

# Reviving a Language

There are different ways of thinking about language revival, depending on what stage your language is in now, how many people are motivated to work on getting your language back, what resources you have in the way of people, time and money, and many other factors.

Many people like to start small, planning a specific project – maybe publishing some of the Elders' stories, making a poster of animals with their language names, or teaching children some songs in language. Small projects can be very rewarding, as you see results quickly, and then knowledge of the language spreads through what you have done.

Some communities decide to spend a few concentrated years, or however long it takes, researching and teaching the language as thoroughly as possible. This is much slower and more complex, but allows you to understand the unique words, patterns and character of your language at a much deeper level.

If your language has not been spoken as an everyday language for a long time, you will find that researching the old sources brings up many questions for your community to consider carefully. Which meanings are correct? Which words are from our language? How will we spell the language? Are we going to make new words for new ideas? Often there is no one correct answer, but everyone can gain in knowledge and confidence through the process of arriving at the answers for your community.

If your community decides to run a full language program, it will constantly grow and change in five main areas:

***It is important to take time regularly to consider where your program is up to in each of these five areas, and where it is going. Your language might be at different stages in different areas – for example, you may already have a dictionary, but not many people who know the language. Also, you will keep coming back to some stages over time – more Elders may offer to record their language knowledge, or someone writing a speech may need to create new words.***

***Talk to VACL staff about where your language is up to, where you would like to see it go, and what would be involved. We may be able to help you plan for the return of your language.***

**People and planning** – Reviving a language involves a lot of people. It needs people authorised to approve and direct a language program, people to do the detailed work of research, analysis and preparing materials, people to organise other people, times, places and money, people to teach language, people with technical and other specialist skills, people to learn and use the language, and people to develop the language – decide about 'gaps' in the records, if there should be new words, borrowed words, a spelling system etc. Some people will take on several of these roles.

**Resources and analyses** – There are three kinds of resources that may already exist: (1) people's knowledge, (2) historical records, (3) analysis of the language. Once everything is collected, more analyses will need to be done, and set out clearly, so that people can learn how to use their language again.

**Training and support** – Resources are available through VACL, including ongoing training and assistance for learning how to analyse language, how to interpret old sources, how to develop language resources, technical skills development etc. Formally accredited training is also available through TAFE and other institutions such as Koorie College (University of Sydney).

**Educational materials & opportunities** – Teaching is for adults as well as children. To teach and learn language you will need materials to use and opportunities for learning.

**Community language opportunities** – A language needs a place to live. As your language comes back into common use, more and more ways of using it need to be created and developed.