



Seven Circles of Design and Inquiry

A design approach informed by living systems and Indigenous Systems Knowledge.

October 2025



AIME

National
Futures
Initiative

TACSI

Written by the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) and The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI)

AIME

TACSI



About the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)

Born from the longest continuous human civilization, the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AUME) is an Indigenous-led global systems-change movement that has, since 2005, activated imagination and mentoring as tools for social transformation.

While originally founded to address educational inequality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, AIME has evolved over two decades into a living example of a complexity-informed system rooted in relationality, custodianship, and imagination offering a full-stack solution to the polycrisis faced by the world today.

AIME, and its newly launched relational network IMAGI-NATION, have both publicly committed to cease operations by 2033, a planned organisational death. This act is not an ending born of failure but one of organisational fulfilment; is a system, like a lifeform, has a rhythm and its end can be part of its success, not its erasure. "Our exit is not a retreat, it's a return. A return to community. A return to rhythm. A return to the land."

aimementoring.com

About The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI)

The Australian Centre of Social Innovation helps Australia learn, do and create the conditions for Social innovation.

We've spent 15 years partnering with government, philanthropy, PHNs, not-for-profits, service providers and communities to develop social innovation practices that promote imagination, systemic awareness and give real power to people at the margins.

Our work includes supporting communities to lead local change; services and policy innovation; and stretching Australia's sense of possibility for a just future.

tacsi.org.au

About AIME's IMAGI-NATION {University}

Launched in 2020 to facilitate deep learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, AIME's IMAGI-NATION {University} has become a decentralized Indigenous-led global research and development lab for humankind whose vision is to make 'higher order thinking' accessible to all through the creation of open-source knowledge and free-for-all tools. Having won the 2021 Good Design Award for 'Social Impact', the {University} has expanded AIME's network reach around the world to over 100 countries, and the 'Seven Circles' is the flagship design offering helping organisations re-orient themselves to life, and come back in relation with humans and our more-than-human kin.

aimementoring.com/imagi-nation-university/imagi-nation-university-copy



Big Story Tour, Yuin Country. Credit: Ben Knight, AIME

Acknowledgements

AIME would like to acknowledge:

We begin by acknowledging the ancient lineages of knowledge held in the landscapes of this continent now called Australia, and the enduring sovereignty of the First Peoples, who have lived in deep relation and connection with these lands, skies, and waters, and the many species that inhabit them as kin, for over 108,000 years.

We honour the custodianship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia as history as well as living breathing systems of governance, trade, ceremony, and science that is still here; still alive, still speaking through Country and still evolving. We honour also the many other species, our older siblings in many more-than- human forms, that continue to guide our work.

Steph Beck and Parul Punjabi Jagdish

TACSI would like to acknowledge:

We acknowledge the elders of the Kaurna, Peramangk, Gadigal and Bidigal lands that we have been on as we wrote this paper.

We acknowledge our ancestor, Aunty Vickey Charles, who has guided us in working with First Nations people and has generously shared her knowledge over the last decade; she will be our Aunty in Residence, always.

We acknowledge the Indigenous thinkers and writers who generously share their knowledge with the goal of better outcomes for all. And amongst them AIME, who have taken us on this Seven Circle journey to designing with Indigenous Systems Knowledge: a raft-run through rapids of personal reorienting, raucous laughter, freezing water, and performing puppets.

Chris Vanstone, Jemima Taylor, Tasman Munro, Kerry Jones, and Simone Mandl

About this paper

This is the story of a non-Indigenous organisation (TACSI) being guided through a re-orienting process using Indigenous Systems Knowledges, called the AIME IMAGI-NATION {University} Processes of Design and Inquiry, which we colloquially refer to as 'The Seven Circles'.

This paper is first narrated by AIME, who provide us with important context, and then by TACSI, who reflect on how their perspectives, and the design of the National Futures Initiative, have been reoriented.

This paper is part of a series being created through the development of the National Futures Initiative; an Australian initiative led by TACSI (and seed funded by The Paul Ramsay Foundation) that's creating opportunities for individuals, communities, and organisations to imagine and activate a more socially just future.

The National Futures Initiative is our commitment to building national capability to realise a more just future. Find out how you can be a part of it at tacsi.org.au/futures

Why this paper is important

This paper introduces frameworks and protocols that illustrate a practical process for working with Indigenous Systems Knowledges. The process is informing the design of a national initiative for all people in Australia. These same protocols could also be applied to the design of mainstream services, strategies, and policies that are grappling with complexity.

Who is this paper for?

- Non-Indigenous leaders looking to bring Indigenous Knowledges to their work
- Practitioners with an interest in Futures and Indigenous Knowledges
- People leading futuring initiatives in other countries with colonial histories
- Partners of the National Futures Initiative

Thank you to our contributors

Stephanie Beck

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Professor Song

Professor Death

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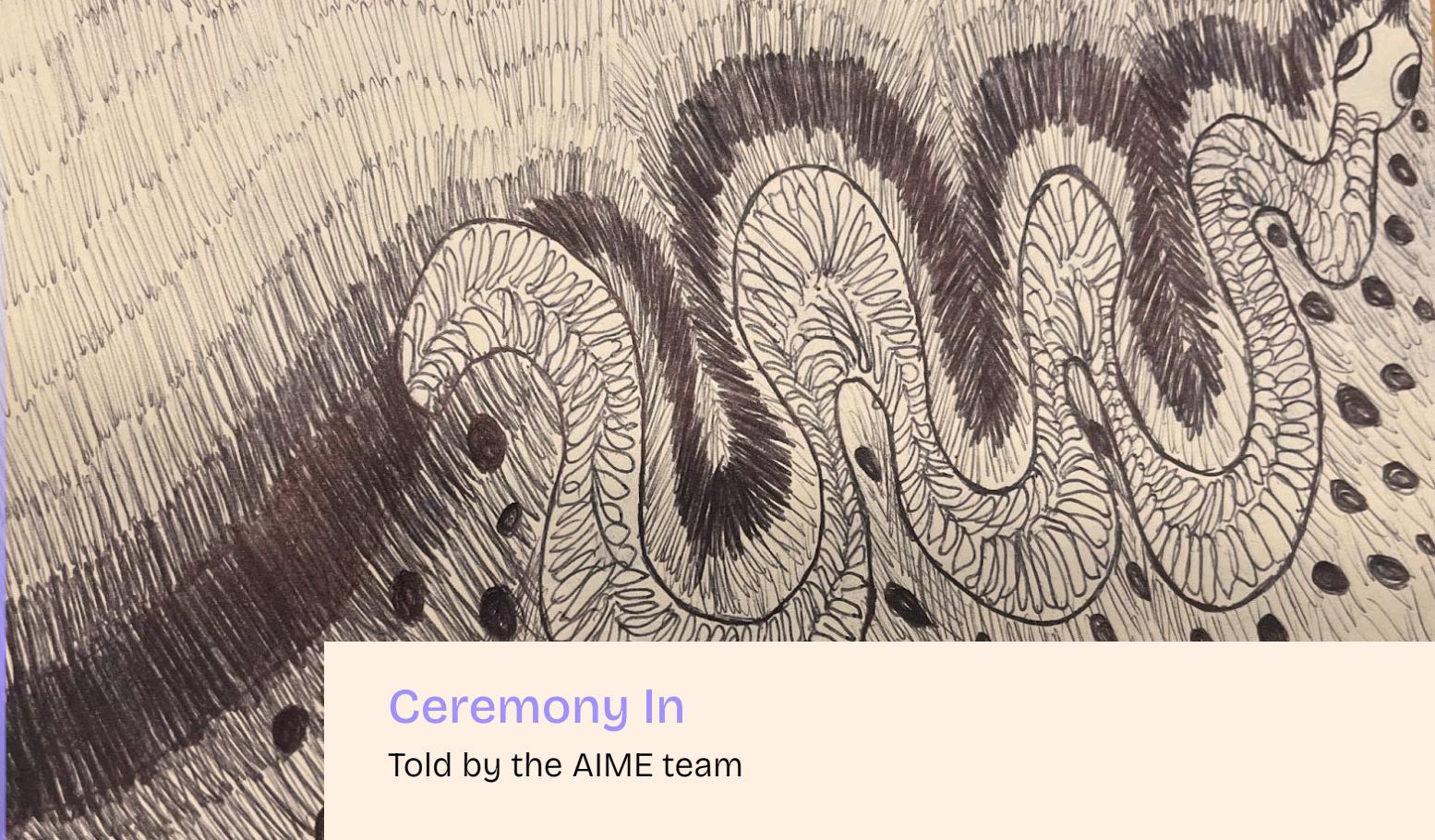
Tasman Munro

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Ceremony In

Told by the AIME team

We started by coming into Ceremony.

As part of the long lineage of knowledge that comes from Country and returns to it, we as AIME responded to a call from TACSI through the National Futures Initiative to co-create the conditions for just futures.

Together we are supporting a Ko-lab methodology to build a space where Indigenous Systems Knowledge and social innovation practice meet to shape national capability for transition.

We bring with us the gifts of entanglement: 20 years of work alongside Indigenous communities in Australia, organisational ties with the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab at Deakin University, and relations across a wider global Indigenous commons spanning all continents of Earth.

Our great hope is that we can bring the majority of humanity back into good relations with themselves, with each other, and with all the other species we inhabit this Earth with. The Seven Circles is our offering to get us there, and our working with TACSI was our first step towards sharing with the wider world and putting Indigenous Systems Knowledge at the front of the design queue.

By weaving this knowledge with TACSI's futures and systems innovation practice, Ko-lab holds the potential to expand Australia's sense of possibility, inspire charismatic demonstrations, and mobilise people for socially just transitions.

Serpent coiled back on itself as a representation of time.
Credit: Parul Jagdish,
AIME

The Seven Circles of Design and Inquiry, as unearthed by AIME, and passed down generationally in different ways, provide a deep process of coming into relation with reality, and life as it is. An understanding of the nuances of the varied dimensions and directions that life operates within, and from there finding pathways of design together, still in relation. The process is more important than the goal, not because the goal is unworthy or because it is unsure, simply because it is unrealised. The process operates in the now - in the 'where we are, and in relation to who'.

Some may say that it's strange, in a paper focused on the future, to ground so deeply in the present (and in a way in the past!). However, in Indigenous Systems Knowledge and in the Eastern Systems Knowledge, time isn't linear like in the Western worldview. Time is cyclical sometimes, often a spiral, and sometimes visually represented as a coiled-up serpent, rearing its head for every creation cycle and returning back to its coiled-up state in every cycle of dissolution.

Looking in Five Directions

Told by the AIME team

To look to the future, you have to look in many different directions (at least five):

1. **The back**, i.e. the past and the long lineage that has nurtured us and allowed us to exist, which means honouring our ancestry
2. **The bottom**, i.e. the earth and our deep inherent connection to Country, which sustains all life at all times
3. **Both sides**, i.e. the co-inhabitants of our shared planet, and invite and come into relation with all the other species who have been here much longer than us
4. **The top**, i.e. the sky and our striving towards some greater relation with the Cosmos at large, sense-made through the constellations of stars that have inspired and guided most of humanity in their many journeys
5. **The future**, i.e. forward, in relation to all the other four directions.

If the process is done right, the looking forward is not some disassociated fantasy, but a deeply grounded imagination that has potential to shape life on Earth.

This is, perhaps why, the creator spirit in Indic cultures had five heads that are chopped down to four, and almost all Indigenous cultures have some variation of a reverence towards the four cardinal directions, with the fifth chopped-off direction implied.

The future is, thus, not a disjointed construct, but a relational understanding of what comes next, naturally from understanding the entangled web of relations the other four directions present to us.

Some might consider the myth of the fifth head being chopped off to mean the loss of our capacity to look into the future, and that will not be completely off, but it will also not be entirely true.

If anything, we have lost our capacity, first and foremost to look at the present very deeply, and that naturally entails the depth of relations we bring from the past, from the earth country and the sky country, and all the other species around. If anything, it is the other directions that are chopped off that prevent our vision into the future.

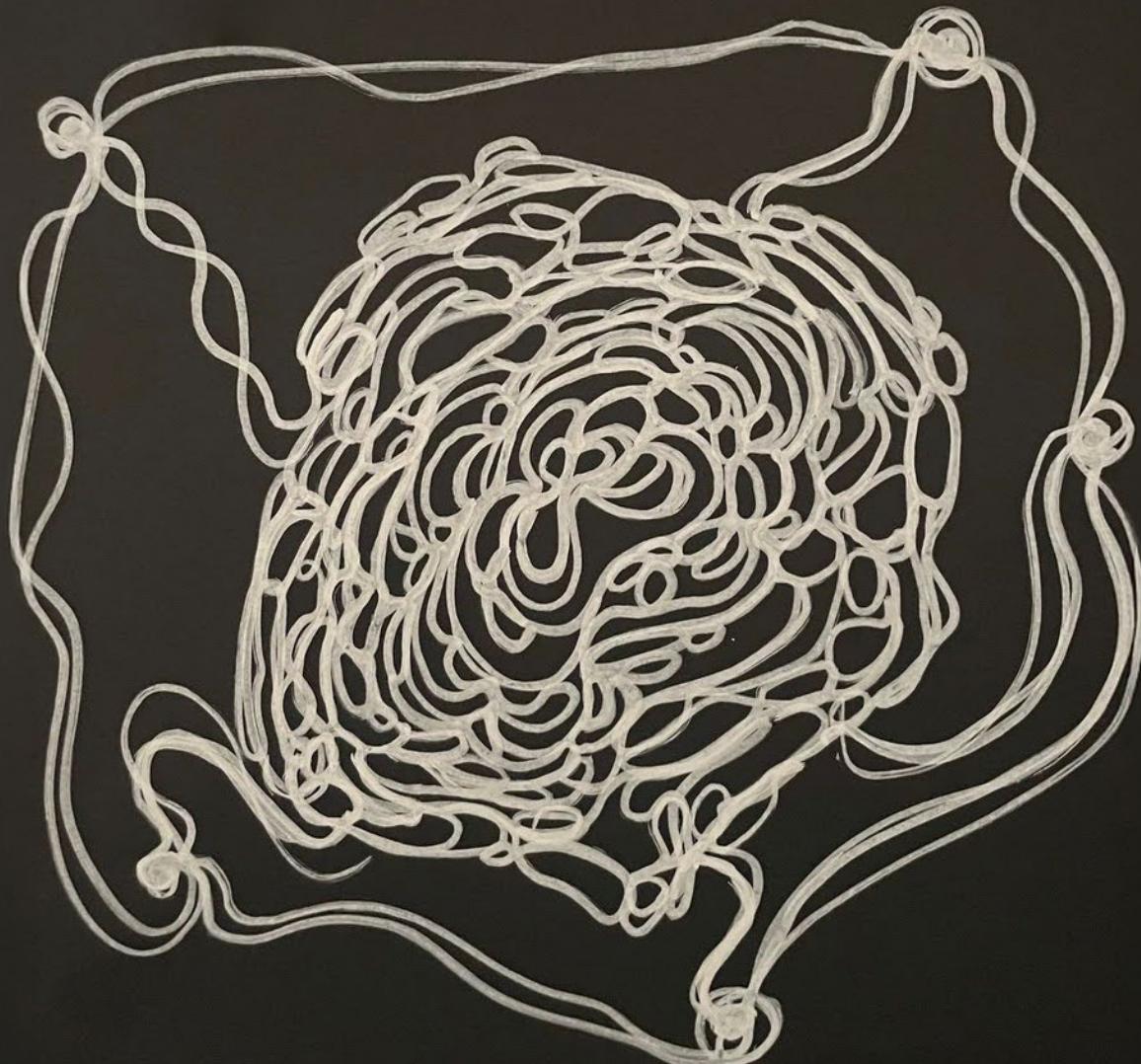
The landscapes of politics and social media influencers and everyday specialists on LinkedIn and even AI agents all have some vision of the future; there are plenty of doomsayers and utopia-sellers anywhere you look, but there is a handful of humans who are willing to fully embrace the past, the present and the web of relations all around us at all times.

And so, the Seven Circles offer a pathway back into the first four directions, so the fifth may be illuminated. It is, essentially, returning to the right relations that unlocks our pathways to the future.

"To know where you are going, you first have to know where you have come from."

Inuit proverb

Map of five directions (as featured in the movie IMAGINE¹). Credit: Stephanie Beck, AIME



¹ IMAGINE is a 'co-created animated feature film blending Indigenous knowledge with cutting-edge technology'. Developed through IMAGI-NATION {TV} with contributions from over 150 young people, 18 schools, and global guests, it follows 15-year-old Kim and their alien canine Jeff on a journey exploring identity, freedom, and imagination as a force for change. Led by Jack Manning Bancroft and Tyson Yunkaporta, and produced with 408 Productions and Vizion Studios, IMAGINE represents a groundbreaking new model of collaborative storytelling. You can learn more about the film here: <https://www.aimementoring.com/tools/imagine-film>



Sea the Weed. Credit:
Stephanie Beck, AIME

A word of caution

Do not take this paper as the ultimate solution. It was created as a tool for sense-making together, and a way to share the insights from a journey that team AIME undertook alongside team TACSI over five sessions spread over six weeks.

This was after an already elaborate process of the two organisations coming into deep relation, including some of team TACSI coming on AIME's 'Big Story'² Tour, and the two teams meeting in person at AIME's HQ in Addi Road, and some of team TACSI going underwater with team AIME to connect to the other species that team AIME are in deep relation with, i.e. Crayweed.³

Note also that we had Indigenous Systems Knowledge holders from team AIME shepherding the non-Indigenous team at TACSI towards a shared understanding of our role as humans, and so the protocols of Embassy and philanthropy were utilised as needed.

And yet, it must be remembered still that the whole journey will not be found in the words below, nor will the wisdom therein.

What you'll find within this paper is an invitation to come back into relation in words. As we say in Indic cultures, 'the fingers pointing to the moon are not the moon' (and yet if you follow the direction they indicate, you will come to find the moon).

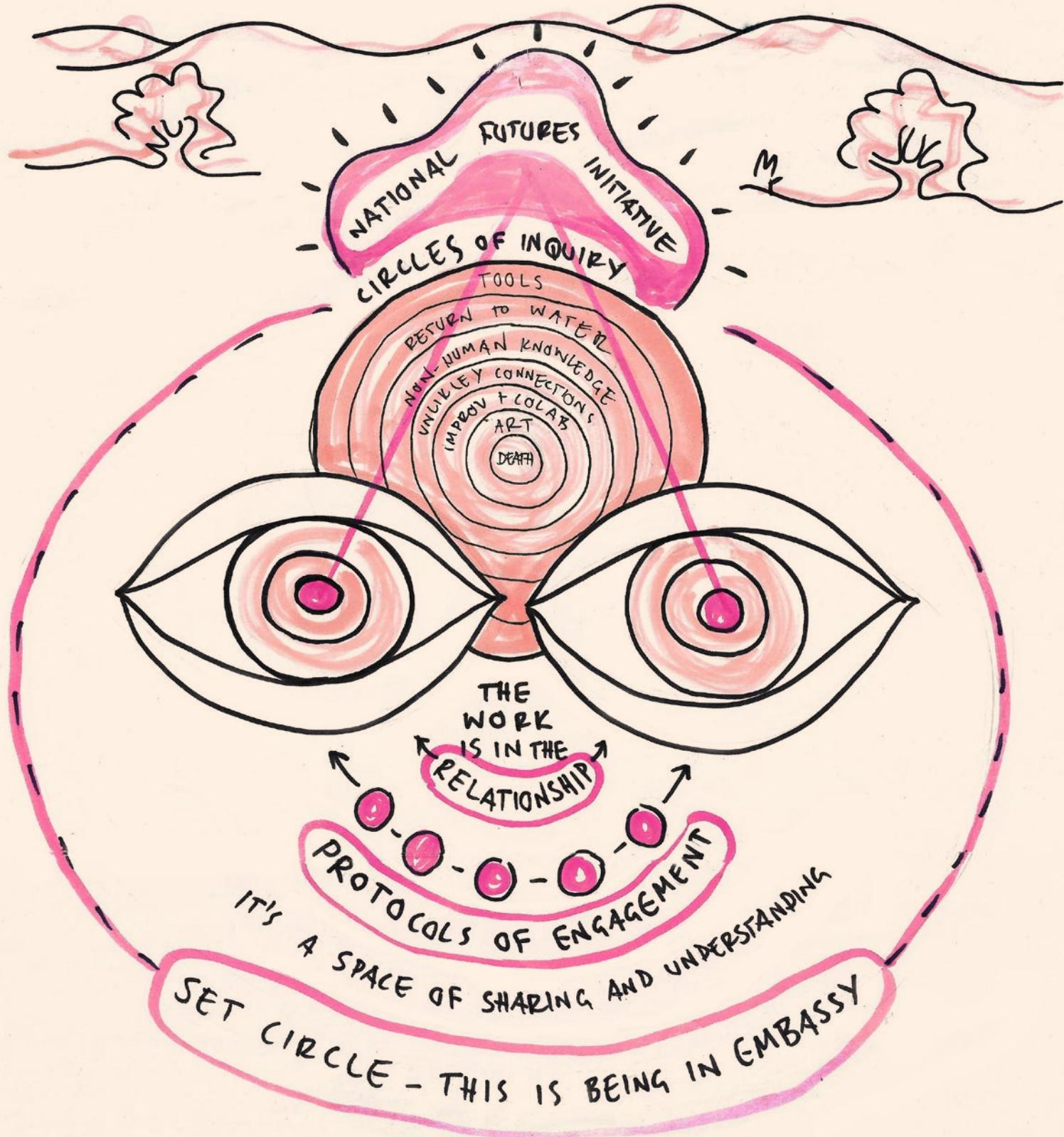
So follow the words within with care, as they are a space for team TACSI to reflect on the journey they went through with us, at a particular point in time in a particular place, and what changed for them over this period.

And then, if the journey excites you, come join us for a journey of your own, to experience this change, which can never be captured or transmitted in the words within, and yet the words point to this transformation, and yet, the words invite you back into relations. Are you ready to walk the walk?

² At the end of 2024, Jemima and Tasman from TACSI went on AIME's 'Big Story' tour. The tour involves a journey of immersion and imagination as the troupe follow songlines across Australia connecting with Indigenous Knowledge Holders, schools and communities along the way. For AIME's invitation to you to join 'Big Story' see: <https://aime.my.canva.site/big-story>

³ Sea the Weed is a partnership with Operation Crayweed, a program led by the Sydney Institute of Marine Science (Macquarie University, UNSW, University of Sydney, UTS) to reforest crayweed along Sydney's coastline. In collaboration with AIME and the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab, the initiative integrates First Nations wisdom and ceremony, with monthly gatherings where community members and scientists learn, connect, and swim with the regenerating crayweed forests.

LANDSCAPE OF POSSIBILITY



Two-Eyed Being. Doodle made while coming into the embassy and participating in the first circle. Credit: Tasman Munro, TACSI

Two-Eyed Seeing

Told by the AIME team

The methodology we employed to design the Seven Circles has helped us bring Indigenous Knowledge Systems thinking to the front of the design queue. It's also helped redesign our pathway to exploring the futures work required of Australia and to find our place in the world properly.⁴

This has parallels with and also acknowledges the work of our First Nations friends in Canada and their thinking around two-eyed seeing, which team TACSI playfully invited us to expand into a 'two-eyed being' vision for the world.

Two-Eyed Seeing is a basis in viewing the world through both Western and Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. Two-Eyed Seeing was introduced by Mi'kmaq Elders, Albert D. Marshall and Murdena Marshall from Eskasoni First Nation, alongside Cape Breton University (CBU) professor Cheryl Bartlett.

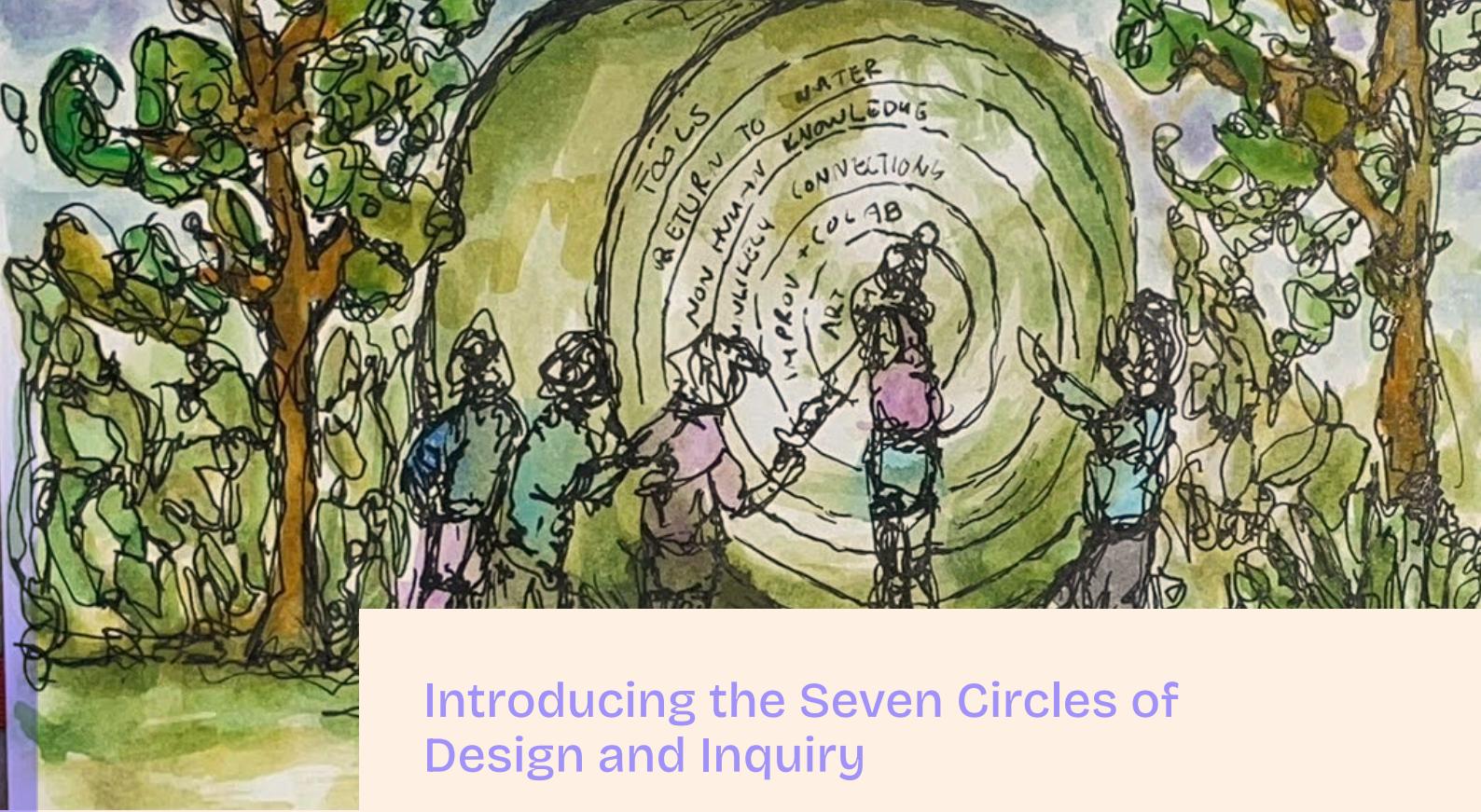
Albert Marshall describes Two-Eyed Seeing as an approach to viewing the world "from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together"⁵

We know that when we need to focus, say looking through an imaginary telescope into the future, we sometimes need to close one eye for greater focus.

At this stage, societally in Australia, the eye that is open is the Western worldview. We would love to activate the other eye for proper two-eyed vision, and know that for focus, we relationally navigate the closing of one eye from time to time as needed.

⁴ This video provides a visualisation for working with Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges for healthier systems. See: <https://vimeo.com/876262457>

⁵ Bartlett C, Marshall M, Marshall A. Two-Eyed Seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together Indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing. *J Environ Stud Sci* 2012;2:331-340.



Introducing the Seven Circles of Design and Inquiry

The Seven Circles illustrated on a water tank that was rolled into place on a property in Milton as part of AIME's Big Story tour. Credit: Stephanie Beck, AIME

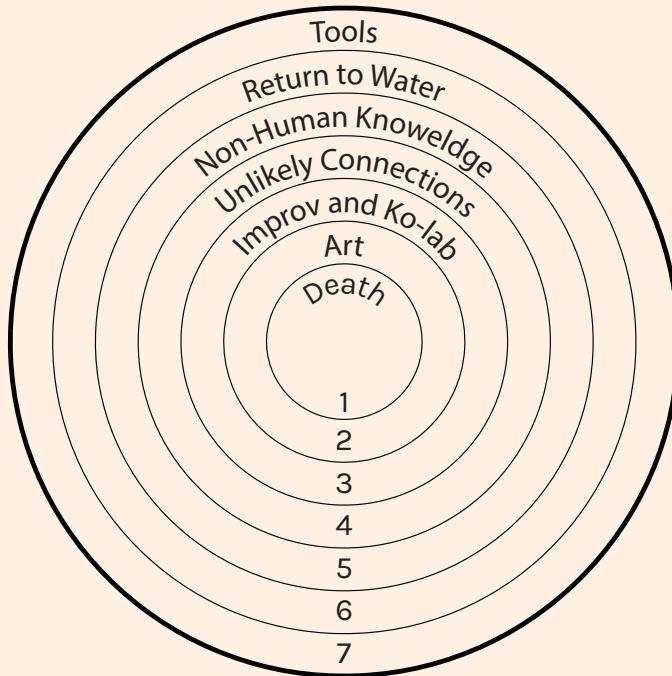
The AIME IMAGI-NATION {University} Processes of Design and Inquiry, colloquially referred to as 'The Seven Circles' is a framework, first formulated in 2024. It was designed for working with Indigenous Systems Knowledges that is informed by AIME's 20 years experience of social innovation and tens of thousands of years of Indigenous Knowledges, from the Australian continent and beyond.

The seven circles are:

1. **Designing with Death:** Death helps get us out of culture, releases us from competition and helps us orientate with everyone.
2. **Art:** Art and imagination help move energy and people through creativity.
3. **Improv and Ko-lab:** Making and creating together helps build trust and understanding with others, through play.
4. **Unlikely Connections:** Connecting with intelligence beyond the margins of our existing networks helps us expand our imagination.
5. **Non-Human Knowledge:** Learning from Country and creatures can teach us how and what to design.
6. **Return to Water:** Connecting to water as a life-force helps us remember our relation to life.
7. **Tools:** Sharing resources freely for all to stimulate positive change and enable shared knowledge systems.

When these knowledges are brought alive, by coming into embassy with knowledge holders, they provide a practical approach to bringing Indigenous Systems Knowledges to the design of services, programs, policy, organisations and life.

And now let's handover to team TACSI to share their experience of the journey.



Designing using the Seven Circles

Told by the TACSI team (Jemima, Tasman, Chris, Kerry, Simone), who reflect on their experience of coming into embassy with AIME, being introduced to the Seven Circles of Design and Inquiry, and applying the methodology to the design of the National Futures Initiative.

In our last paper ["Practices for realising just futures"](#), we wrote about how engaging with a diversity of knowledges is essential to expanding our sense of possibility for the future.

From a distance, the Seven Circles seemed like a practical way to do just that and shape the design of the National Futures Initiative through knowledge from living systems and Indigenous Systems Knowledge.

The reorientation that Circles created for us has now helped us shape an initiative that is lighter, more distributed, more relational and more ambitious. The process unlocked ways to do what we told our funders we could never do with the resources we have.

The experience took place online over five video calls with people (and puppets) joining from Kaurna, Peramangk, Gadigal, Bidjigal, Gumbaynggirr, Bindal and Wulgurukaba lands across Australia, and sometimes in Paris and Amsterdam.

During this time we met in person at AIME's HQ on Gadigal country, swam with crayweed off the coast of Bidigal land and moved through Gadigal, Bidjigal, Tharawal/Dharawal and Yuin lands on the Big Story tour.

Reflections on: Coming into Embassy

Told by the TACSI team

"A journey to the nexus of Indigenous wisdom and Western thought begins with an important realization, that both are equal but differentiated."

Melanie Goodchild

The experience

Coming into Embassy was the first step of our journey. Steph and PJ from AIME set circle to establish the cultural protocols for working deeply and respectfully with Aboriginal knowledge.

We explored the following protocols⁶:

- Our ambassadors have been invited into and are in their varied journeys of re-orientation to come back into right relations with all our kin, including our other species family (who)
- Our ambassadors carry culture and message (how)
- Our ambassadors carry gifts of entanglement (what)
- Our ambassadors carry responsibility for learning, listening and kin making (why)
- Our ambassadors expect to leave with nothing but new relationships and deeper entanglement (death in design)

Important to note: Money, and the seeking/accepting of it, can only be in service of expanded relationships and the health of the whole system (which system, because this system thrives off a Law of unequal exchange).

6 Unpublished, AIME

What did coming into Embassy make us think?

"The protocols helped me understand how I needed to show up throughout the sessions and have guided how I've referred to and drawn from this knowledge following them. There is a responsibility to share and many contexts that could benefit from what we learnt - but the conditions need to be right and it can't be extractive."

Jemima, TACSI

"The embassy protocol around money - 'the seeking/accepting of it, can only be in service of expanded relationships and the health of the whole system' really struck me as a smart and systemic way to do business. A different way to guide relations involving money."

Chris, TACSI

"Expect to leave with nothing but new relationships and deeper entanglement" was such an unleashing protocol, to let go of any expectations other than relationship and deeper entanglement ultimately readied me for the journey we shared, the possibilities that emerged and the emotion that came with letting go of things too tightly held.'

Kerry, TACSI

What does this mean for the National Futures Initiative?

The protocols and processes of Embassy are influencing how we are in this work and how we're inviting others to come into relation with one another.

These protocols will now guide people's initial experiences with the National Futures Initiative, how we foster unlikely connections and how we set circle in the journey together.

The protocols will also continue to guide our relationship with AIME and with other knowledge holders who journey through the initiative.



Parul Punjabi Jagdish



Chris on Kauma Land



Stephani Beck



Reflections on Circle 1: Death

Told by the TACSI team

Professor Death leads a meditation on death via Zoom, from Paris, supported by Parul Jagdish.

"Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect."

Chief Seattle, Leader of the Suquamish and Duwamish Native American tribes

The experience

The Seven Circles start with death. We explored the role of death in our natural systems as part of a cycle, rather than an ending. We reflected on how this changed the way we see ourselves and our relationship to the systems around us. We were prompted to reflect on questions including:

- How does letting go enable your organisation to move forward?
- What outdated structures or beliefs need to die to make space for joy?
- What needs to be released to create a healthier system

Professor Death took us through a meditation and visualisation experience, portraying the death of self, based on a traditional South Indian commencement of education initiation ceremony.

In this meditation, Professor Death asked us to close our eyes and imagine ourselves floating above a fire, surrounded by our close relatives and friends. During this meditation, we connected to our loved ones, but also to Country.

We also learnt how AIME use puppets as a way to get outside of the limits of human knowledge (and the potential for corruption of humans through the holding of knowledge) and find their freedom and imagination, as well as the ability to connect with other species. This practice itself is built on lineages of puppetry used in several Indigenous cultures worldwide.

What did Circle 1 make us think?

"I was initially incredibly resistant to being asked to explore death so explicitly. I saw death as in-opposition to life, hope, joy, progress and love... but starting from a place of death helped me to see that death is intertwined and inseparable from life."

Jemima, TACSI

"Thinking about something from the perspective of your dead self helps you see outside yourself and the ecosystem around you. Removing yourself from life gives you a stronger appreciation for life and being a good ancestor and designing for future generations. It's a release because you realise how many social norms and constraints drop away because you're dead."

Chris, TACSI

"PJ's visualisation asked us to de-centre ourselves and our loved ones in order to see our relational connection to all living things. That this is our legacy. In the days following, I am thinking a lot about my living experience of death and how clarifying it can be around the life we want to live and the legacy we hope to create. I am thinking about death and my own compulsion to create. Or the drive to deny our own death through the creation of legacy."

Simone, TACSI

"The visualisation and reflection is an invitation to let go of western constructs of time to sit with cycles of life and death and truly explore what's possible. When you embrace death the unhelpful beliefs and constructs go to the background, freeing your heart and mind."

Kerry, TACSI

Visual reflections on the implications of death for the National Futures Initiative.
Credit: Chris Vanstone, TACSI





What does this mean for the National Futures Initiative?

The experience of Circle 1 made us reflect deeply on the unlocking potential of starting with death.

It has led us to prompt National Futures Initiative participants to also reflect on death and collapse (some of these will be facilitated by Professor Death, in-person, or in a pre-recorded video).

In addition, reflecting on decay and rebirth over time has led us to take a more dispersed approach to the design of the initiative. We've now designed ways that participants in the initiative can run 'just futuring experiences' in their own network without direct support from the initiative itself, and we're working on ways to keep the ideas surfaced in the futuring conversations alive and evolving for participants over time.

Professor Death by
Stephanie Beck

Reflections on Circle 2 & 3: Art, Improv and Ko-lab

Told by the TACSI team

"The most powerful Spinifex paintings have been collaborations... giant canvases in which each artist weaves their personality and history into a shared identity as one people."

John Carty, co-author of "Sun & Shadow: Art of the Spinifex People"⁷

The experience

In Circle 2 and Circle 3, we explored the role and potential of collaborative art making, guided by Indigenous protocols.

Steph read us a passage from the book "Sun & Shadow: Art of the Spinifex People" written by John Carty and Luke Scholes. This book tells the story of the Spinifex people, who have lived on their ancestral homelands in the Great Victoria Desert since time immemorial. Their lives were disrupted by the Maralinga atomic tests, but after returning home they began to fight for recognition, developing a powerful collaborative art-making tradition. Steph shared her experience of using art as a way to make sense of and share knowledge with others.

We were introduced to the idea of Ko-lab or Ko-design⁸ as a collaborative process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, grounded in Indigenous protocols of engagement. The Kriol-inspired "K" is a reminder of our kinship responsibilities, while also distinguishing it from the "co-" in co-design, which is often tied to extractive and unequal practices in Western contexts.

PJ shared how AIME uses collective art making when developing their organisation strategy, and to get us into the collaborative and creative zone, Professor Song helped us write and sing a song together.

Then, using a western storytelling structure – the 'Story Spine'⁹ (also known as Pixar's story structure) we collectively co-wrote a story about the origins of and our hope for the National Futures Initiative.

⁷ This quote by John Carty, features in the 2015 *Tarnanthi Catalogue*. *Tarnanthi* (tar-nan-dee), a Kaurna word meaning "to rise, come forth, spring up or appear," evokes the energy of new beginnings and the imagination's power to bring ideas to life. As the inaugural Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, Tarnanthi showcases the creativity of more than 300 artists from across Australia, celebrating diverse voices and bold expressions.

⁸ You can hear more about Ko-lab and Ko-design on this podcast with Tyson Yunkaporta and Jack Manning-Bancroft [here](#).

⁹ Memon, M. (2022, April 6). The Story Spine (also known as Pixar's Story Structure). StoryPrompt. <https://www.storyprompt.com/blog/the-story-spine-also-known-as-pixars-story-structure>

What did Circles 2 and 3 make us think?

"The collaborative mark making of the Spinifex painters stuck with me. It was where art met improv, and I saw it as a space for collective time travel, where reality is softened to become malleable where communities can intuitively flow between past, present and future, reworking lines, emphasising the glimmers, and covering parts we don't need or want to share."

Tasman, TACSI

"I think the pace of the improv and Ko-lab session helps you to lose your inhibitions as a part of the creative process. There wasn't time to overthink what you were going to contribute, and the process was so generative and collective there wasn't a sense of judgement which allowed for silliness and joy and for unique ideas to emerge."

Jemima, TACSI

"Going through the process of 'Ko-lab' with a 'K' was really different to the process of co-design with a 'c'. The 'K' calls out what might be invisible to non-indigenous participants and reminds us that even though we tell ourselves we're doing work in collaborative ways and bring people together in equal power balance, there will always be a cultural bias in that the process of 'co-design' originates from a western context."

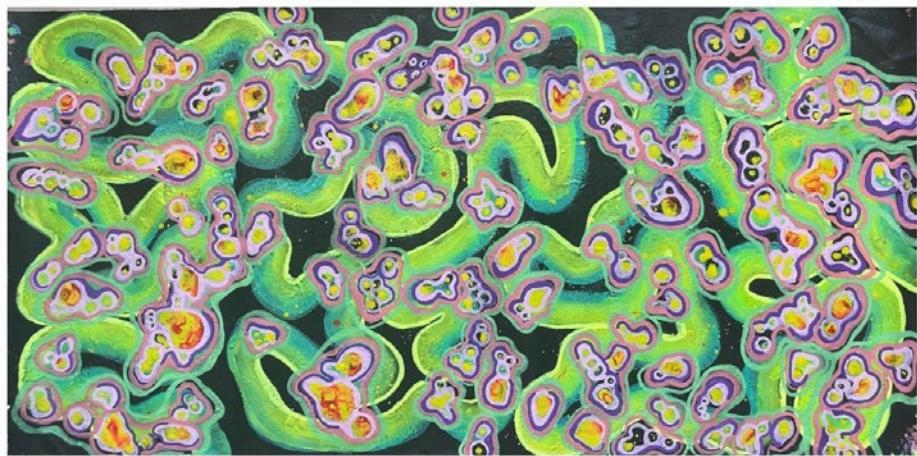
Chris, TACSI

"A big part of the The National Futures Initiative is supporting communities to shape their own futures. These Circles reminded me that art is one of those community approaches to futuring, it's a tool communities have used for a long time to gather, reflect, look forward, and mobilise people in new directions."

Tasman, TACSI

Excerpt from our
collaboratively
written story about
the National Futures
Initiative.

Let's write this story together of the National Futures Initiative –



(Start from the origin)

→ Once upon a time, this time and this place there was a river known as **WHAT**, it has been flowing through the land for lonerg then any of us could imagine, but the past 250 years has not been kind to it, the water, its all murky now and the fish who used to pass through rock traps and fill bellies have thinned beyond recognition. There are farms up stream and factories down and the sheer weight of forgetting to listen to the river have taken its toll ...

What does this mean for the National Futures Initiative?

The collaborative story telling helped our team explore and align about the bigger story we wanted for the initiative itself, and the bigger picture that the initiative is operating within.

It was also fun and got ideas flowing, as did collaboratively writing and singing a song, even if that was something we were all somewhat unfamiliar with.

A big part of the The National Futures Initiative is supporting diverse groups of participants to shape their own futures. We're looking forward to using collective art making as a practice to bring people together; to have concrete conversations about abstract concepts, to serve as a platform for the exchange of diverse knowledges, histories and perspectives; and to create a shared vision and identity.



Professor Song



Professor Song leads a collaborative song writing approach.



What does this mean for TACSI?

We experienced this circle just as we were planning how to approach two days of whole team strategy development at TACSI. Inspired by the collaborative art making practice, we decided we would offer our teams canvases, paints, and making materials.

In groups, people were asked to paint a picture of TACSI's possible future relations with First Nations Peoples. Then, we collectively built a cardboard model of the future TACSI and our evolving relations, and gathered video recordings to share between our teams in Redfern and Adelaide. The work we did set the foundation of our new strategies, and the canvases sit in our meeting rooms as a reminder of the vision and conversations.

Artwork created to document TACSI's future relations with First Nations people.
Credit: The TACSI team





Stephanie Beck

Reflections on Circle 4: Unlikely Connections

Told by the TACSI team

"When each new connection is unlikely, the previously established networks unravel, the patterns of specialisation and race and culture and nations and fixed mindsets evaporate, and the space in between is humankind. In the complexities, we find deep commonalities, like our imagination, our ability to laugh, our relationships with nature, our feelings of love."

Jack Manning Bancroft, Founder of AIME, co-author of "Hoodie Economics"

The experience

Before the session, we listened to 'Surviving Dunbar at Scale', a podcast by Tyson Yunkaporta with Jack Manning Bancroft and evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar.

In the podcast, Tyson, Jack and Robin explore Dunbar numbers, the limits of human relational capacity, AIME's digital nation IMAGI-NATION¹⁰, non-human relations and the global universality of imagination and nature.

In Circle 4, we explored the benefit of seeking out the marginal intelligence that sits on the edges of our system. We were invited to consider and reflect on a time when we had connected with someone in an unlikely way and share what new perspectives emerged from this experience.

We also explored the way that unlikely connections can relate to each other in different ways, like forming 'stacks' and fractals encompassing five layers of: land, knowledge, community, embassy and human/non-human actors.

10 You can explore AIME's digital nation, IMAGI-NATION, [here](#).

What did Circle 4 make us think?

"Reflecting on unlikely connections I'd experienced with people throughout my life highlighted how much energy I get from exposure to ideas or people outside of my usual frame of reference. Since the session, I've intentionally started to seek out and put time into finding connections with unlikely people."

Jemima, TACSI

"It's made me think that supporting unlikely connections is not only about opening imagination, it supports deep system change by pushing against polarisation. We see this in our response to climate action where we have all the solutions but politics and conflict get in the way of collective action. But it's important to move past connections to relationships. It's not as easy as throwing diverse folks in a room together, there's a responsibility to then hold space for people to find common ground or hold those differences well"

Tasman, TACSI

"Cautionary tales around scale – heartbeats and whales. Five small fractals from which you can scale. Roles composted and recycled. Everything has to have the conditions to emerge. Everything needs an environment to emerge in. I love this."

Simone, TACSI

"When you're setting up a process, it's so easy to bring together the likely suspects. If we want a different type of process to happen, and for new ideas to flow, we need to curate for this by bringing in an array of perspectives, norms and cultures. Our typical ways of working and our general specialisation make serendipitous connections less and less likely."

Chris, TACSI

"I left this session still reflecting on the unlikely connection I chose to explore, and how grateful I am to have been challenged and also embraced by that person. I enjoy fostering connections between people who might not otherwise cross paths, and this circle took that impetus to a much deeper level, leaving me with wonder and excitement about how we genuinely create space for unlikely connections in this work."

Kerry, TACSI



Stephanie Beck¹¹

¹¹ These drawings, by Stephanie Beck, highlight the way knowledge generated through unlikely connections can be stacked and layered. These stacks and layers are not static but flows of knowledge that move through all things human and non-human.

What does this mean for the National Futures Initiative?

The book "Hoodie Economics"¹² by AIME founder Jack Manning Bancroft had already convinced us of the value of unlikely connections (we wrote about them in our last paper "Practices for realising just futures"¹³) and this circle substantiated that further.

This circle helped us think about how, in the National Futures Initiative, we create spaces intimate enough for relationships to grow and distributed enough for a movement bigger than ourselves to emerge.

Since the circle, we've started recruiting people into two 'networks of unlikely connections', one focussed on the future of childhood, one on the future of community. [Read more about that here.](#)

For each network we will curate a group of 30 participants so that we have a diversity of people across age, gender, income, sector (government, community, business, creatives) and cultures, including First Nations cultures.

A pivotal moment in these networks will be 'deep futuring conversations' where participants will be in groups of five unlikely connections ('unlikely fives' being another concept explored in "Hoodie Economics").

Participants in the networks will experience unlikely fives conversations three times; twice with diverse participants online, and one with diverse participants in their bioregion.

Next we'll be exploring how we can support participants to set up unlikely connections within their own networks, with the goal to diversify the knowledge they can bring together.

¹² In Hoodie Economics, Jack Manning Bancroft "builds a values system revolution that centres a relational economy, offering urgent and transformative solutions to embrace Indigenous thinking and ideas from outside the margins and pushing the focus from capitalism to relationships – from the people in suits to the people in hoodies." You can access a copy of Hoodie Economics [here](#).

¹³ You can read our Paper exploring Practices for Realising Just Futures [here](#).



TACSI and friends after going underwater at Sea the Weed in July 2025

Reflections on Circle 5 & 6: Non-Human Knowledge and Return to Water

Told by the TACSI team

"We've been colonized by a certain mental models—that true knowledge is only something that's written or can be counted or even observed."

Melanie Goodchild

The experience

During this session, we were invited to consider the knowledge of non-human and more-than-human beings. We each selected a non-human/more-than-human entity – a flower, a tree, the water in our body, some mince pies – and shared what the world might look like from that being's perspective.

We explored the knowledge and memory that water holds and were encouraged to 'get underwater' as part of our homework.

We also participated in a 'Sea the Weed'¹⁴ experience alongside AIME, during which Arthur Little and Brenden Newton took us through a cultural ceremony as Grandfather Sun rose over the water.

Brenden told us about the science behind the Sea The Weed project involving the re-foresting of crayweed alongside the east coast of Sydney. We were able to get under the water and dive down to see the re-forested cray weed growing along the sea floor.

¹⁴ Sea the Weed is a partnership with Operation Crayweed, a program led by the Sydney Institute of Marine Science (Macquarie University, University of New South Wales, University of Sydney and the University of Technology Sydney) to reforest crayweed along Sydney's coastline. In collaboration with AIME and the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Lab, the initiative integrates First Nations wisdom and ceremony, with monthly gatherings where community members and scientists learn, connect, and swim with the regenerating crayweed forests.

What did Circles 5 and 6 make us think?

"It made me think about knowledge as water, that it's best flowing freely in and through Country, if we try to own, commodify and control it we remove its essence as the nurturer of life."

Tasman, TACSI

"Everything happens in place, even the larger initiatives that involve national or international networks stretch across some area of Country, which holds its unique wisdom and story. How do we maintain a place based lens at this bigger scale to ensure we're always working in dialogue with Country?"

Tasman, TACSI

"Being asked to think like a tree, which I think I did a really bad job of, makes you realise how hard it is to do. But, asking 'what does the tree want?' feels like it could guide your decision making in a different way. It feels like a more generative approach than asking 'How do we minimise carbon emissions?', as it holds a lot more complexity."

Chris, TACSI

"I think seeing knowledge and potential in all beings, human or non-human, is a quality that most of us have as children but lose as we age. I remember thinking about the world from the perspective of my soft toy animals... or turning a cardboard box into a whole world as a child. It was hard to tap back into that mindset as an adult. But I also think it sparks qualities of wonder, curiosity and possibility that are incredibly re-energising."

Jemima, TACSI

"The 'Water is life' circle had a profound influence on my thinking. I found myself making sense of complex systems through water systems, imagining flows of knowledge and ways of being within and across communities, learning more about how an ecosystem changes when waterflows are cared for and how we apply this to the National Futures Initiative."

Kerry, TACSI

What could this mean for the National Futures Initiative?

This circle has led us to reflect on how we include non-human knowledge as part of the National Futures initiative. We've not fully resolved this at the time of writing, but we are working with AIME, who have now come on board as Indigenous Systems Knowledge partners for the initiative, to shape a ceremony into the initiative that helps us keep non-human intelligence in mind from the outset.

With AIME's encouragement we've also started to explore what might be a custodial species for TACSI as an organisation, and we've made a strategic commitment to explore how we bring nature into our decision making and governance, we'll be doing that at an upcoming team camp.

Credit: Stephanie Beck





Reflections on Circle 7: Tools

Told by the TACSI team

Professor Blue and the digital message stick.

A knowledge-keeper must share knowledge because she or he is a custodian of miniature creation events that must continually take place in the minds of people coming into knowledge.

Tyson Yunkaporta, Sand Talk

The experience

In Circle 7, Steph talked about the value of collective meaning-making and tool-making. We learnt about tool creation as a way to encode and materialise knowledge so it can be shared and understood.

If we change the way we encode, share and evaluate impact and knowledge we are able to fundamentally shift systems.

We watched an animation of Professor Blue introducing a digitally augmented talking stick carved by Tyson Yunkaporta as an example of a tool (specifically a way to track the impact of AIME's work).

What did Circle 7 make us think?

"Toolmaking is a mindset, a practice and a responsibility. Steph has an incredible ability to translate knowledge into tools, to make the implicit explicit and possible to use, share and build on."

Tasman, TACSI

"The tools that someone holds plays an important role in defining their identity and the way they see and interact with the world. Imagine engaging a carpenter, dance teacher or accountant, and how different your experience is with each as your interaction is mediated through the tools they use and the things you create together. This session made me ask what identity and experience do we want to offer as an Initiative and how can we create tools to support this?"

Tasman, TACSI

"Meaning-making objects like drawings or carvings can serve as super tools for imagination, activating energy and helping us get unstuck. I was inspired by Steph's use of drawing as a reflective tool. Her drawings facilitate and inspire a kind of 'felt learning' – a bodily experience that influences our thoughts, perceptions, and behaviours."

Simone, TACSI

"Something that continues to live in me from this circle is the reflection that "for knowledge to live, it needs to be shared". It challenged me to consider how through the National Futures Initiative we can make sense together and foster rich knowledge exchange, especially in a world driven by imparting information."

Kerry, TACSI

What could this mean for the National Futures Initiative?

The discussion in this circle about open access tools and sharing knowledge prompted us to think more carefully about the ways that we share knowledge in the initiative, and our responsibility for sharing knowledge created by participants as tools.

While we don't yet know how we'll do this, we've already started to explore the tools and experiences that might enable people directly participating in the network to carry knowledge from the futures network into their own network of relations.

This circle was also the igniting force to create this paper so that we could share our experiences with you. It's also helped us forge an ongoing collaboration between TACSI and AIME, which will soon extend to sharing the Seven Circles approach through the [TACSI Learning Hub](#), so you too can learn with Steph, PJ and the professors.

Reflections Out

Told by the TACSI team

Five of us from TACSI rolled with AIME around the seven circles over six weeks. Individually, we all experienced different things, but what the experience gave us all was time and space and stories and tools to explore and question beliefs that were unexplored, and seemed 'natural'.

The process was a helpful, deep and consistently joyful disorientation from our norms. We came away from the experience feeling re-oriented to living system and Indigenous Systems Knowledge.

In terms of shaping the design of the National Futures Initiative, his reorientation has and is helping us create an initiative that is lighter, more distributed, more relational and more ambitious.

The process unlocked ways to do what we told our funders we could never do with the resources we have (for example, by choosing to work in a more distributed and organic way). We will also replicate these patterns of thought for people participating in the initiative.

And excitedly, AIME has now joined the initiative as Indigenous Systems Knowledge Partners, which means they'll continue to inform the design and experience of the initiative.

And in the bigger picture of social innovation in Australia, the Seven Circles offers a way to work with Indigenous Knowledges through complexity, and for social justice, in a way that is accessible, fun and profound.

This is a process that could and should be used in any mainstream design process; for a strategy, service, system or business. That's why we wanted to share our experience with you in this paper, and why we're partnering with AIME to create learning experiences that open up access so more folks can roll with the circles.

And now back to AIME to lead us out of this paper...

Told by the AIME team

For us at AIME, it was a thrill of joy and a sense of right relationship to take team TACSI through the process of the Seven Circles. Team TACSI came in the right way with the right relational approach from the outset, never tried to extract the knowledges or take them out of context, and were always willing to give of their time and attention and came in eager to learn.

It is our great hope that we can bring the majority of humanity back into right relations with themselves, with each other, and with all the other species we inhabit this Earth with, and the Seven Circles work is our offering to get us there.

Ceremony Out

We conclude this paper with an invitation to go deeper:

"Once you have a Ceremony In to relations, there is no Ceremony Out. You cannot fall out of relations – and the privileges and the responsibilities they bestow – once you come into right relationships. They endure for the duration of your life, and even in death they continue."

AIME

So, consider this your call to come into relation with us at AIME.

For AIME x TACSI:

Teams AIME & TACSI are now deeply woven together and are working on the National Futures Initiative together as noted above. Some of the threads that bind us deeper include:

TACSI are now one of the 150 Custodians of AIME's relational network IMAGINATION and we're in the process of working out what a 'Trade Agreement' looks like between our new nation and its many custodians including TACSI.

For other organisations who do the work of Seven Circles with us, there may be similar opportunities to jointly steward one of the first relational networks in the world via a trade agreement.

As part of our philosophy of relational economics - refer to the book 'Hoodie Economics' by AIME founder - TACSI are in the process of receiving a custom-made Hoodie that honours our relationship to date, and their graduation with Honours from IMAGI-NATION {University} and also as an MoU of our future work together on the Futures Initiative and beyond.

Jointly, we are running an online course for other groups and organisations on the Seven Circles in early 2026, with a webinar for people interested set for 18 November 2025. The intent is to create an open-source tool over time on the Seven Circles that can then be shared freely with the world.

For you who reads this:

Experience what we speak of firsthand and discover the joy of the journey that lies ahead. It is not for the faint of heart, though, because as you will have seen from the reflections of team TACSI, they might just bring about a total transformation in the way you perceive the world and in the way you act and re-act.

They may also do very little for you, if the time is not yet right for you. So enter with a curious mind and discover the richness of the process, and share back what unfolds for you in the ever widening circles of relations that we all get to hold as humans, in relation with all the other species that share this one precious planet with us.

Whether you heed the call or not, the process described within this paper is constantly unfolding, just like the one long dance of humanity since our inception, and all we get to do in this very long dance is to add a step or two, in sync with all that has come before us, and in relation with all that is to come after us.

All we get to add to the one long song of humanity, which is sung in chorus with the voices of all the other species, is a note or two. All you get to add to this one long song painting of humanity, with many other furry friends and clawed and winged friends all painting, is a brushstroke or two.

You get the point. So, all we're saying is, you're invited.

Peace be the journey!

Steph Beck and Parul Punjabi Jagdish, AIME



Big Story Tour, Yuin Country. Credit: Ben Knight, AIME

Continue your learning with the podcasts, films and papers that helped inform the Seven Circles:

[The Other Others](#)

A podcast hosted by Tyson Yunkaporta and guests

[Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World](#)

A book written by Tyson Yunkaporta

[Protocols for Non-Indigenous People Working with Indigenous Knowledge](#)

A paper written by Indigenous scholars from IKSLabs at Algoma and Deakin Universities

[Two-Eyed Seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing](#)

A book written by Cheryl Bartlett, Murdena Marshall & Albert Marshall

[Relational Systems Thinking: That's How Change Is Going To Come, from Our Earth Mother](#)

A paper written by Melanie Goodchild

[Sun & Shadow: Art of the Spinifex People](#)

A book written John Carty and Luke Scholes

[Hoodie Economics: Changing Our Systems to Value What Matters](#)

A book co-written by Jack Manning Bancroft

[IMAGINE](#)

A film created by AIME

[IMAGI-NATION University](#)

A new digital nation created and run by AIME

Also check out the [TACSI Learning Hub](#) for webinars and learning experiences introducing the Seven Circles.

Gallery: The images we made on this journey.



Sea the Weed, TACSI Team



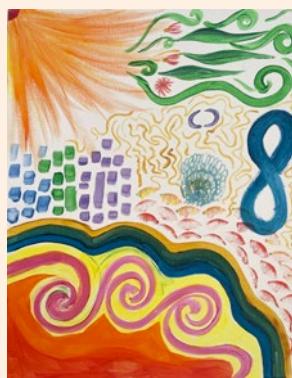
Professor Death, Stephanie Beck



Urge to Merge, Stephanie Beck



Sea the Weed Ceremony,
Tasmin Munro



First Nations Relationships,
TACSI Team



First Nations Relationships,
TACSI Team



Black Cockatoos, Stephanie Beck



Stacks, Stephanie Beck



I Transmit Human Thoughts,
Stephanie Beck