Reconciliation Action Plans: Origins, Innovations and Trends

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This article tells the remarkable history of the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program for the first time. Since its founding in 2006, more than one thousand Australian organisations have voluntarily committed to customised plans that seek to show respect, develop relationships and create opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Where did this program come from? How did evolve over its first decade? Drawing on original data on RAP organisations, interviews with RAP program founders and staff and archival documents, I identify the program's institutional and conceptual origins and trends in RAP adoption from 2006-2015. While it draws on important traditions in Australia's reconciliation history, I argue that the RAP program also makes two major innovations in the reconciliation landscape. First, the RAP program successfully frames and recruits organisations as important actors in the project of national reconciliation. Second, the RAP program reconceptualises practical and symbolic actions as interrelated, mutually dependent aspects of reconciliation in post-Howard Australia.

Introduction

The history of the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program since its founding in 2006 is short but remarkable. Despite the precarious funding of its creator and coordinator Reconciliation Australia (RA), the program managed to not only survive but to see more than 650 Australian organisations join its ranks within a decade. With its membership surpassing 1,100 organisations in 2018 (RN 2018), the RAP program has attracted participations from many organisational types ranging from large financial institutions to church parishes, from iconic cultural institutions to small community service providers, from rugby teams to retailers. Perhaps most impressively, within ten years it had touched the lives of roughly 3 million people, over 25% of workers in Australia, who are employed by an organisation with a RAP (RA 2015).[1]

Moreover, RAPs have become a central, flagship fixture in Australia's reconciliation landscape. RA's 2016 *The State of Reconciliation in Australia* report—the most comprehensive assessment and plan for reconciliation since the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's (CAR) *Roadmap for Reconciliation* in 2000—lays out a crucial role for the RAP program as part of Australia's "reconciliation journey" over the next 25 years (RA 2016: 11–12). The RAP program is also increasingly part of the narration of Australia's reconciliation history and progress: RA's 2016 report includes the founding of the RAP program in its reconciliation timeline (2016: 16–17) and in its description of

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[1] While 3 million Australians are part of organisations that have held approved RAPs *at some point* since 2006, only about half—1.4 million Australians—are "working or studying in an organisation with a *current* RAP" (RA 2017b) [emphasis added].

reconciliation milestones alongside such events as the apology to the Stolen Generations by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the Close the Gap campaign (RA 2016: 66).

While the RAP program has been the subject of many media releases, impact reports and other publications issued by RA, it has made less impact upon the scholarly literature. Likely the first journal article to be written on RAPs was authored by RA communications officer Claire Tedeschi and published in *Interaction*, a quarterly journal of the Geography Teachers' Association of Victoria, in their "International Year of Reconciliation" issue (Tedeschi 2009). RAPs have been mentioned briefly in a growing number of academic works on topics including higher education (Bennett et al. 2016; Johnston and Bishop 2012; Kilpatrick and Johns 2014; Nolan, Hill, and Harris 2010), the mining sector (Coronado and Fallon 2010), social work and child welfare (Bennett 2015; Radich 2012), nursing and midwifery (Keast and Dragon 2015), mental health (Dudgeon, Milroy, and Walker 2014), engineering practice and education (Duff et al. 2011; Goldfinch and Kennedy 2013; Jordan 2012), the Australian Red Cross (Howitt et al. 2014), employment (Ferdinand et al. 2014), military service (Riseman 2013), and the evolution of Welcome to Country protocols (McKenna 2014).

Several articles focusing directly on RAPs in relation to employment targets, professional sports, and the profession of psychiatry have even given short histories and descriptions of the RAP program based on RA's website materials, annual reports and RAP impact measurement reports (Daly, Gebremedhin, and Sayem 2013; Hunter 2015; Lee 2015; Lloyd 2019). However, there exists no comprehensive history of the RAP program—neither in the archives of RA nor in the academic literature—and some scholarly sources reveal confusion about the origins of the RAP program.[2] Instead, scholarly works have tended to focus on the formal period of reconciliation under the CAR from 1991-2000.

Therefore, the goal of this article is to document the origins of the RAP program and trace its evolution over the first decade of its existence from 2006-2015. I draw on numerous primary sources, including documents from the program's history as well as seven original interviews with the program's architects, founders and staff at RA. In telling the history of the RAP program for the first time, this chapter fills a conspicuous gap on a subject that is growing in academic importance.

What are RAPs?

First, what are RAPs? The program's original slogan advertises that RAPs are about "turning good intentions into action." In 2006, RA's first publication on RAPs described the program as striking a balance between "formalising your business' desire and intent to create a fairer society" while at the same time supporting successful businesses (RA 2006d: 6). The publication listed a list of 12 "benefits for everyone", including increased ability to recruit and retain employees, an increase in community connection and patronage, and the possibility of joint ventures with Indigenous communities (ibid). While the

[2] For instance, Penny Edmonds' excellent book *Settler Colonialism and (Re)conciliation* mistakenly locates RAPs as part of the formal reconciliation process in the 1990s (Edmonds 2016: 97).

template provided a standard checklist of questions to help organisations plan their RAP, it equally emphasized that RAPs should be creative and unique to the circumstances and capacities of each organisation. “It is up to you,” the publication urges, “to consider the most appropriate action/s your organisation can take to improve the life choices of Indigenous Australians and reduce the gap in life expectancy” (RA 2006d: 7). Organisations were asked to write down their vision and approach to reconciliation, create timelines for reconciliation actions and then register their plan centrally with RA.

In 2008, RA released an updated “Reconciliation Action Plan Toolkit” that defined the RAP program this way:

> *A Reconciliation Action Plan is a tool to help your organisation build positive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It gives you a format for exploring how reconciliation can advance your business/ organisational objectives. And it’s your public contribution towards the national effort to close the 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. A RAP formalises your contribution by encouraging you to identify clear actions and realistic targets, as well as lessons learnt. While each organisation shapes their own RAP, all plans include a creative blend of relationships, respect and opportunities. Developing a meaningful RAP takes time. But the final product is a simple, easy to read plan of no more than five pages. (RA 2008c: 2)*

The new Toolkit introduced three discrete themes—respect, relationships, and opportunities—around which organisations were asked to structure their reconciliation actions (Figure 1):

Figure 1. RAP Themes: Relationships, Respect and Opportunities (RA 2008c: 13)

Suggested actions for the *respect* theme, defined as “indigenous-led solutions, sharing information, professional, social and cultural networks,” included having Indigenous people provide advice on RAP development and accepting invitations to spend time in Indigenous communities. For instance, Adelaide City Council pledged the “[f]lying of Aboriginal flag in Victoria Square / Tarndanyangga” as well as an “[a]nnual Aboriginal art exhibition in the Adelaide Town Hall” as part of their respect actions (Adelaide City Council 2009). *Relationships* could include tasks such as displaying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flag and Indigenous art, conducting PR activities to promote Indigenous culture, and providing all staff with cultural awareness training. Under this theme, a Western Australian water supplier pledged to consult with "community members to incorporate Indigenous perspective into Waterwise

Schools Program[3] curricula and materials" (Water Corporation 2008). Finally, *opportunities* entailed actions such as hiring Indigenous employees and partnering or contracting with Indigenous organisations. Employment targets for Indigenous employees, cadets and trainees, quarterly Indigenous staff forums and "a Buddy Program for new Indigenous staff" were just some of the opportunity pledges by Qantas, self-described as "Australia's largest airline and a national icon" (Qantas 2009).

The Toolkit's new two-page template also asked organisations to record their pledged actions in a four-column chart alongside information about responsible entities, the timeline for completion and measurable targets (Figure 2). "How will you know your action has been successful? What outcome will be achieved?" the template asks, prompting, "Provide an actual number" (RA 2008c: 15).

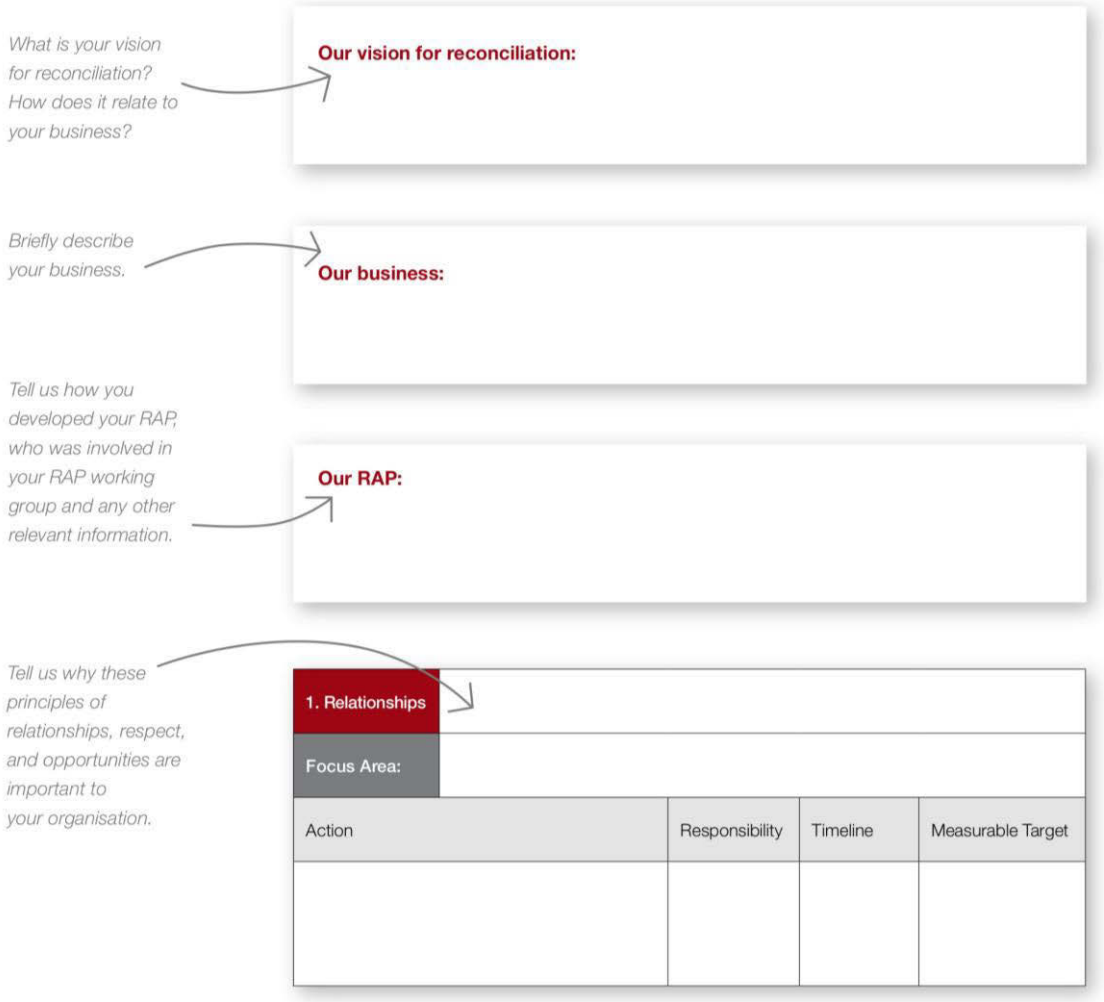

Figure 2: RAP Template (RA 2008c: 14–15)

[3] Waterwise Schools is a Water Corporation program to help schools both save water in their facilities and to teach students about water usage and conservation with dozens of Western Australian participants in 2008 (Water Corporation of WA).

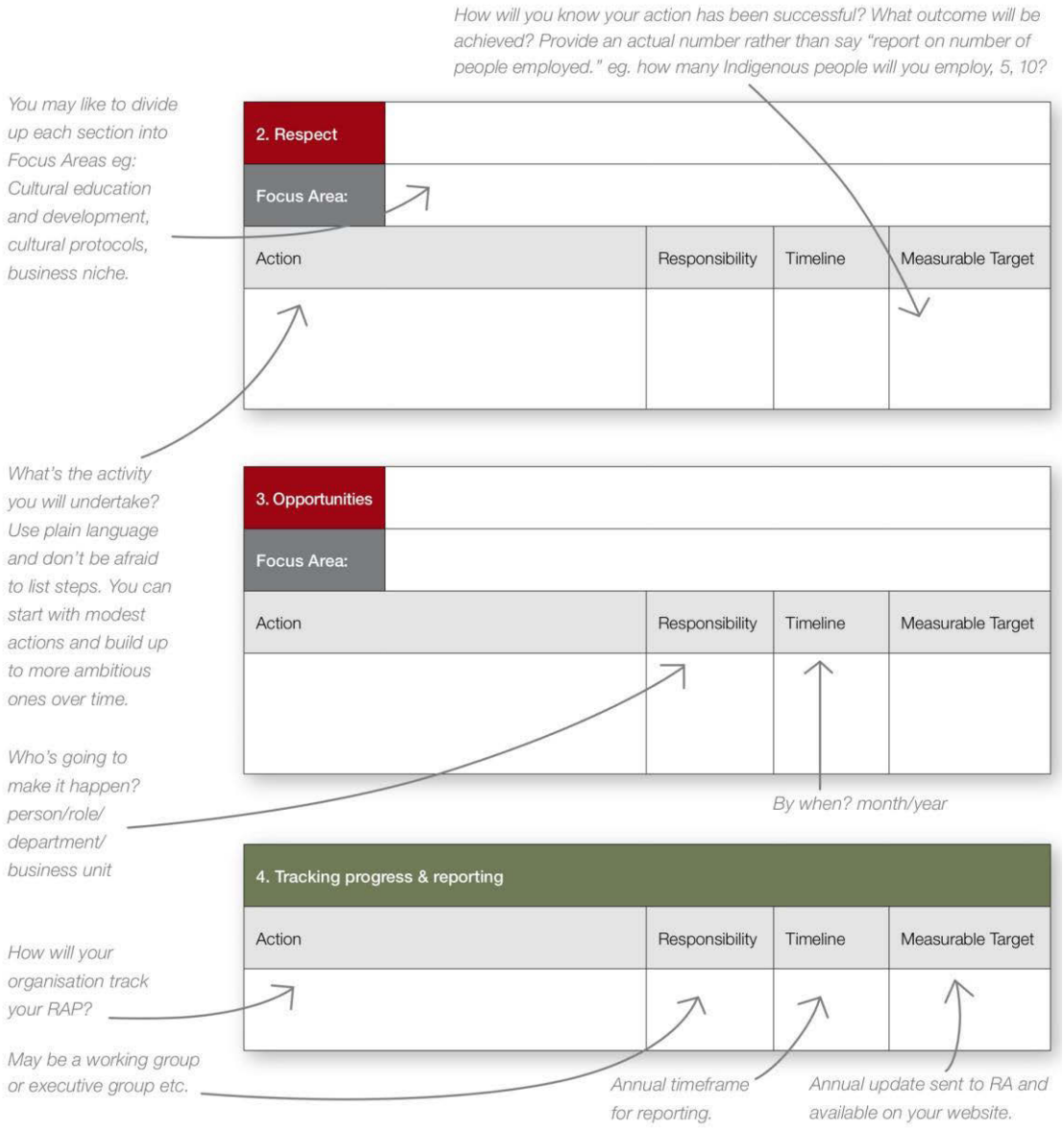

Figure 2: RAP Template (RA 2008c: 14–15) cont'd

Finally, the 2008 Toolkit included many new graphics to guide organisations through the 14-step "RAP Journey" to create, register and launch a new RAP as well as the 7-element cycle for annual reporting on and "refreshing" of RAP targets and timelines. At the heart of this continuous process stood each organisations' RAP Working Group, comprised of "a mix of people including executive members, managers across the organisation, indigenous staff and ideally external indigenous stakeholders", who would meet regularly to create, oversee, report on and renew the organisation's RAP document. Finalized RAPs required the "executive sign off" from the organisation and approval from RA to become official, whereupon the RAP would be made public in RA's online database. Although RA does not independently monitor or audit organisational follow-through on their pledged actions, organisations are asked to track and publicly report on their progress towards achieving actions and "lessons learnt" along the way (RA 2008c: 17). **"**RAPs are living documents to be reviewed and updated annually," advises the Toolkit, "A good RAP is about quality not

quantity. Be realistic, keep it simple and use plain language. A first RAP can take time to be developed and approved - a quick turnaround is not necessarily a good thing" (RA 2008c: 7).

In 2013, RA made the first major change to the program with the introduction of the "RISE" structure and the creation of specialized RAP templates (RA 2018; Torrens 2016). Rather than a single RAP model for all organisations, there are now four specialized templates with increasingly stringent "minimum elements" (Figure 3-4). "There are four types of RAPs that an organisation can develop: Reflect, Innovate, Stretch or Elevate," explains RA, "Each type of RAP is designed to suit an organisation at different stages of their reconciliation journey" (RA 2017b: 4).

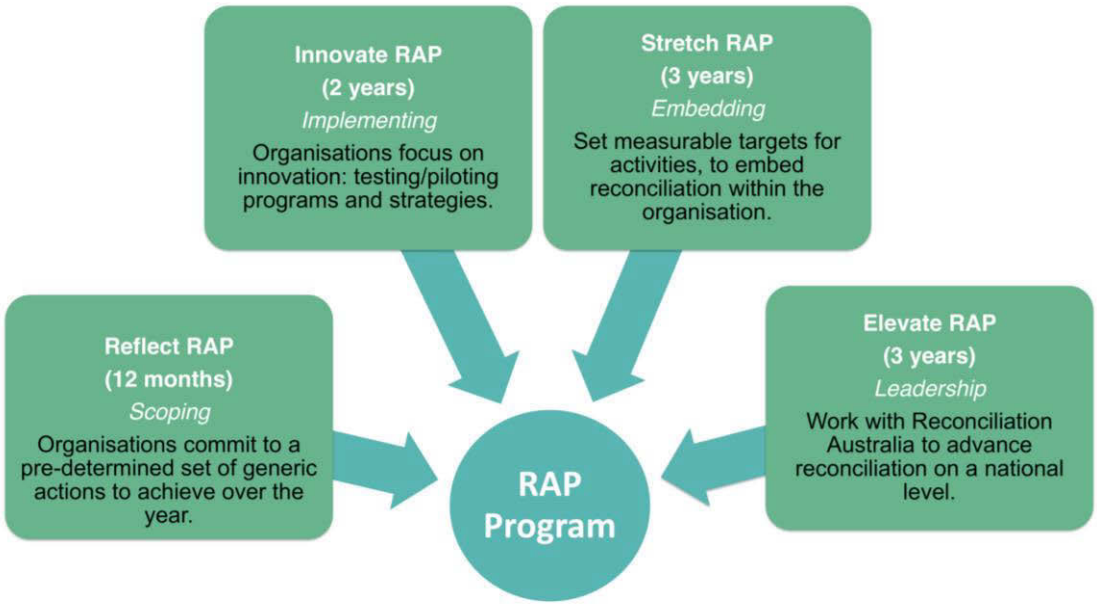

Figure 3: RISE Stages (RA, Roberts, and Cappie-Wood 2017: 9)

Figure 4: RAP Minimum Requirements (RA et al. 2017: 18)

The most basic *Reflect* RAP model focuses on awareness raising within the organisation, the creation of RAP governance, and the implementation of cultural protocols, while the next level of *Innovate* RAPs introduces actions related to cultural learning programming, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, and supply sourcing from Indigenous suppliers. The third and fourth level *Stretch* and *Elevate* RAPs introduce more ambitious targets and additional measurement and reporting requirements for organisations with a history of engagement with Indigenous issues or the RAP program.

Meanwhile, other aspects of the program have remained remarkably stable in the ten years since the Toolkit template was released in 2008: the three themes of relationships, respect and opportunities are still central to the structure of RAPs even today. In fact, the 2017 *RAP Impact Report* introduces a diagram of RAPs in which these themes are the pillars of a RAP structure supporting the five dimensions of reconciliation—race relations, equality and equity, institutional integrity, unity, and historical acceptance—which were introduced in RA's landmark *The State of Reconciliation in Australia* report in 2016 (Figure 5). This report lays out a crucial role for the RAP program in relation to the reconciliation dimension of institutional integrity, "the active support of reconciliation by the nation's political, business and community structures" (RA 2016: 4). The number of RAPs in business, government and community sector organisations is suggested by the report as an "indicator" of support for reconciliation (2016: 7–8, 24, 41, 44, 48–49) and the RAP program is designated a "key action" for the next 25 years of Australia's "reconciliation journey" (2016: 11–12, 24, 48).

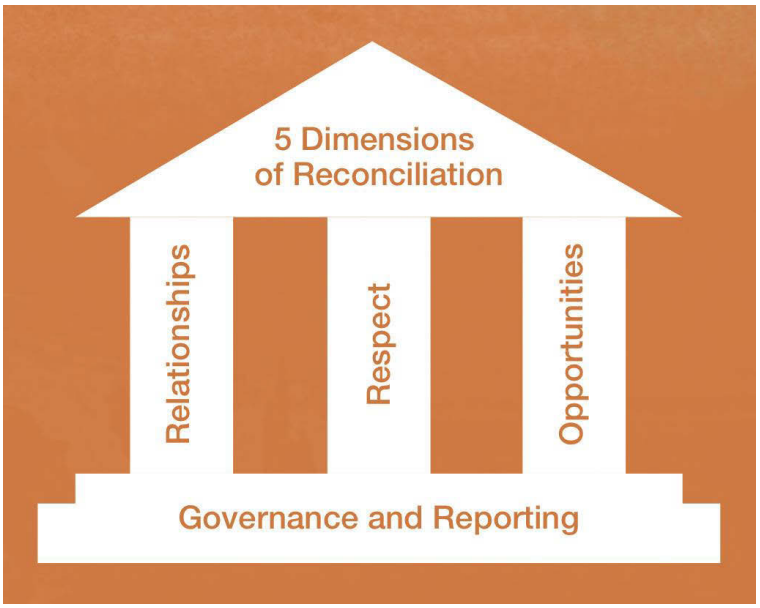

Figure 5: RAP Pillars (RA 2017b: 4)

Where did this intricate RAP framework and program design come from? What did RAP adoption and participation look like in its first ten years of the program's existence? This article first provides background on the formal CAR period of reconciliation from 1991-2000 before turning its attention to the early years of RA and the beginnings of the RAP program in 2005. Using documentary sources as well as original interviews with key RA staff and consultants, the

next sections identify the institutional and conceptual origins of the RAP program as well as its "innovations" in the practice of Australian reconciliation. Finally, data on 1,170 RAP documents from 671 organisation who joined the RAP program between 2006-2015 is analysed to identify major trends in RAP participation.

Background: Formal Reconciliation in Australia (1991-2000)

In 1991 the Australian Federal Government established the CAR to begin a national process of coming to terms with the traumatic past and present of the treatment of Indigenous people in the Australian settler-colonial state. Indigenous history in Australia begins over 60,000 years ago with migration from South Asia and Aboriginal peoples are proudly considered the world's "oldest living culture" (Behrendt 2016; Butlin 1988; Malaspinas et al. 2016; Smith and Briscoe 2002). Thus, when the British "First Fleet" landed in Sydney Cove in 1788, they arrived to a continent that was already inhabited by many complex Indigenous societies whose total population likely reached 750,000, if not more, individuals. A little over one century later, plausible estimates put the Indigenous population around 150,000, dropping below 120,000 in the 1920-30s (Madden and Jackson Pulver 2009), with direct violence against Indigenous peoples, including police shooting parties and poisoning, most likely accounting for at least 20,000 deaths in frontier wars (Broome 2003). The decimation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures is widely considered to be a genocide (Barta 1987; Behrendt 2001; Moses 2000; Reynolds 2001; Tatz 1999).

By no means did violence against Indigenous peoples end with the frontier wars: in the first two-thirds of the 20th century, thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were removed from their families to be raised in boarding schools, orphanages or with white families—facts that would later be brought to full public attention by a National Inquiry established in 1995 (Commonwealth of Australia 1997; Read 2006; Rigney 1998). Whether through violent death or forced assimilation, the state's "logic of elimination" towards Indigenous people is *the* constitutive element of settler-colonialism, which scholars consider to be an enduring structure of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Elkins and Pedersen 2005; Veracini 2010; Wolfe 2006).[4] Strong Indigenous-led social movements, such as the Freedom Rides (1965) and the Wave Hill Walk-Offs (1966) did result in some positive change for Indigenous peoples: Australia's famous 1967 referendum was passed with over 90% of the popular vote include Indigenous peoples in the census and grant the Commonwealth government the power to make laws for Indigenous peoples.[5] Nonetheless, as the 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy made clear,

[4] Critical Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars identify ongoing settler-colonial ideology, i.e. laws and beliefs that deny the sovereignty, autonomy and cultural values of Indigenous peoples, in many aspects of contemporary Australia ranging from daily life to politics to academia (Attwood 2005; Banivanua Mar 2012; Lovell 2012; Moreton-Robinson 2004; Potter 2012; Smith and Jackson 2006).

[5] Specifically, the referendum asked voters to decide whether two discriminatory references to Indigenous people should be changed in the Constitution:

> *51. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to: [...] (xxvi) The people of any race, other than the aboriginal people in any State, for whom it is necessary to make special laws.*

sovereignty remained a pressing issue for Australia's Indigenous peoples, with whom the colonial government never made a single treaty—a stark contrast to British practices in Canada, New Zealand and the United States (Foley, Schaap, and Howell 2014; Langton 2001).

The reconciliation process in Australia placed this history of dispossession and violence at the centre of discussions on contemporary Indigenous affairs. "Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together," reads the CAR declaration of principles, "Reconciliation must live in the hearts and minds of all Australians." In addition to acknowledging the unresolved history of colonial era violence and dispossession, the preamble to the Act frames the CAR's role in terms of coordinating a national effort to address Indigenous disadvantage in advance of the 100th anniversary of Australian federation:

> *[A]s a part of the reconciliation process, the Commonwealth will seek an ongoing national commitment from governments at all levels to co-operate and to co-ordinate with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission as appropriate to address progressively Aboriginal disadvantage and aspirations in relation to land, housing, law and justice, cultural heritage, education, employment, health, infrastructure, economic development and any other relevant matters in the decade leading to the centenary of Federation, 2001. (Australian Government 1991)*

The Act outlines ten specific responsibilities of the CAR, including to promote reconciliation at the community level and to facilitate education and discussion of Indigenous history, disadvantage and reconciliation. The Council was also instructed to "consult Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and the wider Australian community on whether reconciliation would be advanced by a formal document or formal documents of reconciliation" (Australian Government 1991). Thus, while the idea of a treaty was not officially precluded by the reconciliation process, neither was it guaranteed: the CAR's charge was simply to consult on the desirability of a reconciliation document of some kind.

This ambiguity regarding the place of a treaty in the reconciliation processes broke with Prime Minister Bob Hawke's (1983-1991) explicit promise for there to "be a treaty negotiated between the Aboriginal people and the Government on behalf of all the people of Australia", the preparations for which were to be started immediately (Hawke 1988). Hawke's promise was made just two years earlier in 1988 at the Barunga Sports and Cultural Festival in the Northern Territory, where a team of Aboriginal artists and leaders from across Australia undertook an historical intercultural collaboration to create a "painted declaration" of political self-determination, compensation for stolen land, repatriation of Aboriginal remains and artefacts, and the upholding of cultural and social rights for Aboriginal peoples (AIATSIS 2018; Reece, Meyers, and Read 2006).

> *127. In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives should not be counted.*

After the May 27, 1967 referendum passed, the Constitution was officially altered on August 10, 1967 (NAA).

On one hand, the prime minister's positive response to the Barunga Declaration following the creation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody[6] in 1987 and establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission[7] (ATSIC) in 1990 marked a cautiously optimistic moment for Indigenous affairs. On the other hand, Hawke's government had already broken the Labour Party's endorsement of land rights after more than a decade of Indigenous activism and social movements for self-determination. In 1985, the Hawke government released the "Preferred National Land Rights Model" that sidelined Aboriginal consent for land use and was widely seen as caving to the pressures of the mining and pastoral industry before abandoning the pursuit of national land rights legislation altogether (Foley 2013; Foley and Anderson 2006; Libby 2003; Mercer 1993).

It was in this highly charged context, the same year of 1991 in which Yothu Yindi released their iconic song "Treaty Now" [8], that the CAR began its ten-year term. The Council pursued two main lines of action: consultation on the eventual reconciliation document and fostering the "people's movement" for reconciliation. This latter activity involved many programs and campaigns, including *Reconciliation Study Circle* and *Reconciliation Learning Circle* kits with materials on Indigenous history and culture for self-directed discussion groups, the quarterly *Walking Together* newsletter of the CAR, and *Australians for Reconciliation* to create networks of coordinators and local communities to be involved with reconciliation (CAR 1992, 1993, 1999; Gunstone 2016). These high-profile education and awareness campaigns, as well as complementary movements such as Sorry Books, were generally seen as a success of the CAR despite ongoing ambivalence in public understanding and attitudes towards reconciliation (Brennan 2004).

In contrast to its relatively successful educational program, the CAR's efforts towards a reconciliation document were challenged, especially by the election of a Liberal-National coalition government under Prime Minister John Howard in 1996. By 1997 the "Father of Reconciliation" Patrick Dodson had resigned, reportedly stating "I fear for the spirit of our country" (Thorpe 2016), and the chairmanship of the CAR passed to Evelyn Scott. Delegates at the 1997 Reconciliation Convention turned their backs on a "visibly shaken"

[6] The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was established in response to public concern about the deaths of Indigenous people in police and prison custody. Released in 1991, the report examined 99 deaths of Indigenous individuals in custody between 1980-89 and found that "their Aboriginality played a significant and in most cases a dominant role in their being in custody and dying in custody" (Commonwealth of Australia 1991:1; Williams 2001:1). The report was also significant in generating 339 recommendations, many of which articulated a vision of Indigenous self-determination, at least in administrative terms (Rowse 1992).

[7] ATSIC was established to increase the role of Indigenous people in policymaking and service delivery regarding Indigenous affairs, with 35 Regional Councils elected to represent Indigenous perspectives as well as hundreds of public servants to administer ATSIC's programs (Bennett and Pratt 2004:7–9).

[8] The original, unmixed version of the song contains the incisive line that "promises can disappear" presumably in reference to the Hawke's failure to follow through on his promise at Barunga that treaty negotiations would soon be underway (Corn 2010; Kerr 2015; Stubington and Dunbar-Hall 1994). In 2013, RA issued a press release regarding the "passing of Yothu Yindi frontman Dr Yunupingu", which it named as an "inspiration to all Australians; a passionate advocate for reconciliation […] and 1992 Australian of the Year for his commitment to reconciliation and work as a musician and educator." While mourning the loss of this "legendary Australian", RA highlighted more than 500 registered reconciliation events and activities for that year's National Reconciliation Week, saying the "enthusiasm and goodwill displayed by the tens of thousands who took part is a tribute to the growing public support for reconciliation" (RA 2013).

Howard (Behrendt 2010: 175-6), whose speech laid out the principles of his government's "practical reconciliation" strategy:

> *Reconciliation will not work if it puts a higher value on symbolic gestures and overblown promises rather than the practical needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in areas like health, housing, education and employment.*
>
> *It will not work if it is premised solely on a sense of national guilt and shame. Rather we should acknowledge past injustices and focus our energies on addressing the root causes of current and future disadvantage among our indigenous people. (Howard 1997)*

Whereas Howard's speech touches on the issue of Indigenous "disadvantage" no fewer than nine times, it did not mention the word "treaty" even once.

As the deadline for the presentation of the reconciliation document at the 2000 Corroborree approached, Dodson gave voice to the growing public frustration with the reconciliation process in his Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Wentworth Lecture:

> *Let there be no misunderstanding. The anger and disappointment that many Indigenous Australians have with the way the content of the 'Towards a Document of Reconciliation' proposal is being handled is not directed at the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. We are angry and disappointed at the cynical manipulation of the process that has been employed by the Federal Government and, in particular, the leader of that Government. A manipulation that is an affront to the millions of Australians of goodwill that have sought a genuine reconciliation between our peoples. (2000)*

When the CAR's ten-year term expired, its final report admitted that "true reconciliation" was far from being achieved and pointed towards the "unfinished business" of reconciliation that that remained for the years to come (CAR 2000b). In the end, the CAR issued only a one-page "Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation" alongside a longer "Roadmap for Reconciliation" and four national strategies concerning sustaining reconciliation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, overcoming disadvantage and economic independence. Although roughly a quarter of a million people turned out for the famous Sydney Bridge Walk[9], the event was as much protest as it was celebration, with signs, banners and sky writing of the word "sorry" waving to the tune of "Treaty Now" (Edmonds 2016: 94–97).

Reconciliation Australia (2001-present)

Despite the lack of progress on "substantive" reconciliation gains of a treaty, land rights and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty during the CAR's tenure, the Council recommended in no uncertain terms that the reconciliation process should be sustained going forward. Its *Roadmap for*

[9] The Sydney Bridge Walk was an event organized by the CAR as part of its final Corroboree events in 2000 at the end of its term. Roughly 250,000 Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian joined the march over Sydney's iconic Harbour Bridge (NMA n.d.).

Reconciliation outlined essential actions, including that a foundation named "Reconciliation Australia" be created to "maintain a national leadership focus for reconciliation, report on progress, provide information and raise funds to promote and support reconciliation activities" (CAR 2000c). The full "National Strategy to Sustain the Reconciliation Process" released after the Roadmap described the mission of RA in further detail:

> *Provide national leadership to the reconciliation process by:*
> - *promoting discussion;*
> - *producing and disseminating information;*
> - *raising funds to support other organisations' activities;*
> - *reporting to the nation on the progress of the reconciliation process;*
> - *providing a safe meeting place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous Australians can come together to seek common ground and to identify the next steps in achieving reconciliation; and*
> - *working closely with national peak bodies and stakeholders, for example the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and Australia Local Government Association (ALGA). (CAR 2000d)*

Furthermore, guidelines for other reconciliation actors—explicitly including federal, state and local governments, voluntary and community organisations, private sector organisations, and local reconciliation groups—were directed to coordinate with, support and even donate to the RA.[10] This new foundation was clearly the lynchpin in the CAR's strategy for continuing leadership of an ongoing national project of reconciliation in Australia.

Shortly before the CAR's term came to a close at the end of the year, on December 7th 2000 Chairwoman Evelyn Scott announced Neil Westbury as the first General Manager of the new organisation as well as nine inaugural board members, including two who would carry over from the CAR: Jackie Huggins, deputy director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at Queensland University in Brisbane, and the Djiniyini Gondarra, chairman of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (CAR 2000a). RA's first press release followed shortly to announce its appointment of Co-Chairs of the Board: Shelley Reys, an Aboriginal woman of the Djirbul people, an Australians for Reconciliation Coordinator and a member of the NSW State Reconciliation Committee, and managing director of Arrilla Aboriginal Training and Development; and Fred Chaney, deputy president of the National Native Title Tribunal and a former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (RA 2000). Huggins would succeed Reys as co-chair of the board alongside Chaney the following year (RA 2002).

Seeking to establish a role and voice for itself, RA was very active in issuing approximately 35 media releases during 2001-2002 on topics ranging from media comments concerning child removal by Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue (RA

[10] The only groups not directed to donate or otherwise contribute to the new RA foundation were state and territory reconciliation commissions and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. However, the Federation of State and Territory Reconciliation Committees was directed to coordinate closely with RA.

003) to Tasmanian land legislation (RA 004) to domestic violence in Indigenous communities (RA 014; RA 032). While continuing to make use of CAR frameworks and recommendations, RA engaged in consultative work to determine its own reconciliation goals. RA was highly aware of its distinctive institutional and funding position. As Chaney stated in an early media release, "[i]t's important to note the difference between this new foundation Reconciliation Australia and the old Council. Reconciliation Australia is fully independent of government; the board is not government appointed; we will not be dependent on government funding; rather, we will be reliant on community and corporate support" (RA 2001).

However, before the end of 2002 the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee chaired by Senator Nick Bolkus had called for and received over 100 public submissions for its inquiry into the post-CAR reconciliation process, publishing its *Reconciliation: off track* report in 2003.[11] The report advanced the argument that reconciliation in Australia could not progress without well-funded national leadership, and specifically recommended that "the Government provide ongoing funding to Reconciliation Australia, sufficient for it to meet its diverse range of responsibilities" (Bolkus 2003). Although the report also identified RA's lack of statutory authority as a barrier to its mission, it did not formulate any specific recommendations on this issue, choosing to emphasize the importance of funding instead. Claire Tedeschi, RA's community relations director during 2003-2010, remembers of these early years as a trying time for the young organisation:

> *[Y]ou know, truth be told we probably struggled for a while. We went through a number of different chief executives […] more focused on fundraising so that Reconciliation Australia could be free of government control and support. It quickly became clear that nobody was going to pay our light bills so the government had to, with some coercing, continue to come to the party in terms of those core operational funds. And as I say, it took quite a lot of effort for RA to be just keeping the doors open during that period. (Tedeschi 2016)*

Bolstered by a commitment of four years of federal funding starting in 2004 (RA 2007: 25), by 2005 RA reported its engagement in 18 distinct projects varying duration and impact across its program areas of youth, education, Indigenous leadership and capacity development, economic independence and the "national interest" with a dazzling array of corporate, government and not-for-profit partners. The budding organisation emphasized its mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, being careful to distinguish itself from Indigenous organisations and advocacy organisations in defining its mission as

[11] This report was commissioned as a result of the *Social Justice Report 2001*, which recommended that: "[t]he Senate empower the Legal and Constitutional References Committee to conduct an inquiry into the implementation and response to the reconciliation process. The terms of reference of the inquiry should require the Committee to examine the recommendations contained within the Roadmap to Reconciliation, the final report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and the Social Justice Report 2000 as well as the adequacy of the response of the Federal Government to each of these. In determining the adequacy of the response, the Committee should be required to consider processes by which government agencies have reviewed their policies and programs against the documents of reconciliation; as well as the adequacy of targets and benchmarks adopted and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms" (Recommendation 11).

"[accommodating] differences of opinion while we work to make progress on the basis of increasing areas of common ground." Their annual report from this year contains many references to RA's efforts to diversify their funding sources and states their appreciation for financial and pro bono support in a full-page spread honouring 13 private organisations, prominently including ANZ Bank and BHP Billiton (RA 2006b). Despite many RA initiatives to increase its proportion of private donors, Chaney's declaration of financial independence from government would turn out to be aspirational: to this day RA continues to receive the majority of its funding from the Federal Government.

The RAP Program

During 2005, RA had also started to lay the groundwork for what would become one of its most well-known and far-reaching initiatives: the RAP program. The next section details how the RAP program emerged from the confluence of three institutional factors: RA's search for ways to attain *funding security*, increase *corporate and workplace engagement*, and the opportunity to launch a new program during the excitement of the *40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum*. At the same time, the formulation of the RAP program drew on two major conceptual bases: the long history of grassroots efforts in the *people's movement* for reconciliation and the quantifying ethos and action orientation of *practical reconciliation*.

RA's first annual report published in May 2006, contains a single brief mention of the future RAP program simply as a "[n]ational action project – a project to sign up organisations to measurable action plans that will achieve lasting results" (RA 2006a: 12). Just a few months later on July 25, 2006, the RAP program was launched with great fanfare—and in far more detail—at a luncheon hosted by RA in partnership with BHP Billiton. Prime Minister John Howard attended to announce and celebrate the eight organisations selected to create the nation's very first RAPs: ANZ Bank, BHP Billiton, Canberra Investment Corporation, Centrelink, Melbourne City Council, Oxfam Australia, South Australian Department of Administrative and Information Services, and Yarnteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation. A subsequent media release published details on the specific pledges each of the "trailblazing" organisations planned to make in their RAPs, which were still under development at the time. For instance, Oxfam Australia pledged to develop an "Indigenous Australia Program" in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, ANZ committed to increasing the employment and retention of Indigenous employees, and staff at the South Australia Department of Administrative and Information Services who worked in Indigenous communities were to be given language and cultural training (RA 2006c).

Both due to this publicity and RA's sustained courtship efforts, the program saw immediate success. Less than one year after the launch, RA reported that 30 organisations had joined the program, and that "all Australian Government agencies had either completed or committed to completing a Reconciliation Action Plan" (RA 2007). RA had released a 16-page guide for organisations seeking to join the RAP program explaining the purpose of this "national plan of action", describing the "direct economic and social benefits" for businesses, and providing templates and checklists for the creation and

registration of new RAPs (RA 2006d). By 2008, RA released an updated "RAP Toolkit" with further articulation of the program's three theme areas—respect, relationships and opportunities—and business benefits, a clarified template structure and new graphics showing the 14 steps in the "RAP Journey" for aspiring organisational participants (RA 2008c). In August 2008, a press release announced that the RAP program, which had grown to a membership of 90 organisations, had created 1,700 jobs (RA 2008b).

Institutional Origins of the RAP Program

The RAP program emerged, in part, from RA's institutional context and programming imperatives during 2005-2007 when the program was conceived, created and launched. For this section I rely on RA documents as well as interviews with key RAP architects and staff of RA at this time: Barbara Livesey, chief operating officer (COO) in 2004 and chief executive officer (CEO) from 2005-2009; "Julie Smith", a RAP program consultant from 2006-2007; and Claire Tedeschi, community relations director from 2003-2010. These sources revealed how RA's strategic goals and programming needs heavily influenced the creation of a program that would honour *the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum*, further *corporate and workplace engagement*, and provide *funding security* for the fledgling organisation.

40th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

The first major public articulation of the RAP program by RA was published in January 2007 in the Co-Chairs Jackie Huggins' and Mark Leibler's forward to the 2005-2006 annual report and lauded the upcoming 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum as an "inspiration":

> *We are shaping a program for the anniversary that will demonstrate the maturing of the reconciliation process over the last decade. By signing on to systemic, measurable, action-oriented plans through Reconciliation Action Plans, organisations across Australia will show what reconciliation looks like in many different settings. Nobody will get away with saying they don't know what reconciliation means, that it's "off the agenda" or that they'd like to help but don't know how. (RA 2006b)*

As this statement suggests, RA judged that it needed to counter public perception that reconciliation had stalled or stopped with the end of the CAR. In Tedeschi's words, "I think the Bridge Walk in a sense, people felt like they'd done reconciliation, the job had been done. So, Reconciliation Australia then very much did have to chart a mission whereby it was clear that we'd only really just scratched the surface" (Tedeschi 2016).

The 40th anniversary of the referendum was therefore conceived by RA as a momentous, unmissable opportunity to launch a new program or activity to assert the continuing relevance of reconciliation. In fact, Julie Smith was hired as a consultant in 2006-2007 specifically to work on a program that could take leverage the excitement around this historical moment:

> *[W]e really wanted to use the 40th anniversary of the referendum to highlight where reconciliation in Australia was in 2007 […]. And it was just kind of a good set of events to bring corporate and government together around reconciliation and to lift the profile of reconciliation as an issue of concern for the Australian public. (Smith 2016)*

Smith's recollection closely mirrors the language that present in RA's 2006-7 annual review, which reported to stakeholders and the general public that the organisation was "using the opportunity of the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum to invigorate reconciliation, raise awareness of what can and what is being done, and gather momentum for change" (RA 2007: 20).

The 40th anniversary was not only the impetus for RA to create a new program to reinvigorate the Australian reconciliation process—it was also a means of transforming the organisation into a more high-profile, high-impact player in the reconciliation space on the national stage. Tedeschi describes joining RA in its "infancy" when it was "still a very small organisation based in a tiny little office with 7 staff or something like that" (2016). Similarly, Smith recalls:

> *Reconciliation Australia had really struggled to develop any kind of broader engagement, it was quite a small organisation at that stage. […] So, they were like a secretariat for the Board and they were very much a kind of a lobbying organisation. They were certainly punching well above their weight in that the commentary they were developing and promoting was still regarded as newsworthy, and they had a profile that really belied the small size of the organisation. (Smith 2016)*

Rather than treating the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum as a mere event to commemorate, RA set out to create a high profile, lasting reconciliation program—one that would remain at "core of our work for the next 10 – 25 years" (RA 2006d: 5). Certainly, the labour and resource intensive nature of the RAP program, which required RA to design minimum standards, assist with RAP development and maintain a database of officially approved RAPs, led to growth in the organisation. Annual reports from 2005-2008 document between 20 and 25 staff members of the organisation (some part-time), with the number growing to 30-35 in 2008-2010. Much of that growth is accounted for by the increase in RAP program employees, which increased from 5 in 2007 to 14 in 2010.

The RAP program not only increased the size of RA, but also provided opportunities to expand the public profile of the organisation. For instance, Co-Chair Jackie Huggins attended the launch of ANZ's first RAP (Huggins 2007) and RA issued numerous media releases about other RAP commitments and launches (e.g. RA 2008a, 2010a, 2010b). The RAP program undertook consultations with Indigenous stakeholders (RA 2009a:25), later releasing publications on private sector engagement with Indigenous communities and employment of Indigenous people co-authored with other organisations (DCA and RA 2013; GenerationOne, RA, and Social Ventures Australia 2013). Finally, the progress of the RAP program towards social and economic outcomes became another consistent arena of public engagement: a

comprehensive plan to measure RAP contributions was released in 2009 (RA 2009b), annual "RAP Impact Measurement" reports have been issued every year since 2012 and outside agencies including Auspoll have been contracted to provide biannual "Workplace RAP Barometer" reports (Nelson 2015, 2016; Stolper, Wyatt, and McKenna 2012).[12]

Corporate and Workplace Engagement

While the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum created a tantalizing programming opportunity for RA, the focus on corporate and workplace engagement was a deliberate strategy to branch out from local and community reconciliation groups, many of which already had strong relationships with state reconciliation councils or the Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) national advocacy group. In part due to her experience watching local political party chapters wither, CEO Barbara Livesey envisioned reconciliation being woven into the fabric of workplaces:

> *My sense was this idea of creating place-based community groups was a dying mode of engagement and one of the things that motivated us around the RAPs was a sense that people spend so much time in their workplaces. If you could make it part of their workplaces and their everyday lives then you were going to get further than trying to say to people that you've got to now go and create another group. (2016)*

Expanding reconciliation activities into workplaces had another important advantage in Livesey's mind: reaching a diverse audience. "[T]here were small local reconciliation groups," Livesey told me, "but my sense was that a bit of the same people talking to each other, and [RA] had to get out there" (2016).

While the RAP program is pitched at organisations across private, public and not-for-profit sectors, RA has always had a special relationship with corporations because, as Smith explains, "there was that attraction to working with corporates, particularly the big ones, because of their large workforces" (2016). Additionally, corporates featured so heavily because RA had already established relationships with a number of corporate "supporters", the number of which nearly doubled from 13 to 24 in the 2006-7 financial year (RA 2006b, 2007). Thus, RA was easily able to reach out and extend the relationships it had already built with a number of corporations to find early recruits for the RAP program:

> *There was a bit of a hook, I suppose, in that we were already doing some work with corporates. […] At the time we thought it could be school, a big company, a government department, it could be anywhere. It could be a football club. But we were kind of thinking of corporates to begin with. […] We used our corporate connections, so we went to ANZ, we went to the National Australia Bank, we went to BHP Billiton. (Livesey 2016)*

[12] The "Workplace RAP Barometer" reports rely heavily on RA's biannual "Reconciliation Barometer" modelled on South Africa's survey and started in 2008 (Auspoll and RA 2009; Livesey 2016; Rowse 2009).

Finally, Smith recalls that corporate culture during these years made corporations more open to participation for the RAP program due to the background of their leadership: "[a]t that point of time there were a number of heads of large corporates in Australia who were American and who had a history and an understanding of philanthropy that a lot of Australian heads of corporations just don't have" (Smith 2016).

Whether or not corporate leadership really did affect the formulation or uptake of the RAP program, it is certain that corporations in particular and workplaces in general were perceived by RA as both important and available actors to be targeted for participation in the reconciliation process.

Funding Security

Although the 2003 Senate committee forcefully urged continued funding of RA (Bolkus 2003) and RA had just from a four-year funding commitment from the Federal Government in 2004, in 2005 the organisation was still very much concerned with how to secure its finances in future years. Thus, an early proposal for the RAP program was to create a direct funding stream by charging corporations a fee for RA's oversight of the program and one-on-one help during the RAP development processes, which in turn could have subsidized RAP services for government and not-for-profit organisations (Smith 2016).[13] RA leadership ultimately rejected this idea, opting to rely on government funding to provide these services to corporations, public and not-for-profit organisations at no charge.

Instead, the RAP program was seen by its creators as a way to enhance RA's financial security by appealing to government funders interested in the outreach and results of programs and activities. Smith recalls that RA "wanted to leverage that [40th] anniversary to get the Australian government to make a commitment going forward to fund Reconciliation Australia and to fund reconciliation activities" (2016). From her memories as CEO, Livesey describes a similar sentiment regarding the RAP program:

> *There was internal discussion at the time that if this grows, then it will start to define the organisation and skew the organisation's activities, and was that where we really wanted to go. And I thought if it was successful that it would help to continue to define our reason for existence and therefore secure our ongoing funding because we could demonstrate to funders very tangible outcomes that we were achieving. (2016)*

RA eventually did receive a funding commitment in 2009, alongside government commitments to close the gap targets,[14] and as Smith speculates,

[13] remembers discussing another funding strategy with Adam Mooney: "[W]e were talking about the possibility of Reconciliation Australia having a share portfolio that corporates, if they didn't want to make cash donations or pay fees to Reconciliation Australia, they could contribute shares to a share portfolio that Reconciliation Australia would hold and would fund reconciliation activities. And ANZ thought that was a good idea, but again there was a feeling within Reconciliation Australia at the time that this was a bit beyond their ambit of work" (2016).

[14] RA heavily cautioned the government that real and lasting progress towards closing the gap would only be achieved with substantial Indigenous leadership and participation in using the

"the success of the Reconciliation Action Plan and the number of corporates that have signed up and that are actively working on Reconciliation Action Plans has provided more security to Reconciliation Australia's funding" (2016).

Conceptual Origins of the RAP Program

In addition to the confluence of organisational and programming imperatives discussed above, the RAP program was heavily theorized by its creators and subsequent managers and staff at RA as being a natural extension of two conceptual traditions of reconciliation. The first tradition is *people's movement* of state councils and local reconciliation groups fostered during the CAR period, which were directed to look towards RA for leadership on reconciliation after 2000. The second tradition integral to the RAP program was *practical reconciliation*, the quantifying ethos of which dovetailed with the height of the Close the Gap fervour and the setting of Council of Australian Governments (COAG) targets in 2008. As well as archival documents, this section makes use of four interviews with former RA staff Adam Mooney, RAP program director from 2008-2011; Sharona Torrens, programs and partnerships manager from 2011-2015; "Eric Miller", RA staff from 2011-2013; and Phoebe Dent, policy manager from 2012-2017.

The People's Movement

The RAP program was envisioned by RA as a modern-day extension of the grassroots "people's movement" for reconciliation. Although the people's movement is heavily associated with CAR-era activities such as the Sea of Hands and Sorry Books (CAR 1997; Giles 2002; Kennedy 2011; Metzenrath 2017; Short 2008), RA points back further to the 1967 referendum. The opening "Introduction and Purpose" text in RA's first publication on the RAP program stated:

> *In the 1967 referendum, over 90% of eligible Australians voted to take count of and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as citizens and to give the Commonwealth Government power to make laws regarding Indigenous Australians. This event is often referred to as the first stage of the reconciliation movement in Australia.*
>
> *The 40th anniversary of the referendum, in 2007, is of national significance. To mark the occasion, we're inviting Australian organisations to accept their individual and collective responsibilities for reconciliation–and to take action to address this issue of vital importance to Australia's social, economic and political well-being and advancement. (RA 2006d: 4) [emphasis added]*

In this way, the RAP program was smoothly embedded into a long history of efforts for national reconciliation beginning with the well-loved story of the 1967

allocated funds (RA 2009c, 2009a:8). Eight years later, RA CEO Justin Mohamed issued a similar media release, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led solutions key to closing the gap" (RA 2017a).

referendum.[15] The absence of any mention of the CAR in this explanation, and indeed the entirety of the first RAP publication, marks a noticeable shift in RA's narration of reconciliation history and its own contemporary mission. Although RA's publications from 2004 to mid-2006 are rife with references to the CAR as a touchstone for RA's work[16], the CAR barely figures in publications from later in 2006 and 2007.[17] Instead, these documents refer frequently and evocatively to the 1967 referendum as the anchoring point of RA's ethos and activities, especially its new RAP program.[18]

The RAP program was not only embedded into the history of reconciliation starting with the 1967: RA took great care to present the program as an important way—perhaps *the* way–to keep the grassroots spirit of the referendum alive. Individuals and organisations alike were reminded that it was incumbent upon ordinary Australians rather than the government to change the course of history:

> *The campaign that resulted in the 1967 Referendum didn't start like other movements for constitutional change, because a government wanted it to. It started because enough of the Australian people wanted it and it's a story Reconciliation Australia is retelling to Australians of today. (RA 2006b)*

This message empowering individuals and organisations to take direct action on reconciliation recalled not only the 1967 referendum, but people's movement activities in the CAR era. During our interview, Livesey spoke evocatively about having participated in the Sydney Bridge Walk and recalled some her initial thoughts after becoming CEO of RA: "My question was where is this people's movement, what are they doing?" (2016).

The programming opportunity occasioned by the 40th anniversary of the referendum was thus used not only to reinvigorate reconciliation in general, but

[15] The outpouring of popular support for Indigenous peoples and issues during the 1967 referendum's "Yes" campaign (and the withholding of the usual Parliamentary support for a "No" campaign) resulted in an astounding 90.77% of Australians voting to pass the referendum (Bennett 1985; NAA; SMH 1967). However, the referendum is often misremembered as extending citizenship or voting rights to Indigenous people when in fact, the referendum's two legal changes were to include Indigenous peoples in the census and grant the Commonwealth government the power to make laws for Indigenous peoples. Nonetheless, the referendum is remembered and even "mythologized" by the public, politicians and media alike as a triumph for Indigenous citizenship and reconciliation more generally (Attwood and Markus 1998; McGregor 2008).

[16] For instance, CEO Mike Lynskey's forward states: "We will draw on the work of the former Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and on the goodwill of the community and its desire to change things for the better" (RA 2004:4). Similarly, Co-Chair Jackie Huggins' and Mark Leibler's forward states: "In planning activities for next year's 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum, we will refocus attention on the Roadmap for Reconciliation released in 2000 by the former Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation" (RA 2006a:5). Finally, CEO Barbara Livesey's forward states: "This approach ensures that responsibility for reconciliation is rightly shared and owned across the Australian community, in accordance with the Roadmap left with us by the former Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation […]" (RA 2006a: 7).

[17] The CAR is mentioned only in RA's standard self-description and in the biographies of board members in the annual reports from 2006-8 and is not mentioned at all in the 2006 "Reconciliation Action Plans" publication (RA 2006d, 2006b, 2007).

[18] The word "anniversary" was used 5 times in the 2005-6 annual report, an astonishing 17 times in the 2006-7 annual report and 3 times in the 2006 "Reconciliation Action Plans" publication (RA 2006d, 2006b, 2007). The CAR is not mentioned at all in the RAP publication, and is mentioned only in RA's standard self-description and in the biographies of board members.

to continue in the specific grassroots tradition of the people's movement. As Smith stated of the RAP program, "[I]t was basically reminding people of the great success of the '67 referendum and that was the result of a popular movement, so how could we reinvigorate that popular movement in some form or fashion" (2016).

The RAP program's evocation and revival of the people's movement for reconciliation came at a significant point of frustration with the lack of progress Indigenous affairs in Australian politics when, by early 2006, the Howard government had been in power for a full decade. If anything, the government's dissolution of ATSIC in 2004 represented a step backwards for the project of Indigenous self-determination.[19] The RAP program was designed to tap into this frustration and to focus individuals and organisations on how they could further reconciliation goals within their own spheres of influence:

> *[I]t was building up then to the time when the national apology finally took place, so I think that there was probably, as there still is and will remain, a sense that this will really only make progress if it's a people's movement rather than a movement that takes its lead from policymakers, from government. And I think that the RAP program was a way of giving organisations and individuals who said they wanted to be part of this—and there were many right up from the days of the bridge walks and since, there were lots of people who wanted to be involved—but would say, 'we don't know how.' (Smith 2016)*

It was from this sentiment that the RAP program positioned itself as being open to participation from any and all kinds of organisations including "rock bands, billion dollar corporations, church groups, sporting clubs, schools, hospitals, self-employed mums, government departments, associations, indigenous enterprises, local councils, charities and foundations" (RA 2008c: 20).[20]

Despite the remarkable innovation of calling for organisations to so actively participate in a national reconciliation effort—a practice that remains unique to Australia even today—RA sought to normalize the RAP program as a natural extension of the people's movement.

Practical Reconciliation

As prime minister, Howard became closely associated with the concept of "practical reconciliation" that sought to refocus reconciliation towards "practical" efforts to ameliorate Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage over what he considered merely "symbolic" Indigenous rights issues such as treaty and land rights (Gunstone 2007; Pratt 2005; Sanders 2002; Short 2003). Howard's

[19] ATSIC was disbanded by the Coalition under Howard, which had been publicly against ATSIC from the start. Accusations against ATSIC included its inefficiency and ineffectiveness in service delivery for Indigenous people. Scholars note that ATSIC was plagued from the beginning by unclear mandates and restrictive funding mechanisms, and that abolishing ATSIC instead of pursuing institutional reform overlooked other self-determination and democratic benefits of ATSIC, such as allowing over 1,000 Indigenous people to hold office as community representatives and the involvement of tens of thousands of Indigenous voters (Behrendt 2005, 2010; Bennett and Pratt 2004; Cunningham and Baeza 2005; Sanders 2004).

[20] According to the author's database, the RAP program has seen participation from all of these types of organisations with the exception of rock bands and self-employed mothers.

address at the luncheon introducing the eight pilot organisations of the RAP program provides a representative taste of this vision:

> *These diverse action plans include financial literacy initiatives, cross-cultural staff training and programmes to support effective governance and economic development among Indigenous people. While tailored to specific circumstances, they all rest on relationships of mutual respect which, as Mick Dodson said, are essential for genuine reconciliation. They remind us that reconciliation will not come as a result of eloquent rhetoric or high-level communiqués. It will come through indigenous and other Australians taking millions of small steps in the right direction. […]*
>
> *The gulf between the first Australians and other Australians on economic and social outcomes is a measure of the distance we still have to travel. These gaps can only be closed with practical action that delivers results. Although government structures are important, we should not spend undue amounts of time debating structures and process to the detriment of outcomes. We need to focus on what works, the practical action that delivers results on the ground.*[21] *(2006: 2–3)*

The RAP program's original slogan— "turning good intentions into action"—as well as rigid target and outcome structure cohere neatly with the quantifying ethos and action orientation of practical reconciliation, which demanded visible and tangible results. "I wasn't consciously applying any theoretical models," said Smith of working on the early RAP program, "but it was definitely born of my background in social marketing and behavioural change and trying to develop a broader social proof of action and commitment" (Smith 2016).

In a similar vein, the first director of the RAP program Adam Mooney, who had previously worked as part of the RAP team at ANZ bank, explained that "one of the key things that we were very very keen to do was to make sure that actions were able to be assessed", pointing to a formula he had written to incorporate the concepts of action quality, scale and significance into an aggregated "RAP indicator" (Figure 6):

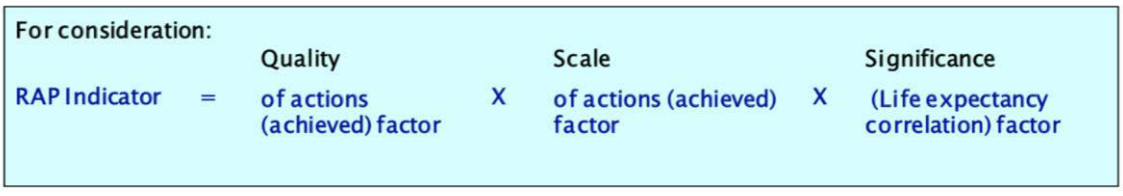

Figure 6: RAP Indicator Formula (RA 2009b: 31)

[21] The remaining two-thirds of Howard's speech focuses on the issue of Indigenous educational attainment without mention of reconciliation. At one point, Howard suggests that non-Indigenous Australians personally fund scholarships for Indigenous students: "[improving Indigenous education] means non-indigenous Australians, whose children have opportunities that the vast bulk of indigenous children could only dream about, also making a difference, perhaps by helping to fund scholarships that widen educational choices for indigenous young people" (2006: 7).

This document preceded the measurement strategies for the RAP program that would facilitate not only the annual RAP impact measurement reports but the biannual Workplace Barometer reports as well. These RAP impact measurement reports have eventually become part of the way RA understands the program's appeal to organisations: "What we try to say is that […] you're joining a community of organisations who are working within a common framework and a common language and contributing to what we measure collectively, so you're contributing to the greater community" (Dent 2016).

At this same juncture, Australia's Close the Gap campaign was well underway. The publication of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma's *Social Justice Report 2005* laid the conceptual groundwork for identifying a gap in social, economic and health indicators between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and calling for a "health equality within a generation" (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2006). A Close the Gap Steering Committee was shortly established and COAG agreed to six Closing the Gap targets in December 2007. After the Labour Party was swept into power and prime minister Kevin Rudd gave his historic apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, further agreements to implement Close the Gap targets were signed and the annual tradition of the "Prime Minister's Report" was inaugurated (Holland 2016).

While the RAP program was *not* designed as part of the Close the Gap campaign, there was a close affinity between the two efforts, especially around the issue of the life expectancy gap. "We were working in RA on the elevator pitch. I need something to say to people about what would it look like if we were reconciled," said Livesey, "And we kept coming back to the life expectancy gap, which at that stage the data was reporting a 17 year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people" (2016).[22] Similarly, Mooney describes Close the Gap as an "enabler", a "very important mantra, an edict, a call to action", but clarifies that the RAP program was conceived with a much broader mission of reconciliation in mind:

> *[The RAP program] was about Reconciliation Australia saying how do we bring together actions that will lead to reconciliation, that will lead to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people living in a place that respects each other, that works together, that lives in harmony, that understands the past, envisages a bright future together. Reconciliation was the overarching aim. The hook, if you like, for the contemporary moment in history, or moment in time, was Close the Gap and turning good intentions into action. So, it was more of an engagement strategy rather than the aim. (Mooney 2016)*

Certainly, the enduring RAP framework of respect, relationships and opportunities distinguishes the plans from other kinds of Close the Gap initiatives laser-focused on quantitative economic, health and social indicators

[22] Livesey continued: "Reconciliation is so much about the heart, but I also thought we should be going to the head—here's the numbers, makes good economic sense. […] If we close the gap in life expectancy, what would be the dollar savings to the economy from reduced spending on what you might call negative spending, prison, pensions, unemployment benefits etc.? We came up with a headline that got us a front-page story in the paper that it's worth something to the country economically to do this because it's worth 1% or 2% of GDP" (2016).

of inequality (Altman 2009; Black and Richards 2009; Kowal 2008; Pholi, Black, and Richards 2009). My interlocutors spoke passionately about the "genius" of the respect, relationships and opportunities breakdown of reconciliation actions[23] and the program's ability to create synergies between practical and symbolic aspects of reconciliation.[24]

However, I argue that we should understand the RAP program as fundamentally aligned with the conceptual tradition of practical reconciliation and its demand for results, its action orientation, its quantifying ethos. Rather than directly challenging the idea that reconciliation is about measurable action, the RAP program integrates traditionally "symbolic" aspects of reconciliation, such as cultural awareness training, the acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and the importance of consultation with Indigenous elders and communities, into a system of goals, responsible entities, timelines and measurable targets. As conceived, practiced and especially *measured* by the RAP program, reconciliation is about actionable targets, be they practical, substantive or symbolic.

Growing the RAP Program: A Decade in Review

Ten years after the program began, I find that 671 organisations became official participants in the RAP program by registering their plans with RA. This count *excludes* at least 30 primary and secondary schools that published RAPs before RA's school-specific program Narragunnawali began in 2012 (Dent 2016). In addition to summarizing the status of the RAP program in its annual reports, RA contracted research consultants to issue two major reports on the RAP program during the 2006-2015 period (Nelson 2015; Stolper et al. 2012). However, the information presented here derives from my own independent collection of more than 1,170 RAPs and RAP reports created by 671 organisations between 2006-2015.[25]

Examination of these RAP documents yields three major conclusions. First, the RAP program achieved broad appeal across a wide range of sectors whereas uptake was highly uneven according to geography. Second, participation in the RAP program grew steadily and significantly in the early years, especially through participation by not-for-profit "third sector"

[23] Miller stated: "[A]t the beginning, because everyone was starting out, just the idea of the three areas of respect, relationships and opportunities, it's a really nice way of thinking about things. […] [T]o be honest, the action planning bit of it, in terms of actions with dates and timelines and accountabilities, that's not that revolutionary or anything, I think that any good plan should have that. But it was the three topic headlines, the three sections that forced people to think about those things. I think that's the genius of [the RAP]—and still is" (2016).

[24] Tedeschi stated: "The idea of something being either symbolic or practical just doesn't work when it comes to reconciliation because the symbolic is part of what makes the practical possible, because it builds trust and respect and understanding" (2016).

[25] My method of data collection involved downloading RAP documents posted publicly in RA's online database periodically between 2011 and 2016. At the end of my data collection period in 2016, I checked my entire collection of documents against RA's database to make sure I had all documents published by 2015 (in fact, I found that RA's database was missing some documents I had previously collected). I then made spreadsheets of both the documents (n=1170) and organisations (n=671) with basic information such as industry sector and year of publication. My own figures match RA's reporting on RAP adoption fairly well: RA reports that by 2014 there were 593 organisations with RAPs whereas I find 572 organisations. These differences are likely attributable to the way that schools were counted or not counted as well as the techniques use to date RAPs. Whereas I base RAP dates off the date ranges of the RAP documents themselves, RA may use dates based on RAP approval or launches.

organisations. Finally, organisations were very likely to be delinquent or become altogether inactive in issuing the annual reports and refreshed RAPs as "required" by this voluntary program.

Organisational Characteristics

One of the most striking conclusions from the RAP document data is the strong representation of different organisational types[26] in the program (Table 1).

Table 1: RAP Adoption by Sector, 2006-2015

Corporate		**149**	**22.2%**
	corporate	149	22.2%
Government		**242**	**36.1%**
	Federal Government	90	13.4%
	State/Territory government	105	15.7%
	local government	47	7.0%
Third Sector		**280**	**41.7%**
	community	188	28.0%
	PEAK	57	8.5%
	tertiary education	30	4.5%
	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander	5	0.8%
Total		**671**	**100.0%**

Although much of the program's rhetoric is targeted specifically towards "businesses", less than one quarter of participating organisations are classified as corporations in RA's records. Government organisations, including federal, state, and local levels, comprise slightly more than one-third of RAP program participants. In fact, the largest single organisational type of participants are the 188 organisations classified by RA as "community" (28%). Non-corporate and non-governmental "third sector" organisations comprise over 40% of organisations in the RAP program.

Table 2: State/Territory Government RAP Adoption (2006-15) & Pop.*

State/Territory	2011 Population	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Pop.	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Pop. %	State/Terr. Gov. RAPs
New South Wales	6,917,658	172,624	2.5%	6
Victoria	5,354,040	37,991	0.7%	4
Queensland	4,332,737	155,825	3.6%	7
Western Australia	2,239,170	69,665	3.1%	59
South Australia	1,596,570	30,431	1.9%	22
Tasmania	495,350	19,625	4.0%	0
Aus. Capital Territory	357,219	5,148	1.5%	7
Northern Territory	211,944	56,779	26.8%	0
Australia Total	**21,507,719**	**548,370**	**2.5%**	**105**

[26] I use RA's organisational 8-category organisation classification system. However, the corporate, government and third-sector groupings are my own.

*Population statistics reported according to the 2011 census available at the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

My data also shows significant variation in RAP adoption according to geography (Table 2). For instance, a surprising pattern emerges in the origins of the 105 state-level governmental organisations that have adopted RAPs since 2006. Fifty-nine of these organisations come from Western Australia alone, while the three most populous states of New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland had a combined total of only 17 organisations enrolled in the RAP program by the end of 2015. Furthermore, not a single state government organisation in the Northern Territory created a RAP despite the fact that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up over a quarter of the population—by far the highest in Australia. This clearly demonstrates variation in RAP adoption due to state-level factors.

RAP Adoption over Time

Statistics on RAP adoption demonstrate that the RAP program grew significantly and steadily in the first decade after its founding. Starting with 8 pilot organisations in 2006, the RAP program averaged 72 new participants each year, with a high of 114 organisations creating RAPs for the first time in 2014. Participation was much greater in the second half of the program (2011-2015) with 475 organisations joining as compared to only 196 organisations joining in the first period (2006-2010).

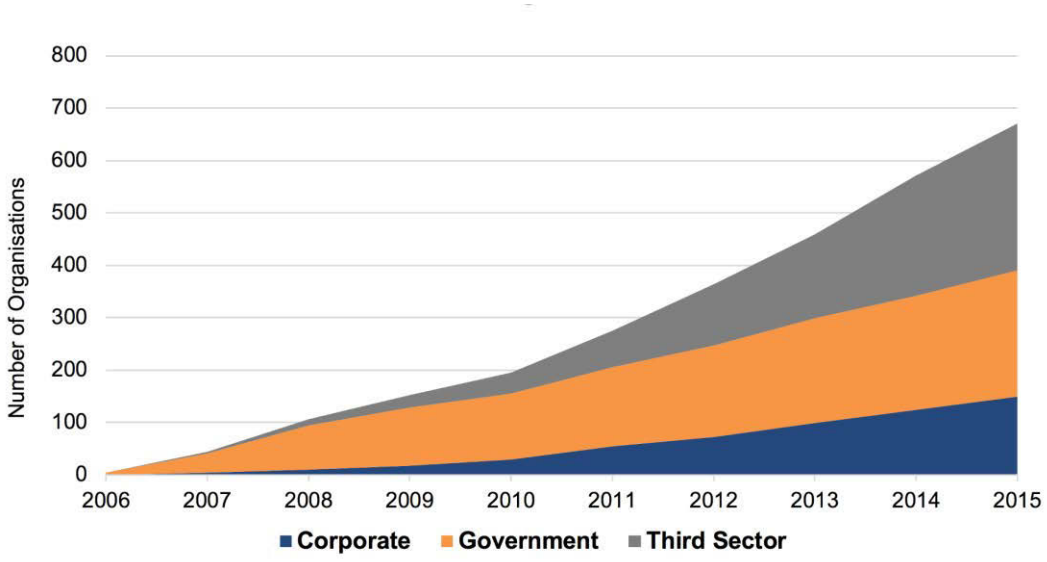

Figure 7: RAP Adoption by Sector 2006-2015 (n=671)

The three different organisational sectors—corporate, government, and third sector—display markedly different dynamics of RAP adoption over the program's brief history. As Figure 7 demonstrates, government-affiliated organisations far outpaced corporations and third sector organisations in RAP adoption in the early years of the program. The fifth year of the RAP program in 2010 saw government organisations comprising roughly 64% of the nearly 200 enrolled organisations. Since 2010, the number of third sector

organisations in particular has grown rapidly, increasing from only 40 to 280, and far outpaced the still considerable growth of corporate participants.

RAP Participation Activity

RAP adoption is an inadequate measure of an organisation's ongoing participation in the program. Under the original, pre-RISE structure of the RAP program, organisations were asked to report on RAPs and to "refresh" their plans annually. "RAPs are living documents to be reviewed and updated annually," urged the 2008 RAP Toolkit, instructing organisations to "add in new ideas and actions, to set new targets and timelines and to reflect on what you have learnt over the past year and adjust your RAP accordingly" (RA 2008c: 7,9).

However, the data from RAPs and RAP reports issued during the first ten years of the RAP program suggests that this target was not often met. In Table 3 I present three different measures of RAP inactivity using a sub-sample of the 459 organisations that published their initial RAP before the start of 2014. The first measure is a straightforward count of organisations that have never published a progress report or subsequent RAP, i.e. a "one and done" pattern of RAP activity displayed by 263 (57%) of RAP organisations. The figure is sufficiently similar—50.4%—if the sub-sample is restricted to organisations publishing their first RAP before the end of 2013. With the important caveat that these statistics do not track if organisations became active in the RAP program again in 2016 or later, the conclusion to be drawn from this limited time period is that a *majority of RAP organisations* published only one RAP as the extent of their engagement with the program during its first decade.

Table 3: RAP Inactivity for RAP Adopters 2006-2013 (n=459)

Measure of Inactivity	Corporate	Government	Third sector	Total
Initial RAP only	55 (54.5%)	92 (46%)	116 (73.4%)	263 (57.3%)
Inactive in 2014-2015	81 (80.2%)	161 (80.5%)	139 (88.0%)	381 (83.0%)
Avg. Yrs. Between Docs.*	1.9	2.6	2.2	2.3

*n=196

The second measure of RAP inactivity counts those organisations that did *not* publish a progress report or subsequent RAP in the 2014-2015 period, which comprises 83% of all organisations. In other words, *fewer than one-fifth of RAP organisations were "active" in 2014-2015* (this excludes organisations that created their first RAPs during this period). This equates to only 78 of 459 organisations who had created RAPs in 2013 or earlier who were active in reporting on or refreshing their RAPs in the two-year period from 2014-15.

Finally, a third measure calculates that for the 196 organisations that have published at least two RAP documents, i.e. an initial RAP and either a subsequent RAP or a RAP report, the average time between publication activity is 2.3 years rather than the one year or less expected from fully compliant organisations.

While all three measures demonstrate that inactivity from RAP organisations was common—in fact, the norm—across all organisational sectors, data suggests that third sector organisations were especially delinquent.

Organisations that were late or altogether inactive in publishing progress reports and subsequent RAPs may still have been engaged in carrying out the goals and actions pledged in their initial RAP. Certainly, refreshing RAP documents yearly proved to be a taxing expectation that most organisations were unable or unwilling to meet. Perhaps for this reason, RA later adjusted its expectations for RAP renewals to longer increments in its RISE structure introduced in 2013.[27]

Conclusion

This article has undertaken to provide the first comprehensive history of the RAP program. It details how the RAP program emerged from the confluence of three institutional factors at RA—*funding security*, *corporate and workplace engagement*, and the *40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum*—as well as two conceptual traditions—the *people's movement* and *practical reconciliation*. While certainly not a causal explanation, these factors documented in archival sources as well as interviews with key informants offer important insights into the emergence and success of the RAP program in seeing 671 organisations create over 1,000 RAP-related documents within a decade.

Furthermore, this article has brought original data to bear on the question of adoption during the RAP program's first decade. I find that, despite the language of "businesses" used in many RAP program materials, corporate organisations make up less than one quarter of RAP adoptees during this period. In contrast, over 40% of RAPs created from 2006-2015 were by non-governmental, non-corporate third sector organisations. Data from state- and territory-level government organisations demonstrates strong heterogeneity in RAP adoption according to localised factors, a topic which should be the subject of further research. Finally, the data shows that RAP organisations during the first decade of the program were more often than not delinquent in their annual reporting on and refreshing of RAPs. Understanding periods of inactivity or attrition from the RAP program are also important subjects for future research.

Finally, I argue that the RAP program's very public alignment with the people's movement tradition as well as its subtler adoption of practical reconciliation efficiency objectives and measurement instruments belie two remarkable innovations. First, the RAP program ushered in a new era of organisational participation in the reconciliation project. The novelty and ingenuity of embedding reconciliation practices into existing organisations, rather than through specialized organisations or activities, may not be readily apparent due to RA's narrative of the RAP program as simply being an extension of the people's movement, in which all citizens are called upon to play their part in a national project of reconciliation. However, the engagement

[27] According to the RISE structure, the "scoping" stage of the Reflect RAP should take around one year. The more advanced Innovate and Stretch RAPs should last between two and three years each, and the Elevate RAP timeframe is simply negotiable with RA for organisations at this level (RA 2018). While these explicit written guidelines were published in 2018, the suggested timeframes have clearly been implemented in RAPs adopted since 2015.

of hundreds of organisations with reconciliation was unique in Australia's reconciliation and is, to my knowledge, still a global singularity. Furthermore, RA's ability to easily recruit organisations within this framework of the people's movement raises interesting questions. Is organisational involvement in reconciliation best understood as part of a grassroots people's movement or as top-down participation led by CEOs and boards of directors? To what extent do decisions to participate in the RAP program reflect ingrained organisational identities as corporate citizens or responsible social actors?

As a second innovation, I argue that the RAP program offers a unique resolution to the tension produced by the Howard government's push for practical reconciliation. Rather than sidelining or dismissing the importance of symbolic reconciliation related to historical acknowledgement and cultural respect, RAPs make room for symbolic actions alongside practical ones targeted towards reducing Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage. The innovation here is that symbolic actions are treated according to the same quantifying ethos and action orientation as practical actions related to Close the Gap objectives: even relationships, acknowledgement and respect are broken down into discrete actions, timelines and measurable targets. In some ways, this makes symbolic actions less vulnerable to the criticism of ineffectiveness by providing impact measurements, the contributions of which are all the more impressive at the aggregate level of hundreds of RAP organisations. The RAP program additionally creates a narrative defence against the Howard practical reconciliation narrative that pits symbolism in a zero-sum game against practicality by arguing that the three themes of relationships, respect and opportunities are all equally crucial for reconciliation. In sum, RAP documents provide a comprehensive rationale and instrument for the interrelation and mutual dependence of supposedly distinct symbolic and practical approaches.

The RAP program's importance to Australia's reconciliation landscape is clear: not only do millions of Australians work or study in RAP organisations, the RAP program is also a mainstay of RA's strategy for reconciliation over the next 25 years (RA 2016). In piecing together a comprehensive picture of the program's origins and trends in adoption over the first ten years, this article offers scholars and practitioners alike a better understanding the RAP program in the context of Australia's long reconciliation history—and a useful resource for beginning to raise any number of important questions about the program's past, present and future.

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