

Case Study: PiCCA

Getting up close: Site visits to choose and monitor nonprofit projects

Partners in International Collaborative Community Aid (PiCCA) is an Australian giving circle whose mission is to improve health, education, income and job prospects for disadvantaged communities overseas through sustainable projects that are locally driven, managed and resourced. PiCCA's members pool donations of money, time and expertise, and are actively involved in locating potential projects, choosing how donations are used, and assisting project partners with their work.

Since its foundation in 2014 by four individuals, PiCCA has grown to 21 members and has raised A\$56,000 (US\$42,000) for international development projects. The giving circle states that all donations flow to project activities, which is achieved by levying a small annual membership fee (A\$50). Any administrative expenses not met by the fee are underwritten by the founding directors. PiCCA has so far funded nonprofits in Swaziland, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bougainville in food security for AIDS orphans, post-earthquake reconstruction, a women's commercial catering enterprise, and a community cen-

tre running development and other programmes.

PiCCA's focus on development projects outside of Australia is relatively unusual for giving circles, which typically provide support in their own local communities. One challenge this policy poses for PiCCA is how to identify and monitor projects from a distance, and keep members motivated when project partners may be hundreds or thousands of miles away. Warren McMillan, one of PiCCA's founding directors, said, "we originally thought PiCCA would undertake site visits to monitor projects; we do this and have come to understand there is great value in site visits prior to project establishment." In 2015 PiCCA members made post-funding site visits to Sri Lanka and Swaziland to monitor project progress and offer feedback to the implementing nonprofit organisations. In 2016 PiCCA identified a new funding opportunity in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea.⁶

⁶ Bougainville is politically an autonomous region within Papua New Guinea, but geographically a part of the Solomon Islands Archipelago. It has historical ties to Australia after the post Pacific war U.N. settlement.

Box 2: Criteria for PiCCA Support

PiCCA has developed detailed policy guidelines that set out the criteria for project selection, the selection process and post-funding monitoring. These policies are guided by best practices in international development set out by the Australian Council for International Development and the OECD.

To be eligible to receive funding from PiCCA, a project must:

- Be implemented in a community or communities in a less-developed country overseas approved by the Minister for Foreign Affairs
- Assist the community in one or more of the following areas: employment creation, capability development, construction of needed infrastructure, micro-business development, improvement to health and education outcomes, food security, empowerment of women, or reconciliation between groups in conflict
- Not be currently and completely funded, or readily able to be funded by an existing funding source (government, non-government or private funding)
- Not in any way help to promote a particular religion or political agenda
- Be partly resourced by the community in which it is being implemented (e.g., contribution of labour) where appropriate and feasible, and
- Be located in communities where there is a sufficiently stable environment for development to gain traction.

A Pre-funding Site Visit to Papua New Guinea

Project documentation shows that project visits for assessment or evaluation were carried out and reported in meticulous detail at a depth that belies the relatively modest size of dispersed grants, recognising particular risks of doing international development including the avoidance of bribery and corruption, protecting children, and preventing child trafficking among others. The pre-funding site visit to Bougainville illustrates the way in which PiCCA identifies and supports a new international development project.

In 2016 a PiCCA member alerted the giving circle's directors to the work of the Hako Women's Collective (HWC), a self-organised group of indigenous women in Buka Island, Bougainville. The self-help organisation appeared to meet the development policy objectives of PiCCA (see Box 2). After a period of negotiation between PiCCA and HWC, a field visit was organised over nine days by two of the giving circle's directors. The proposed project involved the construction of a community centre (including amenities), but other project opportunities were discussed during the site visit. The report from the site visit details meetings with HWC members, numerous community visits, cultural events, and the warm hospitality of the Buka Island residents. The following extract illustrates the observations made by PiCCA directors:

“On 7 November 2016 PiCCA Directors inspected the Hako Women's Resource Centre and noted the need for more library books, more space for community meetings and the absence of toilet and washing facilities for women escaping domestic violence. It was estimated that the safe room would be used on average once per week when the Centre is fully operational.

“PiCCA Directors also noted the considerable achievement in bringing the Resource Centre to fruition – the only such facility in the community. The library is extensively used by school groups and community members and the meeting space is used for training sessions as well as community meetings.

“Following the inspection PiCCA Directors attended the Executive Meeting of the Hako Women's Collective. 11 of the 12 executive members attended the meeting, several walking long distances in the heat to attend. Each member introduced themselves and explained their commitment to the Collective. There was discussion about the Collective's vision for the amenity block and rice mill. PiCCA Directors advised that they were impressed with the work of the Collective and its strong community support, and they understood the need for the project. PiCCA Directors explained that all decisions on funding projects were made collectively by PiCCA Members and that other projects may also be considered.”

The report from the visit concluded that the proposed project had considerable merit, and pointed out specific areas on the project proposal and budget where further work was necessary, especially areas related to long-term sustainability. The likely size of the project budget exceeded that normally funded by PiCCA and the report suggested options for co-funding from an Australian grantmaking foundation.

The site visit allowed relationships to be built, details of the proposed project to be verified, and the urgency of the project to be better determined. The partnership with HWC was subsequently agreed by PiCCA members and project funding approved. PiCCA also brokered in-kind support by connecting HWC with individuals and institutions

that provided skilled volunteering for the building project, including an architect and a building supervisor.

A Project Monitoring Visit to Sri Lanka

In 2015 PiCCA approved a grant of A\$10,000 (US\$7,500) to the Sri Lankan nonprofit, Bridging Lanka, to fund a women-led business development project. One of PiCCA's directors made a 12-day visit to Sri Lanka during the early stages of the project implementation to build partnership and monitor progress. The project report, including a table detailing observations of progress against plan, was presented to the PiCCA board the day after the visit was concluded. The table included the nonprofit's responses to the observations, indicating a high degree of participation and transparency in the observation process.

The report noted key items of progress, e.g., completion of the business planning process in a manner appropriate to the literacy and skill level of participants; construction site identification; and the perceived sense of empowerment that the

project had already made to the lives of participating women. The report also noted obstacles that would affect a successful project outcome, both external (loss of funding from a corporate donor, government policy changes) and internal (the fluctuating number of women actively participating in the project). The comprehensive report explains the complexity of project management in the local cultural and administrative environment.

Any PiCCA member can volunteer to make pre-funding and project monitoring visits, but because all travel costs are borne in full by the individual, this limits the number of people who can participate in this aspect of PiCCA's work. Member visits sometimes took place when the individuals were on business trips and could add a visit to a PiCCA project. PiCCA members or directors have made project assessment and evaluation visits to Swaziland, Nepal and Sri Lanka, but have at this stage only visited the new project in Papua New Guinea for a funding assessment.

