excess budget from cutting production costs to boost online marketing. Phase out existing relationships with T-shirt providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition a majority of products manufactured outside Giringun (T-shirts, tea towels) to the dropshipping platform, while retaining bespoke providers (eg: silk scarves).
Suggested Action 2 Transgenerational art- making workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to run art workshops at the TUMRA and Junior Ranger camps to establish links with local TO youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a 'pilot' one day art-making workshop on Country in the school holidays with a small group of TO children and 1-2 Elders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a youth presence at Muulga workshops on Tuesdays and Thursdays. If successful, upscale pilot program to regular sessions with elders on Country. This could take the form of a camp, or vacation program delivered ~ 4 times a year.
Suggested Action 3 Integration with other branches of Giringun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish contact with local schools to set up future work experience opportunities Giringun-wide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start engaging work experience students to assist with art centre duties, and to make content for social media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serve as one branch in a Giringun-wide work experience pathways program.
Suggested Action 4 Enhancing operational efficiency at the Arts Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a teamwide audit of existing processes. Host an intentional and honest yarning circle to discuss how to improve efficiency for everyone in the GACC team. Allocate time in yearly schedule to Complete Operations Manual. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Operations Manual. Simplify the order packing process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocate time in yearly schedule for digitising artworks. If finances allow, employ an additional casual staff member to assist NePhi at Muulga.

Appendix 2: Detailed walkthrough of packing an order as outlined by Nephi Denham on September 1st, 2024.

1. Whitney Casey, manager of GAAC, receives order
2. Whitney emails order to Nephi Denham / prints order out to pack
3. Nephi locates the orders in the workshop or gallery.
4. Nephi prepares packaging for the order. Nephi often makes the boxes himself for artworks to be shipped in.
5. Orders are packaged depending on size.
6. Orders are wrapped in bubble paper
7. Orders are wrapped in brown paper
8. When orders are ready to go, Nephi notifies Whitney which orders are ready to go. (Note: Nephi can't process them himself as he doesn't have access to the company card.)
9. Whitney picks up packed orders.
10. Whitney prints labels to process orders at the office.
11. Whitney takes the orders to the post office to pay for the order to be shipped with the company card.
12. Depending on the orders, a COA is sent by Whitney (generated by system) to the client.
13. For wholesale orders: Whitney sends an invoice to the customer.

Notes:

- This process applies to any and all orders of any price or nature (original GAAC artworks, simple merchandise (such as t-shirts or tea towels), bespoke items (such as puzzles or silk scarves).
- Ashlenn Baylis has taken on this process, but is still being overlooked by Whitney Casey as she has just begun in the GAAC.

Appendix 3: Breakdown of financial data of GAAC (2023-2024)

Girringun Aboriginal Corporation Girringun Art Centre

Cash Flow Forecast 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024

	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Total
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Income													
AQ BIA	0	49000	0	0	0	0	0	35000	0	0	0	0	84000
IVAIS Grant	0	55000	0	0	0	55000	0	0	0	0	0	0	110000
IVAIS Jobs	0	56000	0	0	0	56000	0	0	0	0	0	0	112000
Donations	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	1200
Fine Art	25000	20000	5000	5000	0	0	0	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	60000
Merchandise Retail	2000	2000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	14000
Merchandise Wholesale	3000	3000	500	500	500	500	500	500	500	500	500	500	11000
Merchandise Markets	5000	5000	0	4000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14000
	35100	190100	6600	10600	1600	112600	1600	37600	2600	2600	2600	2600	406200
Direct Costs													
Fine Art	16750	13400	3350	3350	0	0	0	670	670	670	670	670	40200
Merchandise Retail	1000	1000	500	500	500	500	500	500	500	500	500	500	7000
Merchandise Wholesale	2400	2400	400	400	400	400	400	400	400	400	400	400	8800
Merchandise Markets	3000	3000	0	2400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8400
	23150	19800	4250	6650	900	900	900	1570	1570	1570	1570	1570	64400

Girringun Aboriginal Corporation Girringun Art Centre

Cash Flow Forecast 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024

	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Total
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Overheads													
Advertising/Marketing	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	2400
Administration	3000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	14000
Bank charges	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	1200
Electricity	0	0	1500	0	0	1850	0	0	1600	0	0	1600	6550
CIAP	10000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10000
Other exhibitions	400	11000	0	2000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13400
Insurance	7000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7000
Memberships & subs	20	890	20	20	20	205	20	793	20	20	20	20	2068
Motor expenses	100	350	1600	1100	350	200	100	100	100	2000	100	100	6200
Office supplies	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	1200
Rates	0	0	2200	0	0	0	0	0	2200	0	0	0	4400
Repairs & maintenance	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	2400
Telephone	125	125	125	125	125	125	125	125	125	125	125	125	1500
Training	0	0	1500	0	0	0	1500	0	0	0	0	1500	4500
Travel	1250	1400	1100	0	0	0	0	1250	0	0	1000	0	6000
Workshops & production	3000	4000	2700	2500	2500	700	0	2000	3200	3000	3000	3000	29600
Wages	14501	18127	14501	18127	14501	14501	18127	14501	14501	18127	14501	14501	188516
On costs	1668	2085	1668	2085	1668	1668	2085	1668	1668	2085	1668	1668	21684
Uniforms	0	0	500	0	0	0	0	500	0	0	0	0	1000
	41664	39577	29014	27557	20764	20849	23557	22537	25014	26957	22014	24114	323618
Bank position													
Opening balance	12998	-16716	114007	87343	63736	43672	134523	111666	125159	101175	75248	54264	
Movement	-29714	130723	-26664	-23607	-20064	90851	-22857	13493	-23984	-25927	-20984	-23084	
Closing balance	-16716	114007	87343	63736	43672	134523	111666	125159	101175	75248	54264	31180	

Our Analysis:

- Income = \$406,200. Of this, \$306,000 is grant money, the rest is from donations and art sales. Therefore, grant money makes up ~ 75% of the Art Centre's income.
- Costs = \$388,018 (overheads + direct costs)
- Therefore, profit = \$18,182