



Artback NT
Numburindi Festival
Artistic Report
14th – 16th September 2017





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Above: Numburindi Festival
site, Joshua Park, Numbulwar

Cover images:
Dhambul Dancers painting
their bodies with clay

2017

Numburindi Festival Artistic Report

Numburindi Festival is a unique community-driven event which celebrates traditional and contemporary arts and cultural practices from the remote Arnhem Land community of Numbulwar, on the western coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, NT. The festival is a continuation of the inaugural Numburindi Festival 2016 and is embedded in Artback NT's Indigenous Traditional Dance Program (ITDP).

Through its facilitation of traditional and contemporary song and dance development and performance, ITDP assists in the preservation of culture through inter-generational learning; strengthening relationships between Elders and young people and encouraging cultural leadership. The framework developed for ITDP is based on a three-year community engagement cycle, which has now been delivered in Alice Springs (2007–2009), Tennant Creek (2010–2012) and Borroloola (2013 – present). Each community has seen a different model developed in response to their specific needs.

The community of Numbulwar was a new addition to ITDP in 2016 with the intention to develop and deliver engaged and diverse cultural and arts activities in the region. Thus far, Artback NT's ITDP engagement with Numbulwar, has revolved predominantly around supporting the community in the delivery of Numburindi Festival – but also extends to youth arts activities, production and design development and local employment opportunities.

This years' Numburindi Festival was held over three days 14th – 16th September and had a core focus on intergenerational-exchange with clan Elders and empowering youth arts practice.

The aims of ITDP are:

- To assist in the coordination of an annual festival event that celebrates the diversity of traditional Indigenous dance in the Northern Territory, providing an exciting cross-cultural platform for audience and performance development.
- To deliver remote community support that facilitates opportunities for arts and cultural performance and skills development within the region through a series of projects, rehearsals, workshops and events each year.
- To provide further Territory, national and international performance opportunities where appropriate for the hosting community to establish business and professional development pathways.

The objectives of ITDP are:

- Sustainability of an annual festival event in the hosting community and its uptake in the region.
- An improved overall understanding in remote Indigenous communities of the integral relationships between cultural maintenance and professional performing arts opportunities through participation in local, regional and national showcase events.

Agugu Dancers
(Nunggarrgalu)



- An increased awareness of the value of traditional Indigenous dance as an integral strategy in community wellbeing and a pathway to improved employment and further education and training for individuals, particularly disengaged youth.
- The preservation of culture by traditional intergenerational learning methods that strengthen the relationships between Elders and youth and encourages cultural leadership.
- The creation of pathways for cultural understanding, appreciation and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia.
- Undertake independent evaluation through:
 - Data collection
 - Qualitative and rich media
 - Structured feedback and review
 - Critical reflection
 - Regular, rich reporting

Numburindi Festival Staffing

Artback NT prioritises fostering strong and embedded relationships and employment in remote communities. In Numbulwar, we are lucky to have wide community support and to employ the diverse skill sets of our Festival Director Ella Geia and Artistic Director Grant Nundhirribala.

Ella Geia is a Torres Strait Islander woman who has been based in Numbulwar as a media officer, CDP women's mentor and arts practitioner for the last 8 years and has strong relationships with the community. She is manager of the renowned

band and dance group Yilila Band and Red Flag Dancers. Ella has vast experience working in remote community settings delivering high level arts and program management. Her media and arts programming background, in particular, is a vital asset for the festival. Working closely with the Project Manager and community Ella managed the on the ground logistics, site design projects, arts activities, media, program content, emcee and invitations to visiting external dance and band groups.

Grant Nundhirribala is a significant cultural leader and songman in Numbulwar from the Nundhirribala clan group. He is the winner of six music awards, lead singer of his band "Yilila" and the Red Flag dancers and has been a featured guest artist with the Australian Ballet Company and Bangarra Dance Theatre. Grant sings in Wubuy, Anindilyakwa, Creole, English and Bahasa Makasar. As the Numburindi Artistic Director and advisor on cultural protocols, his vision continues to ground the festival locally, showcasing the content that the community wants. At Numburindi Festival 2017, in particular, he was vital in coordinating Murrungun, Red Flag Dancers, Ngalmi and Nunggarrgalu - the four clans performing their traditional dance and song practices. He managed the band night and was fantastically charismatic as an emcee and performer for the evening!

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Eve Pawlik, Artback NT's Project Manager worked alongside Ella and Grant to develop and deliver the Numburindi Festival for 2017. Having been involved in the ITDP program and the DanceSite festival events in both Borrooloola (Malandarri) and Numbulwar (Numburindi) over the last few years, Eve has built strong relationships in the region. From the Artback NT office in Darwin, Eve further developed stakeholder relationships, managed logistics and funding alongside the community. On the ground, Eve assisted the Technical Manager, Josh Grant, run the production elements for the festival event. Established models of community engagement, which Eve had the opportunity to learn from Lia Pa'apa'a, Artback NT's previous ITDP Coordinator, were vital to the festival's success.

Josh Grant was the versatile and highly skilled Technical Manager for the festival. Josh hails from an extensive background in visual arts, live and recorded sound engineering and music. With a particular strength and passion for remote Indigenous community festivals and arts programs, Josh has ongoing relationships with a number of Arnhem Land communities delivering workshop programs and festival activities. As Artback NT's go-to production guru, he has engaged with us on numerous projects through the ITDP and the Performing Arts Program. Josh has been key in the production of DanceSite in Borrooloola, and its transition to Malandarri Festival and Numbulwar's Numburindi Festival in 2016.

The festival also employed over 100 local staff as musicians, performers, cleaners, caterers and production staff. This is an important aspect of the ITDP model to ensure that the festival empowers community members to be active makers in the event. It also provides a large injection of funds into a remote and isolated community where opportunities for employment are limited, particularly for those in the arts.

Pre-festival activity

In the lead up to the Numburindi Festival, Ella coordinated a series of pre-festival craft and site design activities with the Roper Gulf Regional Council CDP Women's Group. This was a fantastic opportunity for the women to design and build the aesthetic feel of the festival. Some of the outcomes were decorations for the marquees, painted rubbish bins, light sculptures and painted flags. Roper Gulf Regional Council staff including Municipal staff and the CDP Men's Group installed the stage, flag poles and sand. In the bump-in of the festival site, these two groups supported the festival tirelessly installing the stage, site design and supporting the production set up. They were invaluable and it was an important way for the community sharing in the sense of creation and ownership of the festival!

The festival space became an active teaching site for the exchange of cultural knowledge between young people and Elders of each Clan

The Numbulwar School were also engaged this year and ran a series of art sessions with their classes leading up to the festival, creating sea creatures as design features of the festival site. Chris O'Neill, Numbulwar School's Music Teacher, had also been working intensively with a group of students to form the Numbulwar School Band. The final rehearsal to prepare the musicians for their festival performance was held at Joshua Park on the Wednesday night. This was a great confidence builder for the youth, as they were able to rehearse to an intimate and highly supportive small community audience.

Program

The programming and content of Numburindi Festival was developed by Ella and Grant in consultation with Numbulwar clan leaders. For 2017, the festival expanded its activities to three nights.

Thursday

The inclusion of Thursday night's Youth Night presented a fantastic way to open the program. The festival space became an active teaching site for the exchange of cultural knowledge between young people and Elders of each Clan. The resoundingly positive community response to the Youth Night has cemented this component into all future festival programming.

Each clan brought together their young people to be the dancers for the evening. The youth were formally prepared as per cultural protocols, painted up with clay, with appropriate tools and dressed in nagas representing each clan colour. This moment – with children as young as three dancing as cultural representatives – was an incredibly special aspect of the festival and was celebrated by the whole community.

Following this two Wubuy language videos that the Numbulwar School have been developing with Tony Grey from AiRemote, for their Wubuy Language Program, were screened. A stand out was the footage of Mambali Band performing at the inaugural Numburindi Festival 2016; the project had incorporated footage of the youth translating the song from Wubuy to English. Films such as these are powerful instruments of learning, and it was great to see footage from Numburindi Festival 2016 repurposed and reactivated in this way by the youth.

Numbulwar School Band performed three songs 'Intro song', 'This is the Truth' and 'No More of That' originally created from an Indigenous Hip Hop Projects workshop. Four of the confident senior girls from the School Band performances sung 'Happy Ending' by MIKA. The primary school youth sang a classic from the Lion King 'He Lived in You' to close the first night of Numburindi Festival 2017.





Gudarrgu Singers
(Ngalmi Clan)

Friday night's Wungubul was a powerful performance with the adults and young people joining together from each of the four clans

Friday

Friday night's Wungubul was a powerful performance with the adults and young people joining together from each of the four clans. Nunggarrgalu performed first, they were followed by Murrugun, Red Flag Dancers, and then Ngalmi, and the Wungubul concluded with a final collaborative dance. The night closed with two award ceremonies. In August, Numbulwar won five awards in the Traditional Music Category for the 2017 National Indigenous Music Awards. Our Festival Director organised with the NIMAs and Music NT to hold off on

the presentation of the physical awards until the Numburindi Festival so the success could be celebrated with their whole community. Following this were the awards from Thursday night's youth clan performances. We had nine awards to hand out, two for each clan group best girl and boy dancer and an overall winner. The overall winner category was assessed on the criteria of best prepared, best dressed, best dancing and best painted up. The awards were announced by Selena Uibo MLA and the Wurramara dance group from Bickerton Island on Groote Eylandt.

Awards

Category	Winner
Best Youth Performer (female)	Tara Nundhirribala – Red Flag Sedonia Mirniyowan – Nunggarrgalu Katisha Ngalmi – Murrugun Lapisha Nunggarrgalu – Gudarrgu (combined)
Best Youth Performer (male)	Ian Wurramara – Red Flag Jason – Nunggugarrlu Kyle Lalara – Murrugun Jamarcus Nunggarrgalu – Gudarrgu (combined)
Overall Best Youth Group Performance NIMAs – Traditional Music Category	Red Flag Dancers (Nundhirribala) Galiliwa Nunggarrgalu, John Lalbich for Mardayin Skin Ceremony. John Murrugun, Samson Ngalmi, Samuel Ngalmi for Mardayin Skin Ceremony. Jeff Nunggarrgalu, Graham Nunggarrgalu for Numburindi Festival 2016. Giningayi Ngalmi, Richard Ngalmi for Numburindi Festival 2016. Kerwin Murrugun, David Murrugun, Dean Austin Bara, Bradley Bara for Numburindi Festival 2016.



Red Flag Dancers
(Nundhirribala Clan)





The dance site had close to 800 people up dancing, kicking up sand to these great bands. It was a fantastic high energy way to close the Numburindi Festival 2017

Saturday

Saturday’s programming included day time youth activities, market stalls, a free community bush-tucker feed and was topped off by a Darwin Castles crocodile waterslide. This created a great buzz of activity during the day leading into the final night of Numburindi Festival!

The visiting dance group Wurramara from Bickerton Island opened the evening. This was the first visiting dance group Numburindi Festival has hosted and it was a great exchange in language and culture with a closely related

neighbouring community. The wonderful Lulu (who is a key asset in the festival planning and logistics) performed a beautiful Kiribati dance.

The festival hosted five bands from Numbulwar and Groote Eylandt - Yilila, Mambali Band, NT Express, Poison Whisky and Salt Lake Band. The bands showcased a unique contemporary sound that draws together reggae, funk, and rock and roll, with lyrics in English, Anindiliyakwa, Wubuy and Creole. The dance site had close to 800 people up dancing, kicking up sand to these great bands. It was a fantastic high energy way to close the Numburindi Festival 2017.

Dance groups and performers

Language Group	Dance Group/ Band	Community	Performers
Nunggubuyu/Nundhirribala	Red Flag Dancers	Numbulwar	52
Nunggubuyu/Murrungun	Murrungun Dancers	Numbulwar	35
Nunggubuyu/Ngalmi	Ngalmi and Manggurra Dancers	Numbulwar	30
Nunggubuyu/Nunggarragalu	Nunggarragalu Dancers	Numbulwar	28
Andindiliyakwa	Wurramara	Groote Eylandt (Bickerton)	24
Kiribati/Fijian	Christine Smith	Numbulwar	1
Nunggubuyu	Yilila Band	Numbulwar	9
Nunggubuyu	NT Express	Numbulwar	4
Nunggubuyu/Mambali/Anindiliyakwa	Mambali Band	Numbulwar	8
Groote Eylandt (Andindiliyakwa)	Salt Lake Band	Groote Eylandt	11
Groote Eylandt (Andindiliyakwa)	Poison Whisky	Groote Eylandt	4
Nunggubuyu/English	Numbulwar School Band	Numbulwar	12
Nunggubuyu/English	Senior Girl School Group	Numbulwar	4
Nunggubuyu/English	Primary School Group	Numbulwar	8
TOTAL			230

Funding

The 2017 Numburindi Festival faced delayed funding announcements which meant the organising team were working off a significantly reduced budget. As a consequence the festival was the core focus of Artback NT's 2017 engagement with Numbulwar.

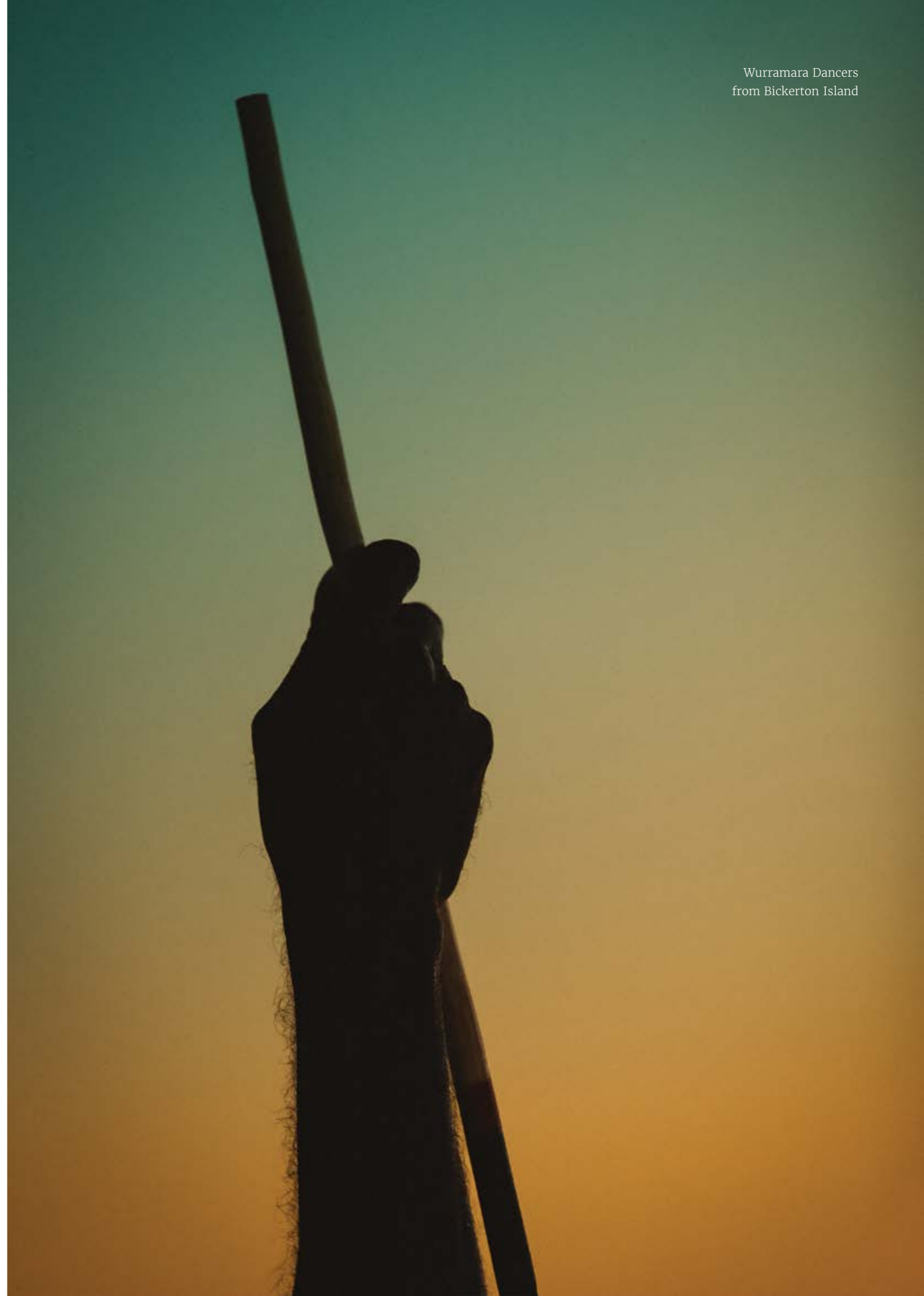
Funding for the event was secured from Artback NT, Catalyst – Australian Arts and Culture Fund, Arts NT's Community Festivals, Festivals NT and Roper Gulf Regional Council Community Grants. Artback NT is proudly sponsored by the Northern Territory Government.

Partnerships

Organisation	Type of Support
Roper Gulf Regional Council – Katherine Office / Numbulwar Office, Night Patrol, Sports and Recreation and CDP.	Site production installation, stage, catering, staff, office resources, cleaners, Night Patrol security staff, decoration and site design/making and tables and chairs. Funding for children's program.
Numbulwar School	Marquees, music equipment, accommodation, Wubuy Language Program videos, music program, production support and Numburindi Festival art workshops.
Numbulwar Homelands	Generators and fuel.
ALPA Numburindi Store	Donation of vegetable and fruit boxes and water for Community Bush Tucker and Youth Day.
Yugul Mangi Corporation – Ngukurr	Marquees, tables and chairs.
Arnhem Electorate Office – MLA Member for Arnhem	Trophies for the Youth Night, Presenter/MC for Awards Ceremony and market stall operator.
Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association (TEABBA)	Promotion, live broadcast of Numburindi Festival – Saturday night and video post-production.

Catering

During each evening of the festival the Numburindi Store Take Away Shop ran a market stall. On the Saturday afternoon, John Terepo and his family provided a bush tucker feed cooked in his home Umu (ground oven). Grant Nundhirribala hunted turtle earlier in the week that was cooked in the Umu with sweet potato, cabbage, carrot and potato. We were incredibly fortunate to receive Numburindi Store's generous sponsorship through the provision of an incredible amount of donated vegetable and fruit boxes and water for the event.



Dhambul Young Boys
(Murrungun)



Media and marketing

Being in a remote and isolated community the value of internet and social media platforms is significant. Pre-event marketing saw Artback NT and Roper Gulf Shire run a series of social media stories on our website, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook promoting the festival. It is worth noting however, that as Numburindi Festival is not an open event for the public, the marketing strategy prioritised general awareness of the festival rather than attendance. An official Numburindi Festival flyer was designed by Artback NT's graphic designer Oscar Waugh and was distributed across the NT. The lead up to the event was heavily documented with behind the scene action shots giving the public a taste of Numburindi Festival magic.

During the event, we had three external media operators. Benjamin Bayliss, ITDP's long term photographer returned to document the festival and take head shots of each of the bands.

Roper Gulf Shire's Media Manager attended the festival regularly doing on the ground social media updates. Bernard and Toby from Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association (TEABBA) ran a live broadcast of Saturday night's festival from 5 – 9 pm.

The delivery of the 2017 Numburindi Festival benefitted greatly from strong community commitment and ensured that the community ownership and local development of the festival continued to grow

Highlights

The delivery of the 2017 Numburindi Festival benefitted greatly from strong community commitment and ensured that the community ownership and local development of the festival continued to grow. The collaboration with local organisations strengthened existing relationships and opened new pathways of participation.

The generosity of the community in sharing their knowledge, and the skills and expertise they contributed to building the event, was overwhelming. This year in particular, there was a strong focus on empowering and supporting Numbulwar's young people to come up with their own creative ideas about how they could contribute to the festival. By programming an additional youth night on the Thursday to focus and celebrate our next generation, Numburindi Festival created a positive space of inclusiveness and joy.

Numburindi Festival was a vibrant showcase of the region's diversity in language, song and dance

Challenges

This year our core challenge was funding insecurity and delayed funding announcements. This put delays in planning timelines and consultation periods. It also restricted our ability to contract external videographers to film the event which was a significant loss to the festival archive and community resources. Artback NT as a consequence provided a greater financial contribution to enable the festival to continue. However, despite this funding insecurity, the local sponsorship and support organisations and clans rallying around the event enabled the festival to expand the programming content across three nights instead of two.

Numbulwar has had significant deaths recently, the funerals for these fell on the Tuesday before the festival and in the week following the festival. The sadness of these events impacted significantly on the community, pushing the scheduling of other community events into the same week of the festival. The Numbulwar School had to delay their school fete until the Thursday 14th of September and the new clinic was opened on Friday 15th September. This put a strain on the limited local resources and staffing energy with everyone jumping in to support each of the events during the day whilst organising preparations for the festival evenings.

Summary

Despite these challenges, Numburindi Festival was a vibrant showcase of the region's diversity in language, song and dance. The programming by the Festival Director and Artistic Director was incredibly professional and a true representation of the talents of Numbulwar's young people and Elders. The festival ran successfully over three nights and had strong evidence of intergenerational exchange throughout the program.

With future planning always on our mind, the Numburindi team is now focused on seeking long-term funding security for artistic and cultural programs in Numbulwar. Artback NT is committed to our relationship with Numbulwar. Consultations regarding the development of programs that will best explore and support the artistic development and cultural maintenance of the community, have been ongoing. Plans for music skills workshops and a series of ongoing cultural bush camps are key elements of this future model.

Wurramara Dancers
from Bickerton Island



