

# GETTING IT RIGHT EMPLOYING INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS: A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS





## GETTING IT RIGHT

'Getting it Right' is a GROW Sydney ACC initiative that aims to reduce economic disadvantage of Indigenous Australians by improving employment outcomes. It builds on the strong desire of both employers and Indigenous communities to advance the goals of mutual understanding through practical strategies that make a difference to people's lives.

It is based on a shared belief that better results will be achieved if we can find more common ground between the culture and expectations of the workplace and the culture and aspirations of Indigenous Australians.

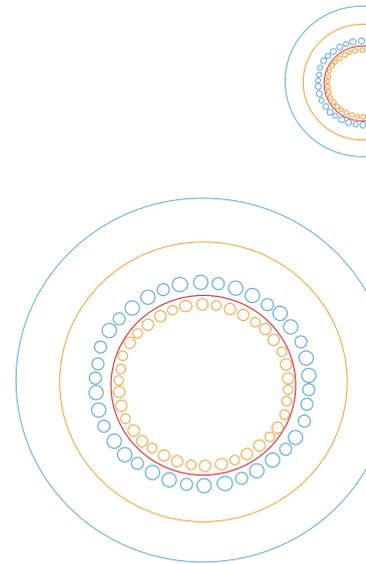
'Getting it Right' includes a series of publications and events that aim to build the capacity of employers, Indigenous community organisations, Indigenous jobseekers, Job Network Members, Australian Apprenticeship Centres and Group Training Companies to improve Indigenous employment.

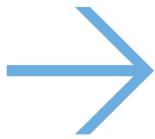
The strategy was initiated and developed by the GROW Sydney ACC, the Area Consultative Committee for Sydney, primarily in partnership with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The graphic design of 'Getting it Right' products is based on the artwork of Aboriginal artist Leeanne Hunter. The main messages depicted by Leeanne are the goal of improved Indigenous employment outcomes and the strength of partnerships that are needed to achieve this goal.

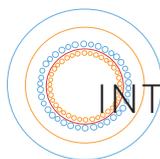
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# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide provides employers with practical advice on how to convert their interest in Indigenous employment into successful outcomes both for their businesses and for Indigenous communities. Although written with medium and large businesses in mind, all employers should find the information useful and relevant.

It is based on the real world experience of employers – it describes what has (and has not) worked for them in the employment and retention of Indigenous staff.

**This guide should be considered to be a "menu" of actions undertaken by employers in their Indigenous employment initiatives. No one employer undertakes all the actions in this guide.**

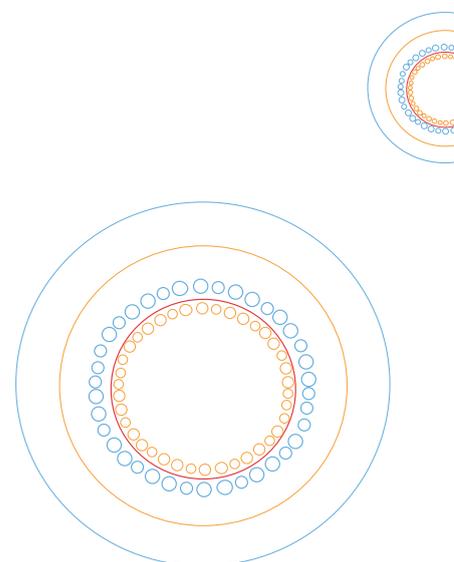
**The guide does not suggest that all these issues will apply in all situations nor that the approaches used will always be the best answer.**

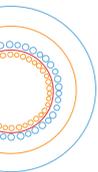
**It does present actions that employers may wish to consider in supporting Indigenous employment and provides employers with food for thought in developing their own approaches.**

**The critical element in determining appropriate actions for your organisation will be to find common ground between the needs of your Indigenous staff and the culture of your organisation.**

## HOW WAS THE GUIDE DEVELOPED?

This guide is based on a project funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)





managed by the GROW Sydney ACC and Arrilla Indigenous Consultants and Services.

## The objectives of the project were to:

- Through consultation with both employers of Indigenous Australians and with Indigenous employees themselves, identify key issues, obstacles, hints and ideas for greater success (including retention) in the employment of Indigenous peoples in the private sector.
- Develop a directory of existing support structures that may assist private sector employers to employ and retain Indigenous people.

This guide is primarily based on input from Sydney employers and their Indigenous staff. It has also brought together information from other publications that provide practical strategies for Indigenous employment success.

The guide includes a number of quotes from employers and from their Indigenous staff. These employers have specific objectives and plans in place to employ Indigenous Australians. While their actual words have been quoted, the sources have not been individually identified as they reflect the general sentiment of the groups involved.

Another feature is the worksheet pages, which are designed to help you apply the ideas in this guide to your organisation.

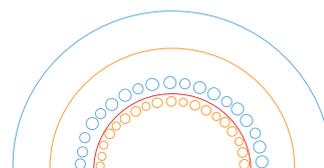
## Other Recourses

- 'Employing Indigenous Australians: A Directory of Services and Programmes for Employers'
  - 'Step Up To Indigenous Staff - Successfully Increase the Participation of Indigenous Australians in Your Workplace'
- These publications are available either by contacting GROW Sydney ACC or visiting [www.grow.org.au](http://www.grow.org.au).

## CONTACT US...

We welcome your questions, suggestions and feedback. Our contact details at the GROW Sydney ACC are:

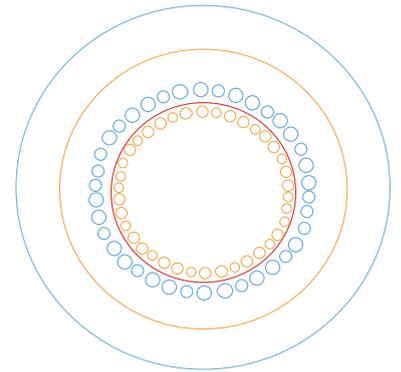
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# 1 | GETTING STARTED





## INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT AND YOUR ORGANISATION

### KNOW YOUR ORGANISATION

Organisations that succeed in Indigenous employment have a very clear view on why they are involved and what they are aiming to achieve. They often see their business can benefit from Indigenous employment initiatives for a number of the following reasons:

- Give them access to the right people for their jobs
- Provide staff that reflect their customer base
- Gain better access to business opportunities with Indigenous organisations
- Gain the advantages of a culturally diverse workforce
- Build their reputation for corporate citizenship

Consider your organisation's current capacity and success in working with a culturally diverse workforce – such experience would give you a head start in achieving success with your Indigenous employment initiatives.

Success in Indigenous employment is about finding some alignment between the culture of your organisation and the needs and aspirations of your Indigenous staff.

### EMPLOYERS SAID...

“Organisations that make an effort to find a match between contemporary Aboriginal cultures and their own culture are more successful than those that don't.”

“The key to a ‘cultural match’ is to understand the culture to begin with.”

## ENSURE YOU HAVE COMMITMENT FROM THE TOP

The active support of the organisation's leaders is a vital factor in the success of Indigenous employment strategies. This needs to be visible and demonstrated by providing the resources and support to make the strategy a success.

## TAKE A "WHOLE OF ORGANISATION" APPROACH

Integrate your Indigenous employment strategy into the practices of your organisation. Ensure all levels of the organisation know why you have an Indigenous Employment strategy, the importance of the strategy to the company, their role in the strategy and the activities the company will undertake to make the strategy a success.

An on-going communication strategy is a must.

The most critical staff in the Indigenous employment strategy are those who will have direct supervision of your Indigenous staff like local managers, supervisors or line managers.

These staff may need some assistance or advice on issues that might come up and how to best work with these issues.

For long term success Indigenous employment strategies need not to be seen as 'special initiatives' but eventually become part of the way the organisation does its business because it is the best way to work with this group and because it makes good business sense.

### Specific actions might include:

→ Setting goals in your Indigenous Employment Strategy

## EMPLOYERS SAID...

"A very active and supportive CEO who is interested in equity issues has been a major factor in our success."

"Management needs to be prepared to get their hands dirty – targeting, mentoring, support – you've got to get in and do it!"

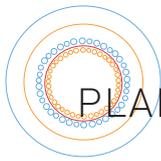
"Our Indigenous employment programme is part of our corporate and business plans. Indigenous employment outcomes are part of our managers performance contracts."

"Ensure that all staff are aware of your Indigenous employment strategy, why you've become involved and what you hope to achieve. Consider hosting an Aboriginal Cross Cultural Awareness Workshop to ensure that staff understand the issues, discuss concerns, share experiences and trouble shoot prior to implementation."

"Some staff, in the early stages, thought it was 'reverse discrimination' to seek Koori staff...this is part of the education process we continue to undertake."

for not only the numbers of Indigenous staff you wish to employ but also their levels and progression within the organisation. It may also be useful to set retention targets.

- Establish accountability for Indigenous employment outcomes in performance management systems not just for Indigenous employment coordinators but throughout the organisation.
- Giving managers responsibility for identifying positions in their branch for Indigenous people, developing job descriptions and participating in the selection process.
- Initiate monitoring and review systems to check progress and seek improvements. Exit interviews are part of this process.



## PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

### BE WILLING "TO TINKER WITH STANDARD PRACTICES"

Many organisations already have employees from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds. The principles and personnel practices that work to maximise the benefits of a culturally diverse workforce will often work in Indigenous employment.

A willingness to adjust human resource management practices to make them more appropriate to an Indigenous audience is just part of the job of managing a culturally diverse workforce.

The employment goals of employers and Indigenous people are most often complementary. Indigenous people generally seek 'real jobs' i.e. jobs that provide long term personal and

### EMPLOYERS SAID...

"An internal staff network of people who are interested in Indigenous employment, made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. This ensures a 'whole of organisation' approach, brings all the staff with you and develops an understanding and supportive culture."

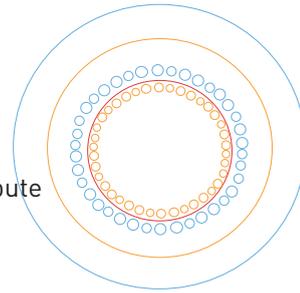
"Our aim is that Indigenous people are competitive for mainstream jobs (not specifically identified for Indigenous people). We do not want to pigeonhole Indigenous people only in Indigenous jobs."

"We produce an Indigenous staff newsletter, have an Indigenous advisory committee who report directly to the Board, conduct surveys of Indigenous staff to better understand what they like and dislike about working in our company."

"Our cultural awareness training is provided on line as part of our corporate training package."

"Adopt processes that are similar to your mainstream ones, but tinker with them a little...make them more appropriate to an Indigenous audience".

professional growth and financial stability for them and their family. Employers seek employees who can contribute to the success of their business.



An organisation that is able work with a contemporary Indigenous culture – and not against it – has greater success in employing and retaining its Indigenous people.

### AVOID STEREOTYPING

Avoid stereotyping and taking a 'broad brush' view of the capabilities of Indigenous people.

Not all Indigenous People look the same. You will find Indigenous people who are blond haired and blue eyed.

All organisations are made up of people who have different personalities, abilities, beliefs and interests. The sum of these things helps to create the culture of the organisation.

Indigenous people are as individual as anyone else.

### DEVELOP AN INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY

Regardless of the size of your organisation or the number of Indigenous people you are able to employ, developing a specific Indigenous employment strategy is a key to success.

Developing such a strategy need not be a burdensome undertaking. It can simply mean that you have considered the issues raised in this guide, how they affect your organisation and documented a response. It can be a part of a broader human resource management or a workforce diversity strategy.

### EMPLOYERS SAID...

"Be aware that there are stereotypical attitudes out there that need to be managed."

"I was told that no one in that community wants to work. I spent two weeks talking to the people about what they can do and in the end felt there were 77% of them who were employable."

"Don't stereotype. You can end up with someone fantastic. We had limited positions but we could have taken more given the talent out there."

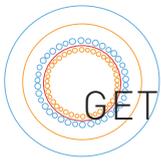
"It is not just a numbers game. Not all Indigenous people will identify as being Indigenous. You may have more Indigenous people working for you than you think."

"It's got nothing to do with being lazy and going walkabout. It's about being given opportunity, training and support."

Remember, an effective strategy needs to take a 'whole of organisation' approach.

The publication 'STEP Up to Indigenous Staff: Successfully Increase the Participation of Indigenous Australians in Your Workforce' provides advice and approaches used by employers to develop an Indigenous Employment Strategy. To obtain a copy of this publication contact GROW Sydney ACC on (02) 9890 7804.

Remember that there are number of issues that could affect the ability of Indigenous people to find and stay in work – this is why you may need to 'tinker with established practices'. (A summary of these issues and how they relate to employment is included in Section 4 of this guide).



## GETTING SUPPORT

### ACCESS EXTERNAL SUPPORT

There is a range of support available to employers designed to complement their Indigenous employment initiatives.

This assistance may be full-time, or on a 'needs basis' depending on the size and interests of your organisation. Professionals could be a Job Network member that specialises in Indigenous clients, a consultant with experience in Indigenous employment, another Indigenous employee of your organisation or a large government agency such as Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

### EMPLOYERS SAID...

"Be strategic and have a plan. Don't just hope that it will all work out for the best."

"Our company did not employ any Aboriginal staff five years ago because Aboriginal people did not apply for our positions.

With a bit of help from the department and the STEP program we were able to access Aboriginal employees and provide them with support and development opportunities.

We don't need STEP anymore - we get more applications from Aboriginal people now and our Koori staff are an integral part of the business."

The Australian government has initiated the Indigenous Employment Policy (IEP) in response to the unacceptable level of Indigenous unemployment and the growing dissatisfaction in the Indigenous community with the current situation.

This national initiative does not reflect on the employability of all Indigenous jobseekers but does acknowledge that potential for success is enhanced when employers can access a range of supports that are appropriate to their needs.

The Structured Training and Employment Programme (STEP) is a component of IEP for employers who are able to employ more than five Indigenous staff. STEP funding is flexible and can include:

- Support to develop an Indigenous employment strategy for your organisation
- Pre-employment, cross cultural awareness and accredited training
- Wage assistance
- Mentoring of participants and coordination of the project
- Marketing and other initiatives that facilitate the supply of suitable jobseekers to your jobs.

There are other components of IEP that can also assist employers. More information on this policy is available at [www.workplace.gov.au](http://www.workplace.gov.au). Go to 'Indigenous programmes'.

Note that organisations whose prime motivation is the financial incentive available for employing Indigenous staff do not succeed.

#### EMPLOYERS SAID...

"With assistance from DEEWR, practical and financial we were able to develop an approach using STEP that suited our business."

"STEP helped us initiate an Indigenous Employment Strategy to attract Indigenous Australians to work for us."

"We used STEP to find out more about Aboriginal Culture - this has helped not only in the employment but also the retention of Aboriginal staff."

"I found by employing an Indigenous staff member who can take charge of Indigenous employment, retention, and other such issues was an important key to our success. It gave credibility, a face in the community and better long-term outcomes."

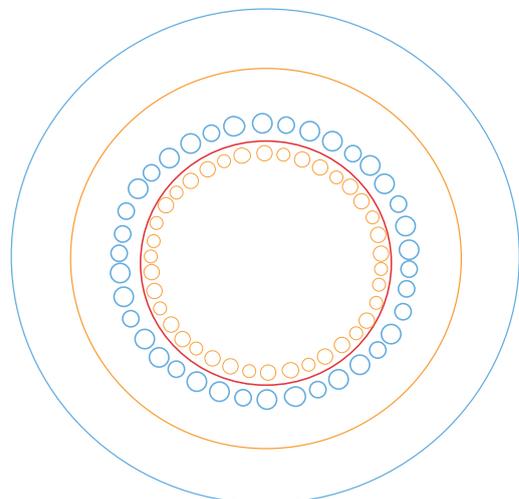
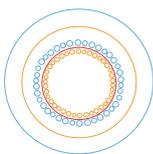
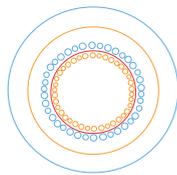
## BUILD INTERNAL SUPPORT

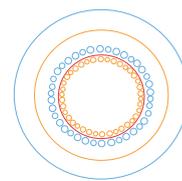
Building your organisation's overall internal capacity to support Indigenous employment is critical – do not rely on one person as a 'whole of organisation' approach is required. The number of Indigenous people you are able to employ will influence your capacity to employ an Indigenous person to coordinate your strategy. Support can be full-time in your organisation or you could access support on a part time basis.

The person responsible for hiring Indigenous staff needs appropriate support. Understanding the pressures Indigenous coordinators can face and providing them with support is also an important issue.

## AN INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT COORDINATOR SAID...

"The success of the Indigenous Employment Strategy rested on me alone – that's an enormous pressure. As an Indigenous employee who employs Indigenous people, I am pressured from both ends: from Indigenous people who have high expectations just because I am Indigenous ...and from 'gubbas' who expect me to succeed and get the numbers."





## GETTING STARTED – WORKSHEET

This worksheet is designed to provide a summary of the critical actions your organisation will need to undertake in "Getting Started" with an Indigenous employment initiative:

**The key actions outlined in this section of the guide are:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| → Know your organisation                         | → Avoid stereotyping                        |
| → Ensure you have commitment from the top        | → Develop an Indigenous employment strategy |
| → Take a "whole of organisation" approach        | → Access external support                   |
| → Be willing "to tinker with standard practices" | → Build internal support                    |

**In my organisation:**

**The three priority challenges for "Getting Started" are:**

**Actions in response:**

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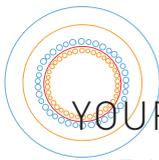
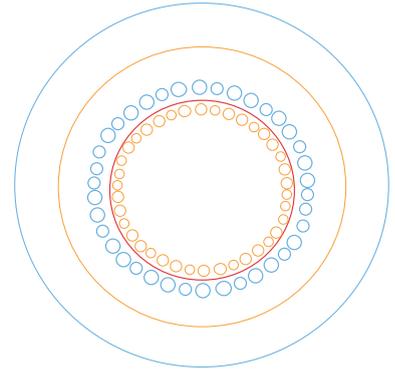
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## 2 | EMPLOYING INDIGENOUS STAFF



## YOUR REPUTATION AS AN INDIGENOUS FRIENDLY ORGANISATION

### BUILD COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Seek the support of key Indigenous community organisations. Gaining the support of the local elders or leaders can be a good way to gain community support and interest. Like many community organisations, the resources of Indigenous organisations are often stretched. Do not interpret a slower than expected response time as a lack of support for your initiative.

Some of the approaches used by employers to become known in the Indigenous community follow:

- Make presentations to Land Councils and other Indigenous organisations. Encourage community people to visit your organisation.
- Display local Aboriginal products and art in your waiting room.
- Advertise 'good news stories' in Indigenous publications like the Koori Mail or National Indigenous Times.

### EMPLOYERS SAID...

"Make the 'Koori Grapevine' your greatest ally."

"Encourage Aboriginal community people to use or visit your organisation. This raises your profile in the community and helps you appear more friendly."

"Have an 'Open Day' which allows Indigenous people to become familiar with the organisation and what is expected before applying for jobs."

"Purchase and display local Aboriginal products in your waiting area. This display should reflect the organisation's commitment and not be just a token gesture."

"Facilitate job-seeking courses in schools and TAFE. This could include résumé writing, how to apply for a position, how to conduct yourself in an interview etc."

# EMPLOYING INDIGENOUS STAFF

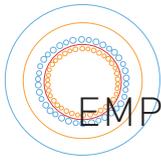
- Establish links with Indigenous community organisations and talk to community members about your organisation and jobs. The 'Directory of Services and Programmes for Employers' provides a list of some of these organisations.
- Consider conducting job interviews within the community.
- Employing Indigenous people will help to open doors to Indigenous community networks.
- Get involved in Indigenous events - consider participating in or sponsoring Indigenous events for example, Survival Day concert, sports competitions, NAIDOC week activities, student graduation functions or Indigenous Jobs Market type activities.
- Support for Indigenous communities for example, one organisation provides personal computers to a small group of Indigenous students others provide mentoring support to emerging Indigenous businesses.
- Offer work experience to school, TAFE or university students. As a development exercise, you may be able to offer temporary or casual work to people who are unsuccessful in the interview process.
- Offer Vocational Education Training (VET) placements for Indigenous Year 11 and 12 students.

## EMPLOYERS SAID...

"Do business with Indigenous suppliers or develop business partnerships or joint ventures with Indigenous organisations or businesses. Or you could be a mentor to assist an Indigenous business to grow."

"Host an event that showcases Aboriginal jobseekers to other employers in your industry – for example, utilise Aboriginal hospitality students at a function."

"We regularly run articles in Indigenous publications that demonstrate what we are doing and showcases the success of our Indigenous staff."



## EMPLOYMENT ADVERTISING

### TARGET YOUR AUDIENCE IN YOUR ADVERTISING

Consider what can attract Indigenous jobseekers to a job. Some strategies include:

- Using previously successful applicants as role models when advertising - this will put you in good stead with the community.
- Having identified or designated positions, which are reserved for Indigenous people. This will attract jobseekers, and ensure your efforts are strategic.
- Developing an Information Kit that describes what you do, transport information etc. Keep it friendly and simple.
- Where possible have an Indigenous person as the contact for the position. For example, one employer had little success in attracting responses. By changing the wording of the advertisement to indicate that the contact for the position was for an Indigenous person (for more details contact the Aboriginal Consultant), the responses were considerable.

### GET YOUR JOB ADVERTISEMENTS RIGHT

Critically examine the essential requirements of your advertised positions. Where possible, talk in terms of the ability you require rather than qualifications.

Ensure that your position description is realistic for both the target audience and the position itself. For instance, if a

### WHAT ATTRACTS YOU TO A JOB? INDIGENOUS JOBSEEKERS SAID...

"The organisation had a good reputation and it was therefore the company, not the position, which was attractive."

"When I am looking for a job I find position descriptions which are full of jargon difficult to understand or daunting. This can reduce my confidence to apply, regardless of whether I have the qualifications."

"A chance to make a difference and add value to my community."

"More opportunities to advance my skills."

"I have a ten year career goal and this position will help me achieve it."

"The experience they were asking for was basic and therefore achievable – this gave me confidence to apply."

"An advertisement in the Koori Mail encouraged me to apply for a job in an organisation I would have never considered."

# EMPLOYING INDIGENOUS STAFF

position does not require tertiary qualifications but other attributes, then alter your standard position description accordingly.

Flexibility is an important issue. Where possible, state that potential and a willingness to learn are important criteria. Consider including pre employment training as part of your strategy.

Where jobs are identified for Indigenous people ensure that this is in the advertisement.

Availability of transport is a major factor in the likely interest of Indigenous people to respond to your job. It can be better to conduct information sessions, initial screening or interviews in community organisations or at local Job Network offices.

All this does not mean you are going to employ someone who cannot meet your requirements. It does mean looking closely at the job and how it is described so you attract the best people.

## KNOW WHERE TO ADVERTISE

Successful employers use a variety of approaches to ensure their jobs are given wide exposure to attract the best Indigenous people.

Keep in mind that numbers of Indigenous people usually represent a small proportion of the total population. When these are segmented by location, work abilities and aspirations, the numbers of suitable people are often low.

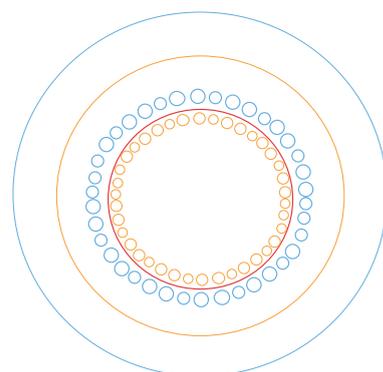
Most Indigenous people live in lower socio-economic areas, so consider where you can locate jobs and where you might advertise.

## EMPLOYERS SAID...

“Formal experience is not as important as a willingness to succeed or learn. Stay flexible on this – potential is just as important.”

“I have greater success when I leave at least six weeks between advertising and close date. Word of mouth is your friend.”

“Consider conducting pre-vocational training, this will help to equip Indigenous jobseekers with the skills you require.”



A range of the options that are often used to find the right Indigenous staff follow.

- 'Employing Indigenous Australians: A Directory of Services and Programmes for Employers' is available through GROW Sydney ACC or on the GROW Sydney ACC website ([www.grow.org.au](http://www.grow.org.au)). This directory lists and provides details on services and programmes available to Sydney employers. The options that are listed below are included in this directory.
- Advertise in the employment sections of specific Indigenous newspapers like the Koori Mail and National Indigenous Times. Mainstream newspapers are also used, probably with more success in a 'Daily Telegraph' type publication. This selection would generally depend on the skill level of the position you are offering.
- Other Indigenous publications like 'Deadly Vibe' also advertise jobs ([www.vibe.com.au](http://www.vibe.com.au)).
- Use the good networks that exist in the Indigenous community and of those people who work in Indigenous employment.
- Job Network Members have a commitment to improving Indigenous employment. Some have a specific focus on and expertise and networks in Indigenous employment ([www.workplace.gov.au](http://www.workplace.gov.au)).

Jobseekers choose the Job Network Member that they feel will best meet their needs. This can mean that not all Job Network Members will have a large pool of Indigenous jobseekers connected to their organisation.

When selecting the Job Network Members that will be

## EMPLOYERS SAID...

"Our company policy is that all our jobs, not only those identified specifically for Indigenous people, are advertised in Indigenous publications."



"Our aim is that Indigenous people are competitive for mainstream jobs (not specifically identified for Indigenous people). We do not want to pigeonhole Indigenous people only in Indigenous jobs."

# EMPLOYING INDIGENOUS STAFF

best able to assist you, ask them about their connections to the Indigenous community and if they have any specific Indigenous employment initiatives.

Run information sessions in conjunction with your local Job Network. Ask the Job Network Member to ask their Indigenous jobseekers to bring their résumés.

→ The Australian Job Search website ([www.jobsearch.gov.au](http://www.jobsearch.gov.au)) allows employers to lodge their vacancies and indicate that they are specifically for Indigenous people.

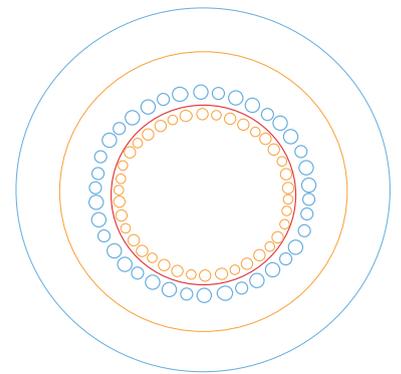
This system matches your job requirements with the records of Indigenous jobseekers who have entered their résumé into the system. Indigenous jobseekers can also search the system for jobs either through touch screens located at Centrelink and Job Network Members or by the internet.

→ Explore State Government Initiatives (e.g. New Careers for Aboriginal People available in NSW) that have a role in finding work for Indigenous people. Usually located in community organisations, they will have a database of Indigenous people who are looking for work.

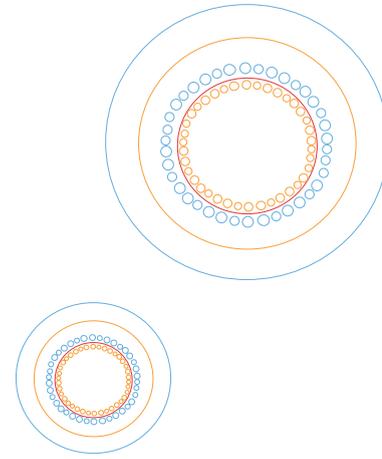
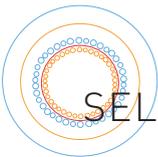
→ Koori Interagency groups are regular networking meetings of organisations who provide a broad range of Indigenous specific services. They not only offer a good means of distributing your promotional material but also offer connections to a range of support services.

→ Indigenous email network groups are a growing source of job information.

→ Advertise in community organisations e.g. Land Councils, Medical Services etc.



- Give schools, TAFE and universities your advertising material and place your information on notice boards. TAFE and Universities have specific Indigenous Units.
- Attend Career and Job Expo type events. Local Departments of Education, Indigenous Coordination Centres, Job Network Members or Koori Interagency groups will know of these events.
- If you currently have Indigenous staff advertise your positions in-house – this will promote the positions amongst their networks and families.
- Advertise the jobs and your strategy on your organisation's website.
- Develop a database of résumés of Indigenous applicants. With their permission, you can match the skills of these jobseekers with future positions.

## SELECTION

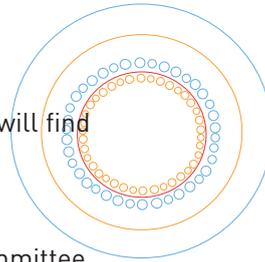
### MAKE JOB INTERVIEWS MORE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE

Ensure that processes are culturally appropriate. Here are some approaches that employers have used:

- Make the process less formal and intimidating. For example, have an informal chat over the telephone to begin with or even conduct interviews in a less formal location.

# EMPLOYING INDIGENOUS STAFF

→ Don't use the standard interview pro-forma. You will find out more through an informal chat.



→ Have an Indigenous person on your selection committee. This can provide you with a different style of questioning.

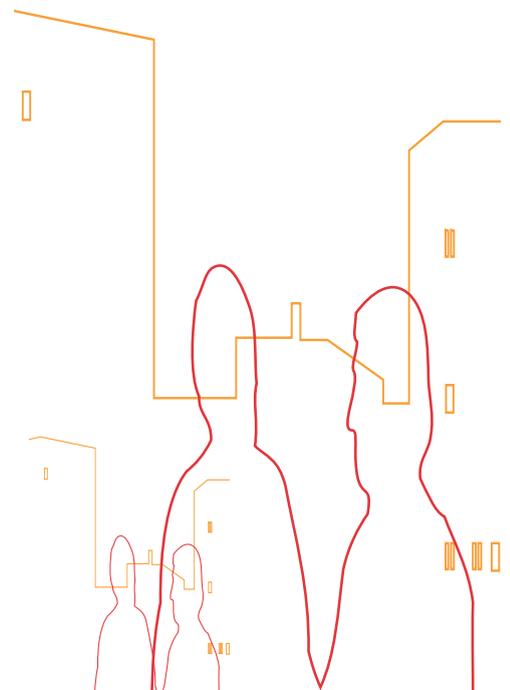
→ Tease out how their experience relates to the job. You might find people saying that they haven't done this or that, but when you talk more about what they have done, they often have transferable skills.

→ Have group interviews to encourage open communication.

→ Conduct a training course or seminar prior to the beginning of the selection process and observe the candidates in action.

If you can't find the right people you may need to review the approach you have taken or it could be that there are not people available. Some jobs are harder to fill than others. If you generally have difficulty in filling specific jobs this is unlikely to be different if you are seeking Indigenous staff.

For applicants who are unsuccessful, be encouraging and take the time to give constructive feedback and advice. Try to avoid just sending an impersonal rejection letter. This will help your reputation in the community.



# EMPLOYING INDIGENOUS STAFF – WORKSHEET

This worksheet is designed to provide a summary of the critical actions your organisation will need to undertake in "Employing Indigenous Staff"

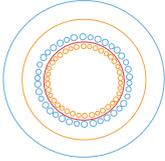
The key actions outlined in this section of the guide are:

- Build community relations
- Target your audience in your advertising
- Get your job advertisements right
- Know where to advertise
- Make job interviews more culturally appropriate

In my organisation:

The three priority challenges for "Employing Indigenous Staff" are:

Actions in response:



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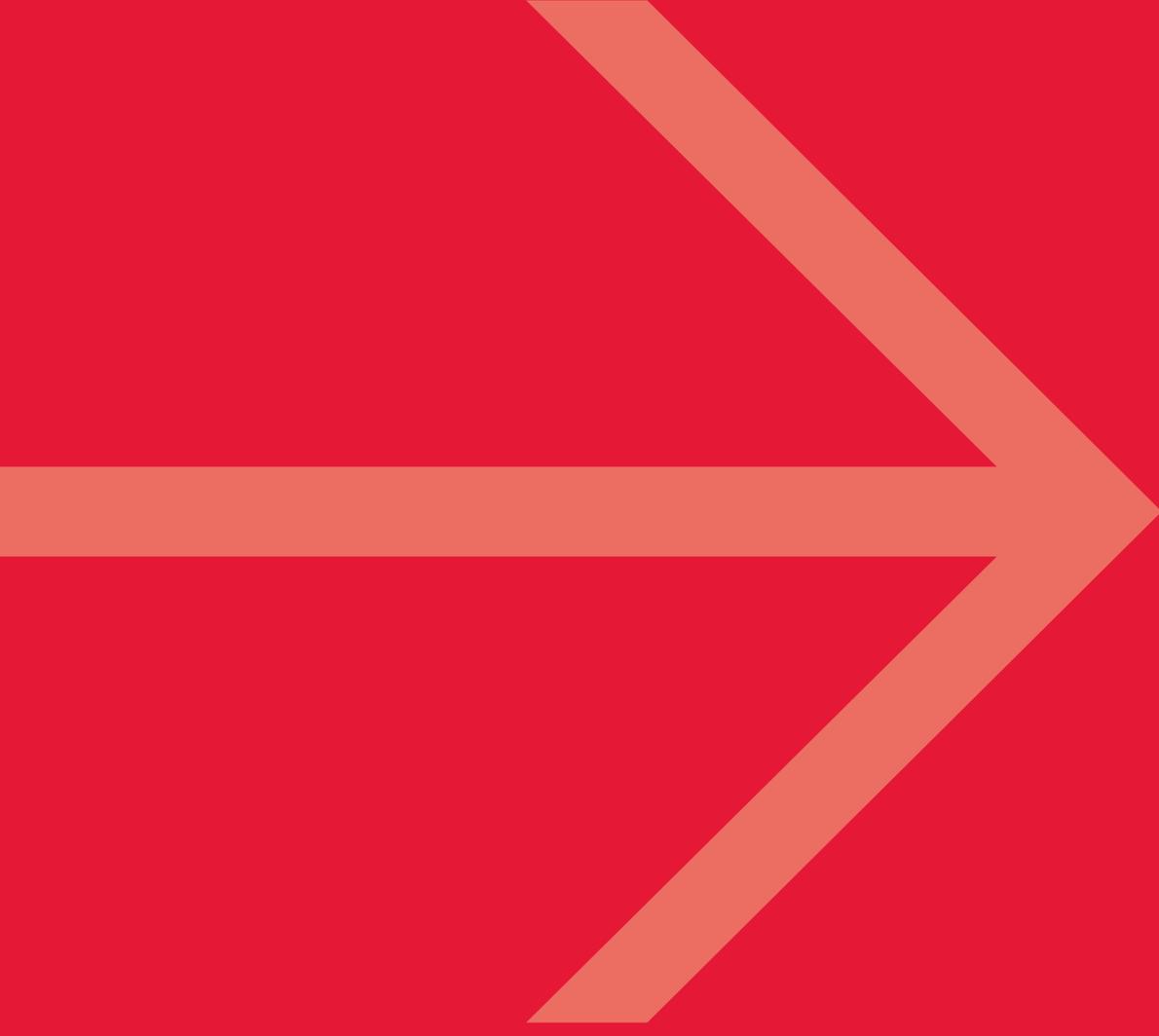
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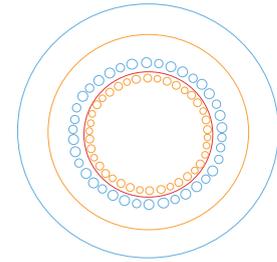
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↓  3 | RETAINING YOUR INDIGENOUS STAFF



## HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

### HAVE FAIR AND REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS OF YOUR INDIGENOUS STAFF AND DISCUSS THESE EXPECTATIONS WITH THEM

Do not assume that your new Indigenous staff will have knowledge of workplace practices and culture.

It is as critical for you to clearly communicate your expectations to your staff as it is for you to understand their aspirations and needs. While many Indigenous staff are ambitious and will seek jobs offering career paths there will be others that are happy to just have a job. There is nothing wrong with that but it is important to know and review the aspirations of your staff. Making assumptions or stereotyping can mean putting undue pressure on staff or frustrating their ambitions.

Tell your staff that you have selected them because you believe they will be good for the company and that you want them to succeed and stay with the company.

The key issue is to build a strong working relationship with your Indigenous staff based on clear communication, trust and respect. Encourage staff to ask questions and to tell you

### EMPLOYERS SAID...

"We don't use Indigenous people as show ponies. We are proud of the steps we've taken, but we don't parade them around."

"The expectations and pressure we place on Indigenous people can be unfair and unrealistic."

"Don't create a lock-away section where Indigenous people are considered to be the only ones who deal with Indigenous issues. Indigenous employees often assist non-Indigenous employees to understand Indigenous issues, but they can get sick of that. Like everyone else, they are there to do a job."

### INDIGENOUS STAFF SAID:

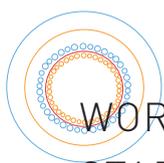
"...they sat down with me and ...informed me that the organisation would benefit by having me work for them. They made me feel comfortable and needed."

about any issues that might affect their work performance.

## PERSEVERE TO "GET IT RIGHT"

Indigenous employment initiatives are new to many employers and work could be new to your Indigenous staff. Neither of you may get it right first time. This does not mean things will never work – persevere, learn from these experiences and adjust your approach.

Don't take a 'microscopic view' of Indigenous staff. They or the program need not be viewed as a failure if one individual does not work out. Many people you employ don't work out regardless of their cultural background so don't be too quick to blame the program or the people and say 'it's too hard' – be broad minded and realistic.



## WORKING WITH YOUR INDIGENOUS STAFF

### BUILD TRUST AND SUPPORT YOUR INDIGENOUS STAFF

By accepting your job offer, the Indigenous person is trusting that the job will be as you described.

Regularly meet with your new staff member – particularly in the early months – and discuss your expectations of each other. If possible, involve another Indigenous staff member in these discussions.

### EMPLOYERS SAID...

"There can be set-backs. Keep in mind you are trying something new. It's a learning environment."

### INDIGENOUS STAFF SAID...

"I am encouraged to stay in a job when they follow through with things and are committed to addressing issues."

"I am more likely to stay in a job where I have the ability to learn different areas of the organisation – a job rotation system allows you to experience many things and gain extra skills."

"I am unlikely to stay in a job where there is lack of opportunity to progress a career or go up the ladder...its attractiveness will run out because I'll learn everything there is to learn from this area."

If career development prospects, training, job rotation and the like were part of your original description of the job, discuss these and how and when you see them being offered.

Training must be practical and useful. Useful training is about the skills for the position, as well as about personal development such as ethics, communication and presentation. Given the lower socio-economic status of many Indigenous people, and their higher levels of unemployment, you may find that your staff member is under pressure on a range of issues that could impact on their work from time to time.

Providing support to your Indigenous staff is a strong factor influencing the success of your Indigenous employment initiatives.

Many jobseekers are young, and are living a long way from home. Discuss with their parents the options available to provide them with support e.g. you could put them in touch with local Indigenous networks, including elders, or there could be family friends or relatives available.

Appoint a buddy or mentor for the first six to twelve months. Indigenous mentors are most popular and assist in areas (personal and professional) that may impinge on the working capacity of your staff. Amongst other things a mentor can:

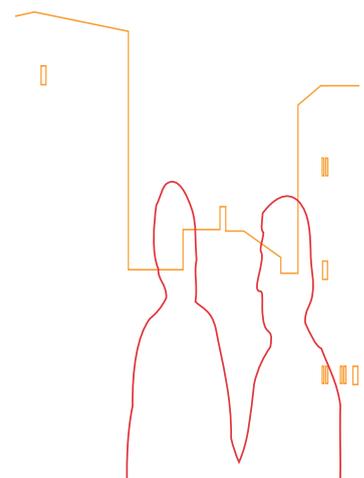
- Act as a role model
- Provide financial guidance (e.g. how to open a bank account, how to budget, how to manage a credit card etc).
- Offer personal and cultural guidance (e.g. meeting family and community obligations/pressures, getting in touch with local Indigenous people if away from home).

Talk to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) about local support services.

#### INDIGENOUS STAFF SAID...

"Placing Indigenous people in the right position will deter them from looking elsewhere, that is a position which matches their skills and interests."

"A good supervisor or manager that will go into bat for you. Good supervision that's non-confrontational and in the spirit of partnership. Management that are willing to talk, listen and learn with you. It helps them and it helps me."





## DEMONSTRATE CULTURAL AWARENESS AND CELEBRATE SUCCESS

### VALUE INDIGENOUS CULTURE

Being culturally aware does not mean implementing practices that will not have longer-term benefit to your organisation. Sustainable results will occur when balance can be found between the goals and needs of your organisation and the needs and aspirations of your Indigenous staff.

Many of the characteristics of Indigenous culture are also characteristics of successful organisations. Indigenous culture is typified by respect, trust and willingness to work for the good of the group (or family or team) rather than for individual gain.

It is not about treating all Indigenous staff in the same way. It is about being willing to 'tinker with the standard processes' to establish successful outcomes for your organisation and your Indigenous staff.

The conduct of cross cultural awareness training does not alone make your organisation a place that will encourage your Indigenous staff to stay and grow. It is the behaviour of the people in the organisation and the ability of the organisation to work with the needs and aspirations of your Indigenous staff that makes the difference.

Many Indigenous people have a preference to work in areas that will benefit their community. Recognise that there are pressures associated with this work and often additional needs for support.

### EMPLOYERS SAID...

"Be sympathetic and flexible to cultural differences while, of course, keeping your bottom line in check. Understand Koori culture and ways – we're too quick to judge with a mainstream mentality."

"Educate your HR people, departmental and line managers regarding cultural awareness so that they are aware of potential issues/cultural differences."

"Cross Cultural training is important, but it is only the first step. It must be followed through with regular reviews. Having an Indigenous person available to work with/assist you can help you reap the most from your program."

## EXCHANGE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES AND FIND THE COMMON GROUND

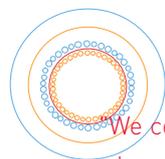
Cross cultural awareness should also have a focus on Indigenous staff and their need to understand the organisation's culture. Without this shared understanding and acknowledgement it will be difficult for mutual benefit to be obtained.

Many Indigenous people may prove not only to be new to your organisation but they may also be new to workplace practices and culture.

A thorough induction programme is an important step to retaining your Indigenous staff.

## CELEBRATE SUCCESS

Your Indigenous employment strategy should have realistic goals. Progress towards these goals needs to be monitored to trigger both a review of your approach and celebrations of your success.



We conduct exit interviews when our Indigenous staff leave. We use this information to learn and improve. The reason people leave is varied. They often leave to go onto better things."

### EMPLOYERS SAID...

"Encourage participation in Indigenous networks and celebrations such as NAIDOC week and National Reconciliation Week."

"The number of Indigenous people recruited does not equal success, but their retention, the skills they gain and how they contribute to our organisation does."

"As an organisation we were proud when they moved on, it was to bigger and better things. I don't see that as a failure, but a complete success."



## RETAINING YOUR INDIGENOUS STAFF – WORKSHEET

This worksheet is designed to provide a summary of the critical actions your organisation will need to undertake to "Retain your Indigenous staff"

**The key actions outlined in this section of the guide are:**

- Have fair and realistic expectations of your Indigenous staff and discuss these expectations with them
- Persevere to get it right
- Celebrate success
- Value Indigenous culture
- Exchange cultural perspectives and find the common ground
- Build trust and support your Indigenous staff

**In my organisation:**

**The three priority challenges for "Retaining Indigenous Staff" are:**

**Actions in response:**

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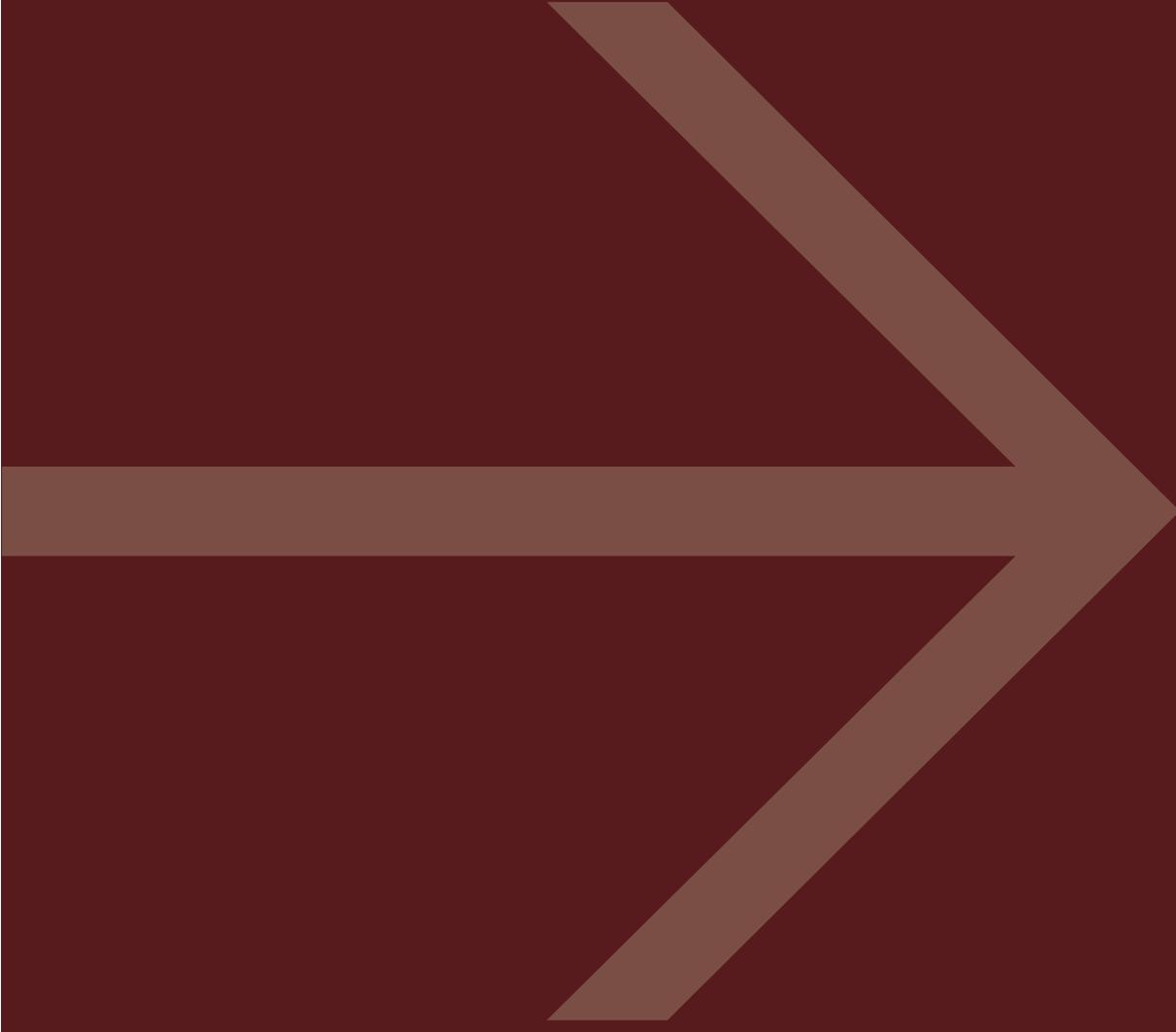
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4 | AN OVERVIEW OF ISSUES THAT YOU COULD  
FACE AND SOME SOLUTIONS TO CONSIDER

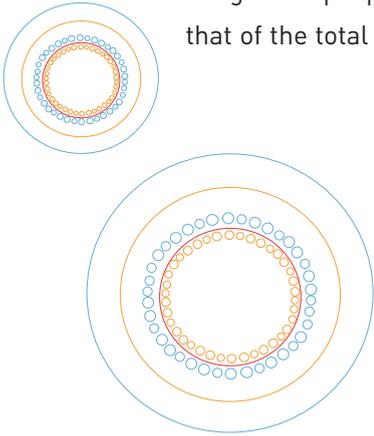
# AN OVERVIEW OF ISSUES THAT YOU COULD FACE AND SOME SOLUTIONS TO CONSIDER

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## "I CAN'T GET INDIGENOUS PEOPLE TO APPLY FOR MY JOBS. WHY?"

### FACT

Unemployment among Indigenous people is double that of the total population.



### IMPLICATIONS

Most jobs are filled through word of mouth by people who hear of vacancies through their employment networks. Most Indigenous people are not connected to these networks. Contact with role models who know how to find a job and understand employer expectations is also often limited. Many Indigenous people are not confident jobseekers.

### WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

Use a variety of methods to advertise your job. Pay particular attention to clarifying your expectations in the recruitment and induction process.

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### FACT

While the comparative rate of unemployment is high, Indigenous people represent a small proportion of the total population.

### IMPLICATIONS

You may find difficulty filling jobs or it could take longer to fill a job.

### WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

Ensure your jobs are well known in the community. Show you are an Indigenous friendly organisation. Where possible locate jobs in high areas of Indigenous population, transport availability and skills.

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### FACT

A large proportion of Indigenous people do not have their own transport and may not live close to your business.

### IMPLICATIONS

It will be very difficult for many Indigenous people to get to job locations not serviced well by public transport. Some Indigenous people may be unfamiliar with your business locality and available transport options.

### WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

Where possible locate positions close to public transport. Advertise the availability of transport in your advertising. If needed seek alternate transport strategies.

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**"INDIGENOUS PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT EXPERIENCE OR QUALIFICATIONS FOR MY JOBS."**

**FACT**

Most Indigenous people work in the public and community sectors.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Most significant job growth is in the private sector. Indigenous people might have less experience in accessing jobs in this sector and knowledge of private sector workplace practices is limited.

**WHAT YOU MIGHT DO**

Don't immediately discount the experience Indigenous people do have. It may be an asset to your business. Provide support while your new employee adapts to the culture of your work place.

**FACT**

The proportion of Indigenous people with Year 12 and post secondary qualifications, while improving, is well below that for the total population.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Indigenous people may not have formal qualifications but that does not mean that many do not possess a high level of skills.

**WHAT YOU MIGHT DO**

Write job descriptions and selection criteria in terms of ability rather than qualifications. Alternate methods of training delivery may be preferred over established classroom type delivery.

**FACT**

The Indigenous population is young, nearly the opposite to the age distribution in the general community.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Indigenous population will increase as a segment of the total population. Employers who are successful in this area will be able to access a growing pool of labour.

Training this young workforce and orientating them to workplace culture will be an important issue.

**WHAT YOU MIGHT DO**

Make connection to schools. Provide work experience, Vocational Education and Training in Schools placements, P/T traineeships, cadetships and/or scholarships. Consider pre-employment/ work preparation training in your strategy.

# AN OVERVIEW OF ISSUES THAT YOU COULD FACE AND SOME SOLUTIONS TO CONSIDER

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## "INDIGENOUS PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT EXPERIENCE OR QUALIFICATIONS FOR MY JOBS."

### FACT

Most Indigenous people are employed in lower skill level occupations.

### IMPLICATIONS

Many Indigenous people seek jobs that provide for development and advancement - career pathways and development strategies can be a major issue in staff retention.

### WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

Identify the aspirations of your Indigenous staff and establish staff development plans.

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## "I HAVE HAD A BAD EXPERIENCE EMPLOYING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN THE PAST."

### FACT

For every bad experience there are many, many success stories in the employment of Indigenous people.

### IMPLICATIONS

There are successes and failures in any recruitment process. To ensure the best chance of success in recruiting Indigenous people, there are specific support structures available.

### WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

Success is the result of finding a good match between the culture of your workplace and Indigenous culture. Persevere and be proactive in laying the foundations of success.

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### FACT

Statistical realities are that there are high incidences of social disadvantage in the Indigenous population.

### IMPLICATIONS

Some Indigenous jobseekers will be under additional pressure from their family that may at times restrict them in pursuing their employment goals. This does not mean they are not motivated to work. They may need support to help them better cope with these pressures. Many Indigenous people have high interest in working in occupations that contribute to improving their community.

### WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

Ensure all support structures are available and staff are encouraged to use them. Find ways for your business to support Aboriginal communities and involve your Indigenous employees in these activities.

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**"I HAVE HAD A BAD EXPERIENCE EMPLOYING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN THE PAST."**

**FACT**

Many Indigenous families are large and most Indigenous people place a high importance on their family responsibilities.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Meeting family responsibilities can be interpreted as lack of interest in work.

**WHAT YOU MIGHT DO**

Establish open lines of communication. Encourage your staff to talk to you about these issues. Determine "minimum commitment". If needed seek compromise or arrangements to make up time.

**FACT**

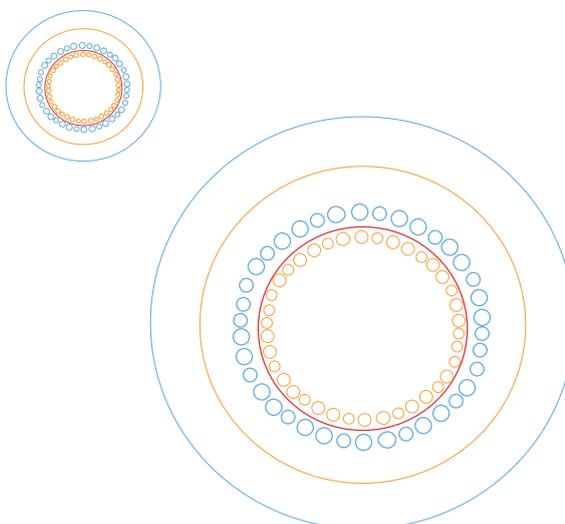
There is growing dissatisfaction in the Indigenous community about the level of unemployment, particularly for youth.

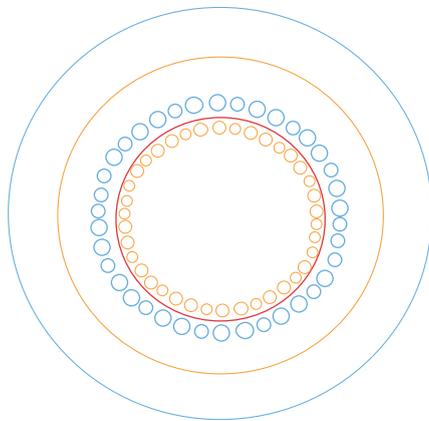
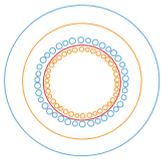
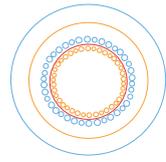
**IMPLICATIONS**

The Indigenous community can be a strong ally in your Indigenous employment initiatives.

**WHAT YOU MIGHT DO**

Build on this interest by making connections with Indigenous communities as a major part of your strategy.

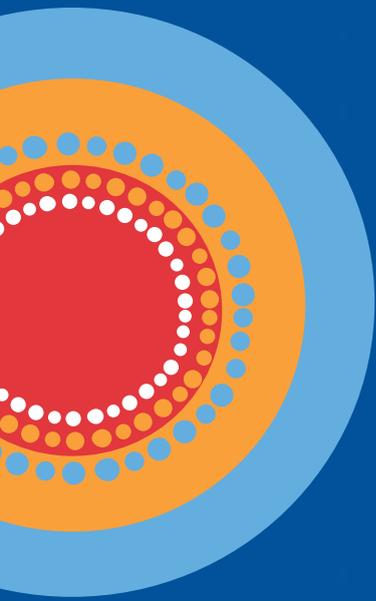






We welcome your questions,  
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GETTING IT RIGHT