



Government of
South Australia

Flying Start

- Information Pack -

Aboriginal Culturally Responsive Recruitment in Early Education

Why it matters

Culturally responsive recruitment is essential, as standard hiring practices in Australia have often excluded Aboriginal peoples due to historical injustices and ongoing systemic barriers. Many Aboriginal job seekers experience mainstream recruitment systems as unfamiliar, unwelcoming, or culturally unsafe. Adopting culturally responsive practices helps employers move beyond tokenism and build inclusive, diverse teams that reflect the Communities they serve. This approach also strengthens outcomes under Reconciliation Action Plans, Aboriginal employment and procurement targets, and corporate social responsibility commitments.

Is this Information pack for you?

This co-designed resource has been developed for early childhood development care organisations that are committed to recruiting, retaining, and supporting Aboriginal staff. Whether your service is Aboriginal-led or working to strengthen its cultural responsiveness, this resource will support your journey. It is intended for managers, team leaders, and those responsible for workforce development who are ready to reflect on their current practices and create a more culturally inclusive workplaces.

Aboriginal staff bring cultural knowledge, lived experience, and Community connection that greatly enrich early childhood services. Supporting Aboriginal peoples' meaningful participation in the workforce strengthens outcomes for all children and families. This resource offers practical ideas to help build respectful, inclusive, and culturally safe working environments where Aboriginal employees feel valued and supported.

No two organisations are the same. The strategies outlined here are not intended as one-size-fits-all solutions, but rather as prompts for reflection and action. The content draws on an Aboriginal-led research project that gathered insights from secondary data, Aboriginal staff working in the early childhood sector across South Australia, and sector experts. These lived experiences and professional perspectives highlight what makes a real difference in culturally responsive recruitment and retention.

How to use this resource

This resource can be used in various settings within your organisation. It may be helpful during senior management meetings, workforce planning sessions, team discussions, or staff performance appraisals. Use it as a flexible resource to spark thinking and guide your approach to building a culturally responsive workforce strategy. Taking the time to reflect on and apply the ideas in this resource will contribute to a more culturally safe and sustainable workplace. When Aboriginal staff are valued, supported, and given room to lead, the entire organisation benefits—along with the children, families, and Communities it serves.

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Section one

Approaches to culturally safe Aboriginal employment

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Why is it important to respect Aboriginal cultures and support self-determination in employment?

Respecting Aboriginal cultures and supporting self-determination in employment is vital for building workplaces that are inclusive, culturally safe, and genuinely responsive to the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples.



What is self-determination?

Self-determination means enabling Aboriginal peoples to lead and make decisions about matters that affect their lives, careers, and Communities.

Key principles of self-determination

- Aboriginal peoples must have the power to influence decisions that affect their careers and workplace experiences.
- Valuing cultural knowledge, Community ties, and lived experiences as assets in the workplace.
- Truth-telling, acknowledgment of colonisation and systemic racism, and respect for Aboriginal knowledge are foundational to genuine inclusion.
- Respecting the right of Aboriginal peoples to lead in matters that affect their Communities and employment outcomes.
- Embedding Aboriginal voices and leadership in decision-making, policies, and strategies.
- Aboriginal peoples should be represented across all levels of an organisation, with clear pathways for career progression and opportunities to build leadership capabilities.
- There should be space to develop and implement culturally relevant models of working, ensuring that Aboriginal people's voices are heard and influence decision-making processes.
- Organisations are encouraged to put in place formal cultural governance structures that are properly resourced, supported by leadership, and integrated into core business operations.

 Read more about: [Aboriginal self-determination](#)

What does Aboriginal cultural safety mean in the workplace?

Aboriginal cultural safety in the workplace means creating an environment where Aboriginal employees feel respected, valued, and able to be their full selves without fear of discrimination, bias, or cultural harm. It involves actively identifying and addressing power imbalances, systemic racism, and unconscious bias across all stages of the employment journey—from recruitment and onboarding to professional development and leadership pathways.

Aboriginal cultural safety is not a one-off training session; it is an ongoing commitment to learning, listening, and adapting workplace practices to ensure inclusion and respect for Aboriginal cultures and experiences.

- Every step in employment—from job advertising to onboarding and leadership development—must be culturally safe for Aboriginal peoples and free from racism and bias.
- Aboriginal cultural safety is defined by the people receiving the experience, not those providing it.
- Safe environments are maintained through ongoing reflection, learning, accountability, and cultural competency at all organisational levels.

Here are some ideas

- Work in a way that acknowledges and upholds Aboriginal cultural practices and values, including the principle of self-determination—doing things our way, on our terms.

 Read more about: [What is cultural safety?](#)

- Engage meaningfully with Aboriginal Communities to ensure that the organisation's work aligns with Community-identified priorities and needs.
- Ensure Aboriginal staff are meaningfully represented in leadership roles and included in key decision-making processes.
- Embed cultural protocols into the everyday life of the organisation, such as incorporating Welcome to Country, Acknowledgement of Country, and smoking ceremonies at events and meetings. Reflect on how all staff are involved. Are Aboriginal staff carrying too much of this responsibility? Are non-Aboriginal staff stepping up to support and take initiative where appropriate?
- Actively support and participate in Aboriginal cultural events such as NAIDOC Week, the National Apology anniversary, and Reconciliation Week. Encourage all staff to attend, learn and engage.
- Show respect for the cultural responsibilities held by Aboriginal staff, including kinship ties, cultural commitments, Community roles, and obligations related to those Communities.
- Establish clear processes for responding to any breaches of cultural safety—whether they involve staff, clients, or external partners—and ensure these are taken seriously and addressed in a culturally responsive manner.

How can organisations genuinely engage Aboriginal Communities in employment programs?

Building relationships with the Community plays a key role in recruitment efforts. Often, for people in the local area to consider working with your organisation or government department, they first need to know who you are and have a positive perception of you. Genuine engagement with Aboriginal Communities in employment programs requires more than consultation—it demands true partnership, shared decision-making, and long-term relationship building.

Aboriginal peoples, Communities, and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) must be directly involved in shaping recruitment strategies, designing culturally appropriate roles, and delivering programs that reflect Community priorities. Engagement should be based on trust, respect, and a willingness to listen and act on Community input.

Effective engagement in employment programs


- Involving Aboriginal Communities and ACCOs in designing jobs, recruitment processes, and program delivery from the outset.
- Building long-term, respectful relationships with local Aboriginal Communities to foster trust and improve program success.
- Prioritising co-design to ensure career pathways are culturally responsive, sustainable, and Community driven.
- Recognising the role of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) as key partners in employment initiatives.
- Allocating time and resources for meaningful engagement, ongoing dialogue, and shared ownership of employment outcomes.

Who is responsible for Aboriginal employment outcomes in an organisation?

Responsibility for Aboriginal employment outcomes lies with the entire organisation, not just Aboriginal staff or the human resources team. A whole-of-organisation approach ensures that every team, department, and level of leadership actively contributes to creating culturally safe, inclusive, and equitable employment opportunities. Aboriginal employment must be a shared priority that is embedded in strategic plans, day-to-day operations, and performance expectations.

What does a whole-of-organisation approach mean?

- Embedding Aboriginal employment responsibilities across leadership, management, HR, and operational teams.
- Developing and maintaining cultural safety organisation-wide through regular training and reflective practice.
- Holding leaders and managers accountable for Aboriginal employment outcomes through KPIs and reporting mechanisms.
- Measuring success by outcomes such as leadership representation, workplace culture, and the influence of Aboriginal voices, not just employment numbers.
- Ensuring ongoing support, mentorship, and career progression opportunities for Aboriginal staff.

 Read more about: [Whole of organisation approach](#)

What are common barriers to recruiting Aboriginal staff?

For many Aboriginal peoples, the journey into employment is shaped by a complex interplay of barriers and enablers. Historical and ongoing experiences of discrimination, cultural misunderstandings, and systemic bias often make job processes feel unwelcoming or exclusionary. Some barriers include:

- Systemic racism and discrimination
- Complex, inflexible job processes
- Lack of trust or connection to organisations
- Poor health and education outcomes
- Cultural load.

What is systemic racism and discrimination?

Systemic racism and discrimination against Aboriginal peoples in Australia refers to the ways in which laws, policies, institutions, and societal structures have historically disadvantaged, and continue to disadvantage them across many aspects of life.

This form of racism isn't always overt or intentional; it is embedded in systems and practices that produce unequal outcomes.

What are complex, inflexible job processes?

When thinking about complex and inflexible job processes in relation to Aboriginal recruitment, it is referring to systems and procedures that make it harder for Aboriginal peoples to apply for, get shortlisted for, and succeed in getting jobs, especially in government or mainstream organisations.

These processes are often designed without Aboriginal cultural contexts, lived experiences, or systemic disadvantage in mind.

Why is there a lack of trust or connection to organisations?

The lack of trust or connection to organisations by Aboriginal peoples, especially in the context of recruitment, stems from both historical and contemporary experiences of exclusion, discrimination, and cultural disconnection due to the impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma.

What is meant by poor health and education outcomes?

When referring to poor health and education outcomes for Aboriginal peoples, it's referring to the fact that, on average, Aboriginal peoples experience significantly worse outcomes in both areas compared to non-Aboriginal Australians.

These are not just individual challenges, but are the result of systemic inequality, racism, intergenerational trauma, and a lack of culturally safe services for Aboriginal peoples to engage with.

What is cultural load?

Cultural load refers to the weight or burden an individual or Community carries as a result of the lasting impacts of colonisation and systemic disadvantage on Aboriginal peoples cultural identity. For Aboriginal peoples, cultural load can stem from:

- intergenerational trauma
- the dispossession of land, language and culture
- ongoing experiences of discrimination and marginalisation since colonisation.

In the workplace, cultural load often describes the extra pressures placed on Aboriginal employees, especially when often they are the only Aboriginal person, or one of very few, within a team or organisation. These additional responsibilities may include:

- being expected to educate non-Aboriginal colleagues about Aboriginal culture, history or racism
- being asked to speak on behalf of all Aboriginal peoples
- being called on to deliver an Acknowledgement of Country, coordinate cultural events, or engage with Community, even when these tasks aren't formally part of their role.

These and other factors can contribute significantly to cultural load, isolation, burnout and a feeling of disconnection. These include:

- Not knowing the pathways
- Poorly defined roles and responsibilities
- Inflexible HR policies
- Unsupportive management and lack of cultural responsiveness
- Lack of understanding or respect for cultural values, practices and traditions from leadership and colleagues
- Lack of representation
- Limited access to resources
- Historical trauma
- Work-life balance challenges due to Community obligations.

 Read more about: [Cultural load](#)



What are common enablers to recruiting Aboriginal staff?

Common enablers to recruiting Aboriginal staff are the actions, strategies, and conditions that support Aboriginal peoples to engage with and succeed in recruitment processes and employment.

These enablers help create culturally safe, accessible, and empowering pathways into work, especially within organisations that have historically been seen as unwelcoming or disconnected. Some factors that can enable successful recruitment include:

- Flexible, culturally safe recruitment processes, offering help with applications, letting candidates bring support people to interviews, or using plain English when asking questions will assist in breaking down communication barriers.
- Removing unnecessary requirements such as driver's licences if the staff member is not required to drive as part of their role, psychometric testing as they typically have not been developed with cultural safety in mind.
- Strong relationships with local Community help to build your organisation's reputation and credibility within the Community.
- Recognition of cultural roles and valuing cultural identity within your organisation can help Aboriginal peoples feel culturally safe. Making space for Aboriginal English, cultural knowledge, or storytelling as valid ways to show capability.
- Including an Aboriginal person on the interview panel is a simple way of supporting visible role models and mentors within the recruitment process and the workplace itself.
- Ongoing support, like buddy systems, Aboriginal staff networks, or trauma-aware supervision, helps staff stay strong.

Section two

Role design and job descriptions

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Why should we co-design job roles with Aboriginal staff or Community members?

Aboriginal co-design is a collaborative process where Aboriginal peoples are involved from the start in the design, development and delivery of programs, policies, services, or systems that affect them.

Rather than being consulted after decisions are made, Aboriginal peoples are equal partners and decision-makers throughout the process.

Co-designing job roles with Aboriginal staff or Community members ensures that positions are appropriate, relevant, and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal peoples and Communities. Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach, co-design recognises the value of Aboriginal knowledge systems, lived experience, and Community priorities.

Key benefits include

- Ensuring roles are aligned with the strengths, needs, and aspirations of Aboriginal Communities.
- Valuing Aboriginal cultural knowledge and lived experience as essential components of role design.
- Increasing Community confidence and participation through inclusive, transparent processes.
- Enhancing recruitment outcomes by creating roles that are culturally safe and appealing to Aboriginal candidates.
- Strengthening long-term retention and impact by designing roles that reflect genuine partnership and purpose.

How does using plain English help in recruitment?

Writing job advertisements and descriptions in plain English helps make work opportunities easier to understand, more welcoming and more accessible for everyone, including Aboriginal peoples. Using complicated language, formal terms or jargon can confuse or deter people, especially those who are not used to formal job processes or who speak English as a second language.

Here are some useful tips:


- Stay away from complex words or workplace jargon.
- Make sure the candidate understands what you're asking and why it's relevant.
- Consider rephrasing the question or asking follow-up questions, seeking to understand, rather than sticking to rigid examples.
- Ask relevant questions with 'real world' practical examples.
- If you don't understand a word the candidate uses, ask politely and explain why you're asking.
- Use diagrams, pictures, or videos where necessary, especially when explaining new ideas, instructions, or words.

Why it matters:

- Using plain English, pictures and videos, makes job advertisements and position descriptions easier for more people to understand.
- Supports inclusive hiring by focusing on real-life skills and what someone can actually do.
- Encourages people with strong Community or lived experience to apply, even if they don't have formal qualifications.
- Helps remove confusing or formal language that might turn people away.
- Builds trust by showing the organisation respects clear and honest communication.

Tips for communicating with Aboriginal employees

- Be mindful of the words you use, whether you're speaking, writing, or using body language. Keep your message simple and clear.
- Avoid copying or imitating the way Aboriginal peoples speak, including Aboriginal English. It is not considered respectful and will not help build trust or make someone feel more comfortable.
- Understand that silence is okay. It doesn't always mean someone doesn't understand, sometimes it's just part of how Aboriginal peoples communicate.
- Let people speak in their own time. Do not interrupt or talk over an Aboriginal person; always wait your turn to talk.

 Read more about: [Communicating effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#)

Should we remove qualification requirements?

Yes, where qualifications are not essential to performing the role, they should be removed or made optional. Many Aboriginal peoples possess strong cultural knowledge, Community leadership, practical experience, and life skills that are just as valuable, if not more so, than formal qualifications.

Removing unnecessary requirements and qualifications such as driver's licences if the staff member is not required to drive as part of their role helps to lower perceived barriers for Aboriginal peoples.

Key considerations

- Reviewing roles to identify whether qualifications are genuinely required for safe and effective performance.
- Recognising cultural knowledge, lived experience, and Community involvement as valuable qualifications in their own right.
- Including clear descriptions of desired skills and attributes, rather than relying solely on formal credentials.
- Supporting candidates to develop required qualifications on the job where needed, through training or mentorship.
- Encouraging applications from Aboriginal peoples who may not meet formal criteria but demonstrate strong potential and Community connection.

What can we ask for instead of formal qualifications?

Instead of requiring formal qualifications, organisations can focus on the practical skills, knowledge, and lived experience that are directly relevant to the role. This approach recognises that many Aboriginal candidates bring deep Community insight, cultural understanding, and hands-on experience that may not be captured through certificates or degrees. This may include:

- Practical experience gained through Community work, volunteering, or caring roles.
- Cultural knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal protocols, values and ways of working.
- Strong communication and relationship-building skills, especially in culturally diverse or Community settings.
- Problem-solving and adaptability, particularly in challenging or changing environments.
- Commitment to Community and demonstrated leadership or advocacy roles.
- Willingness to learn, with opportunities for on-the-job training or professional development.
- Personal values that align with the organisation's mission and support inclusive, respectful practice.


Why is it important to value lived experience and cultural knowledge?

Valuing lived experience and cultural knowledge is essential for building a workforce that is inclusive, effective, and genuinely responsive to the needs of Aboriginal Communities.

Aboriginal peoples bring unique strengths through their connection to Country, culture, Community, and identity. These insights cannot be taught through formal education alone. These lived experiences shape how people engage, communicate, and lead, particularly in roles that involve working with Aboriginal peoples or Communities.

Practical ways to demonstrate lived experience

- Including cultural knowledge and Community ties as essential criteria in job descriptions, especially for Community-facing roles.
- Treating lived experience as equal in value to formal qualifications in the recruitment process.
- Creating pathways for Aboriginal staff to lead and mentor based on their cultural strengths.
- Acknowledging the importance of identity, kinship, and Community roles in shaping professional expertise.
- Providing culturally safe environments that support the ongoing sharing and application of cultural knowledge in the workplace.

 Read more about: [Integrating lived experience: Three approaches to bringing out the lived experience in your organisation](#)



Section three

Community-based advertising and networking

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How can we advertise jobs to reach Aboriginal candidates effectively?

Word-of-mouth and Community networks are the most effective form of recruitment for Aboriginal peoples. Connecting with Community, Elders, local leaders and Traditional Owners is one of the most effective ways to share job opportunities.

Employers should actively engage Traditional Owners and Community leaders, especially when working on Country, and maintain these relationships.

Partnering with Aboriginal organisations is another great way to develop strong relationships with local Aboriginal Communities, Land Councils, and employment service providers.

These groups can help promote roles and recommend potential candidates. Some businesses also engage Aboriginal stakeholders to co-design employment programs and recruitment strategies, which often leads to better engagement and retention.

Where should we advertise roles to reach Aboriginal Communities?

Use a combination of:

- [National Indigenous Times](#)
- [Indigenous Employment Australia](#)
- Aboriginal-specific radio stations (i.e. [Umeewarra Radio](#))
- [Torres News](#)
- [Turkindi Network](#)
- Community noticeboards
- Local Aboriginal organisations' job boards
- Career Trackers, Aboriginal Workstars, and AIME.

How to use social media

Create a dedicated Aboriginal employment webpage or landing page that showcases:

- Current vacancies
- Career pathways
- Staff stories
- Cultural commitments (like RAPs).
- Include visual images of Aboriginal employees in a range of roles to reflect the diversity of opportunities.

Examples

- [Aboriginal Employment SA | Facebook](#)
- [Aboriginal Labour Force Development | Facebook](#)

How should we design job advertisements to attract Aboriginal applicants?

To design job advertisements that support Aboriginal recruitment, consider including the following:

- A clear and concise description of the role, including the key responsibilities and how the position contributes to the organisation's goals.
- Information about leave entitlements, including the availability of cultural leave and how the organisation supports cultural obligations such as Sorry Business or Community events.

What is Sorry Business?

Sorry Business refers to the mourning practices and cultural protocols followed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples after the passing of a loved one.

It is a deeply significant part of cultural life and can vary greatly between different Communities. These customs provide a way for individuals, families and Communities to express grief, show respect, and support one another during times of loss.

Understanding Sorry Business

- **Mourning period:** The length of mourning can differ depending on cultural practices and family ties. It may last from a few days to several weeks or even months. During this period, family members might wear traditional mourning clothing, observe cultural restrictions, and participate in particular customs.
- **Ceremonies and rituals:** Ceremonies are central to Sorry Business and are held to honour the person who has passed and to guide their spirit. These may include smoking ceremonies, song and dance, storytelling, and other cultural practices unique to each Community.
- **Community involvement:** Sorry Business is not just a private family matter. It often involves the broader Community, who come together to offer support, help with funeral arrangements, and take part in shared mourning practices. Sharing memories, expressing condolences, and assisting the family are all important elements of Community care.
- **Cultural protocols:** Each Community has its own protocols and expectations around Sorry Business. These can include specific roles for family members, behavioural expectations, and rules about participating in ceremonies. Understanding and respecting these protocols is essential.
- **Healing and connection:** The practices involved in Sorry Business help Communities process grief, find healing, and maintain cultural strength. They allow space for emotions to be expressed, stories to be shared, and cultural bonds to be reaffirmed during a time of great loss.

Supporting Sorry Business in the workplace

Sorry Business is a sacred and complex aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. It's important for organisations to approach it with respect, cultural sensitivity, and flexibility.

To respectfully support Sorry Business within your workplace or Community:

- Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff or connect with local Community organisations, such as your Local Aboriginal Land Council, Torres Strait Regional Authority or council liaison officer, to understand specific cultural protocols in your area. In some regions, businesses may close completely as a mark of respect.
- Stay informed through local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander networks. You can subscribe to newsletters, check Community websites or follow relevant Facebook pages to receive updates on Sorry Business and related Community notices.
- **Details about hours of work**, with a focus on flexibility, such as part-time options, job sharing or remote work, where possible.
- **Mention of innovative practices**, such as the use of new technology or ways of working that might appeal to candidates with different experiences or learning styles.
- **A visible statement of encouragement**, such as: **"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are encouraged to apply for this job."**
- **Images of Aboriginal staff (with consent)** that reflect cultural inclusion and Aboriginal representation within the organisation, helping applicants envision themselves as part of the team.
- **Plain English language** to ensure the ad is easy to read and accessible to a wide audience.
- Leave entitlements, including cultural leave.
- Hours of work and potential for flexible working arrangements.
- Reference to your Reconciliation Action Plan and/or Aboriginal engagement strategy (if applicable).

How can job descriptions be more culturally inclusive?

When making job descriptions more culturally inclusive for Aboriginal peoples, employers need to rethink the language, structure, and intent behind the position to ensure it is accessible, strengths-based, and welcoming.

A culturally responsive job description goes beyond just adding a diversity statement, it reflects a genuine commitment to inclusion, equity, and cultural safety.

Here are some useful tips:

- **Keep the language simple and inclusive:** Use plain English and avoid bureaucratic jargon. Make the advert short, clear, and welcoming. Tailor the language to suit your intended audience. Avoid complex online application portals unless support is provided.
- **Add cultural elements:** Use culturally relevant artwork or imagery where appropriate and always include a statement like “**Aboriginal peoples are strongly encouraged to apply.**”
- Where possible, provide the name and number of an Aboriginal contact person who can answer questions about the role and support potential applicants. Outline:
 - Role responsibilities
 - Application deadlines
 - Leave entitlements including cultural leave
 - Potential for flexible working
 - Clear explanation if the role is under Affirmative Measures or is an Identified position.

Other useful supports:

- Offer the name and number of an Aboriginal contact person for culturally safe support during the application process.
- Add relevant cultural imagery or artwork to reflect diversity (with appropriate permissions and cultural guidance).
- Clearly outline the role, including responsibilities, deadlines, and expectations. This includes listing entitlements, including cultural leave and flexible work options.
- Explain if the position is an Identified role, with a clear and respectful description of what that means, and what the candidate is expected to undertake as part of their role.

How can we engage with Aboriginal Communities during recruitment?

Engaging with Aboriginal Communities during recruitment is about building genuine relationships, respecting cultural protocols, and creating pathways that are accessible, inclusive, and empowering.

Successful is not transactional or an afterthought; it is grounded in trust, reciprocity, and long-term connection.

Use a combination of:

- Hosting information sessions in local and culturally safe spaces.
- Partnering with Aboriginal organisations, Elders, Land Councils, and local leaders to co-design and promote roles.
- Sharing staff stories and show organisational values, not just job tasks.
- Introducing your organisation and its values.
- Explaining job roles and application processes.
- Featuring Aboriginal staff sharing their lived work experiences.
- Allowing attendees to ask questions and receive help with applications.
- Establishing links with Aboriginal Community organisations and talk to Community members about your organisation and jobs.
- Aboriginal staff sharing their own stories and experiences, offering insights and building connection.
- Offering opportunities for attendees to ask questions, receive support with job applications, and connect with recruitment staff in a culturally respectful setting.
- Providing printed materials or digital resources in plain English to take home and share with others.

Examples of job culturally inclusive advertisements

- Aboriginal Community Elders Services: [Activities Assistant – Aboriginal Community Elders Services Inc \(ACES\)](#)
- Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative: [Jobs | Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative](#)
- [BDAC Recruitment Campaign](#)
- Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative (RAC): [Program Manager – Family Safety - Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative](#)
- Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation: [Employment Opportunities | Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation \(AHAC\)](#)

Section four

Selecting and recruiting Aboriginal staff

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How can we simplify the application and screening process to better support Aboriginal applicants?

To better support Aboriginal applicants, simplifying the application and screening process means removing unnecessary complexity, ensuring cultural safety, and making the process more accessible, strengths-based and human-centered.

This supports equity by recognising that many Aboriginal applicants bring valuable lived and cultural knowledge, even if they haven't followed conventional career pathways. Recognise that not all Aboriginal applicants will have access to fast internet or be confident with online systems.

Make the process simple and supportive, minimising unnecessary paperwork. Always offer help to applicants during the application process, this may include:

- An option for In-person lodgement providing hardcopy application forms that can be mailed or collected in person, or phone applications and interviews.
- Focusing on applicants' strengths, motivation, soft skills, and Community knowledge, rather than filtering out candidates based solely on formal qualifications or perceived gaps.
- Allowing applications or interviews to be completed over the phone for those who prefer verbal communication.

What are strengths-based and empowering approaches in recruitment?

Strengths-based and empowering approaches to recruitment recognise that Aboriginal peoples bring a wealth of skills, knowledge, and lived experience that are valuable assets to any workplace. Rather than focusing on perceived gaps, deficits, or disadvantages, these approaches emphasise the strengths, resilience, and capabilities individuals already possess.

This shift challenges outdated stereotypes and promotes a positive, respectful way of engaging with Aboriginal candidates, honouring their cultural identity and unique contributions. Recruitment frameworks based on strengths focus on identifying what candidates can offer, such as Community knowledge, leadership skills, cultural insight, and practical experience.

Key principles of strengths-based and empowering recruitment

- Recognising Aboriginal people as skilled, capable, and culturally knowledgeable contributors.
- Designing recruitment processes that focus on candidates' strengths and potential, not deficits.
- Supporting career pathways that respect individual aspirations, cultural identity, and Community connections.
- Challenging deficit-based stereotypes and valuing Aboriginal leadership, innovation, and expertise.
- Creating workplaces that nurture pride, dignity, and self-determination for Aboriginal employees.

What does equity in recruitment and advancement involve?

Equity in recruitment and advancement means ensuring Aboriginal peoples have fair and genuine opportunities to enter, stay, and progress within an organisation. This requires actively removing systemic and structural barriers that have historically limited access to employment and promotion for Aboriginal candidates.

Equity is about more than treating everyone the same, it involves recognising different starting points and providing targeted support to level the playing field, so Aboriginal employees can succeed on their own terms.

To achieve equity, organisations often implement affirmative measures such as Aboriginal-identified roles and culturally relevant career pathways. These initiatives are designed to provide clear, supported routes into employment and leadership, reflecting the unique cultural strengths and needs of Aboriginal peoples.

Equity also means creating a workplace culture where Aboriginal employees feel valued, respected, and able to thrive professionally and personally.

Access to leadership and executive roles is a critical component of equity. Aboriginal employees should be encouraged and supported to pursue senior positions through tailored development programs, mentoring, and leadership opportunities.

Key elements of equity in recruitment and advancement include:

- Removing systemic and structural barriers to employment and promotion for Aboriginal peoples.
- Using affirmative action measures and Aboriginal-identified roles to provide equitable access.
- Developing culturally relevant career pathways that align with Community values and strengths.

- Offering tailored mentoring, professional development, and leadership opportunities for Aboriginal staff.
- Embedding policies and practices that support cultural safety, inclusion, and ongoing accountability.

Tips for recruitment pathways

- These can be tailored to people at different stages, such as high school, TAFE, university, or those seeking a career change.
- Examples include:
 - Cadetships such as the Indigenous Cadetship Support Program, which combines academic study with hands-on work.
 - Traineeships focusing on performance-based learning, often offered in public sector, legal, education and environmental roles.
 - Pre-employment or 'job readiness' training programs, designed in partnership with Aboriginal organisations and Traditional Owner groups, that include real-life experience and soft skills, cultural identity, mentoring, and wraparound support.
 - Aboriginal Talent Pools and guaranteed interview schemes (e.g. Aboriginal assessment centres).

The [Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations \(ORIC\)](#) has developed a series of guides for recruitment processes.

Case study: [Boosting First Nations Employment: Boosting First Nations Employment | Australian Public Service Commission](#)

What changes should we make to our selection process?

To make your selection process more inclusive and supportive of Aboriginal applicants, it's important to move away from rigid, one-size-fits-all models and towards culturally safe, strengths-based and flexible approaches.



These changes help level the playing field and demonstrate a genuine commitment to equity and inclusion. Consider applying a culturally responsive approach by:

- Using conversational interviews with plain English, rather than an interrogation style interview avoiding overly formal structures or physical barriers.
- Sharing interview questions in advance and allowing support people at interviews.
- Including Aboriginal representation on selection panels.
- Using situational questions and practical tasks, not just behavioural interviews.

Tips for selection panels

Utilise an Aboriginal person, or a culturally appropriate person, on selection panels. That is, someone who has a firm understanding of what is required by Aboriginal employees in their professional capacity, and also of the kind of challenges that Aboriginal employees may face in their Communities and workplaces. Consider:

- Where possible, match panel members to the applicant's gender for identified roles.
- Don't rely on one person as the sole cultural voice, everyone involved should understand the importance of cultural safety.
- Engage with Aboriginal Employee Networks or Community members to find suitable panel representatives.
- Give your potential workers and panel members reasonable notice about when, where and what will happen.
- Check if the applicant needs anything to help them participate in the interview.
- Brief your panel on what they need to do and how you will rate or score the potential workers.
- Ensure panel members have completed Aboriginal Cultural Safety Training, and/or unconscious bias training.

What makes an interview culturally safe?

A culturally safe interview for Aboriginal applicants is one where the environment, process, and people involved create a sense of respect, trust, and inclusion, allowing the applicant to be themselves and speak freely without fear of judgement, discrimination or misunderstanding.

Cultural safety goes beyond simply avoiding racism, it's about actively valuing Aboriginal identity, ways of communicating, cultural knowledge, and recognising the power imbalance that often exists in mainstream recruitment processes.

Tips for interview panels

- Start with a yarning-style (small talk, get to know you conversation) introduction to build rapport.
- Consider a Yarning Circle (where you interview in a circle, rather than across a table).
- Avoid legalistic or bureaucratic language.
- Aboriginal peoples are highly Community focused and will often answer in storytelling and communal responses ("we" not just "I")
- Respect indirect communication and silence.
- Allow applicants to bring a support person or family member.
- Give interview questions in advance, so applicants have time to prepare.
- Conduct a pre-interview information session and introduce panel members.
- Use conversational style interviews where possible and avoid highly formal settings.
- Create a relaxed environment for interviews.
- Avoid conducting interviews in small, closed rooms and placing physical objects between panel and applicant.

Communication and language

- Keep language simple, clear and free of jargon or legalese.
- Tailor style and pace of questioning according to candidate's comfort level.
- Understand different communication styles:
 - Some applicants may take longer pauses to think.
 - Eye contact may be avoided as a sign of respect.
 - "Shame" can mean feeling embarrassed or self-conscious.
 - Some may say "yes" out of politeness rather than agreement.
 - Many speak about "we" instead of "I" because of the importance of Community.
 - Don't mistake Aboriginal English for poor language skills, it is a legitimate and rich form of expression.

Types of questions

- Situational questions over behavioural ones. Ask what the applicant would do when faced with the problem, rather than what they have done, especially for entry-level roles.
- Explore how candidates manage cultural obligations, such as time off for Sorry Business or Community responsibilities.
- Include questions about values, interests and motivation, not just technical capability.

Example:

“Tell us about a time when you needed to build and maintain a strong connection with a person. How did you engage them, and what did you do to build this relationship?”

- The use of open-ended questions can be effective in finding out information in regard to the applicants work skills and life experiences, job expectations and career expectations.

Sample interview questions: [Recruitment & Retention Strategy](#)

How to use practical tasks and activities

- Practical activities are often more effective than formal interviews. These might include teamwork tasks, safety exercises, or other job-related simulations.
- Involve Aboriginal peoples in the design to ensure cultural relevance.
- Avoid tasks that require high reading or writing levels, but are more focused on verbal communication and conversations.
- Present instructions in different formats to suit various learning styles.
- For group activities, be aware of cultural dynamics like avoidance relationships. Let candidates choose who speaks for the group.



Can we use assessment centres?

Yes, you can use assessment centres when recruiting Aboriginal applicants, but only if they are thoughtfully designed to be culturally safe, inclusive, and supportive.

- Assessment centres can work well for entry-level roles and offer a well-rounded view of a candidate's strengths.
- Use multiple methods like interviews, group work, hands-on tasks, and short exercises.
- Provide clear information before the assessment centre about what to expect, what to wear, and how the day will run.
- Start with a casual “meet and greet” session and include a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country.
- Encourage informal interactions during breaks to ease nerves and build rapport.
- Choose culturally responsive venues, local Community centres, or rooms decorated with Aboriginal flags and artwork.
- Involve Aboriginal assessors and ensure all assessors are trained in both assessment practices and culturally responsive practice.
- Provide information about the role and organisation, inform candidates what it is like to work for the organisation, the type of support available and present the ‘Reconciliation Action Plan,’ if available.

Here are some useful tips

- Be cautious using cognitive ability tests for entry-level roles. These tests are often less predictive of job performance for Aboriginal candidates, because they have typically not been developed with Aboriginal peoples specifically in mind.
- Psychometric tools developed from a Western perspective can create barriers and may not accurately reflect a candidate's potential.
- If using these tools, ensure they're only part of a broader assessment and not used to rule someone out without further consideration.
- Always offer support and context.

Can we use alternative assessments?

- Yes, use role-specific tasks, group activities, or visual demonstrations instead of heavily written exercises.
- Present information in multiple formats (e.g. visual, verbal).
- Involve Aboriginal representatives in co-designing culturally appropriate assessments.

How do we communicate the interview outcomes?

Communicating interview outcomes in a culturally respectful and transparent way is a vital part of a culturally safe recruitment process, especially when working with Aboriginal applicants. It's not just about ticking a box; it's about maintaining trust, building relationships, and supporting long-term inclusion and equity.

- Always notify candidates of the outcome via phone or in person, not email.
- Offer feedback and explain why they were or weren't selected.
- Provide advice on future opportunities and what they could improve.
- Allow the presence of a support person or family member during feedback sessions if the candidate chooses.



Read more about: [Culturally responsive selection and recruitment.](#)

- [Recruiting and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees-A guide for Community legal centres.pdf](#)
- [A guide to promote supportive working environments in health and human services: For Organisations and Managers](#)
- [Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural capability toolkit - VPSC](#)

Section five

Welcoming new staff to your service

Information Pack:
Aboriginal
Culturally
Responsive
Recruitment in
Early Education

How can we support Aboriginal staff once they are hired?

Supporting Aboriginal staff after they are hired is just as important as recruiting them, because without ongoing support, inclusion, and culturally safe environments, Aboriginal staff may feel culturally and psychologically isolated, undervalued, or leave the organisation altogether.

Recruitment alone doesn't close the gap; retention, development, and belonging do.



Here are some useful tips

Welcome and connection

- Introduce new Aboriginal employees to Aboriginal-specific support areas as part of their induction program.
- Customise induction communication for Aboriginal new starters to include information on cultural supports, connections with other Aboriginal employees, and supervisor guidance.
- Provide information on cultural leave provisions, Aboriginal staff networks, and employee assistance programs tailored to Aboriginal employees.

Cultural and family leave

- Employment contracts and conditions for Aboriginal employees should formally include that cultural and family leave days are available and that taking these is supported and encouraged.
- Clearly explain leave policies that provide for cultural and family leave days, ensuring taking such leave is supported and encouraged.
- Provide guidance for managers on how to support Aboriginal employees balancing cultural and family obligations.
- Managers should make a time to have regular chats with new employees to discuss whether the principles are being met to the satisfaction of employees.

Develop a buddy program to support new Aboriginal employees.

How can a buddy program help?

- A buddy program provides new Aboriginal employees with peer or supervisor support to:
 - Ease transition, especially when relocating from Country.
 - Navigate workplace culture.
 - Build relationships and confidence.
 - Learn the role and expectations within the first 90 days.

Prepare supervisors, managers, and teams.

What preparation should supervisors and teams receive?

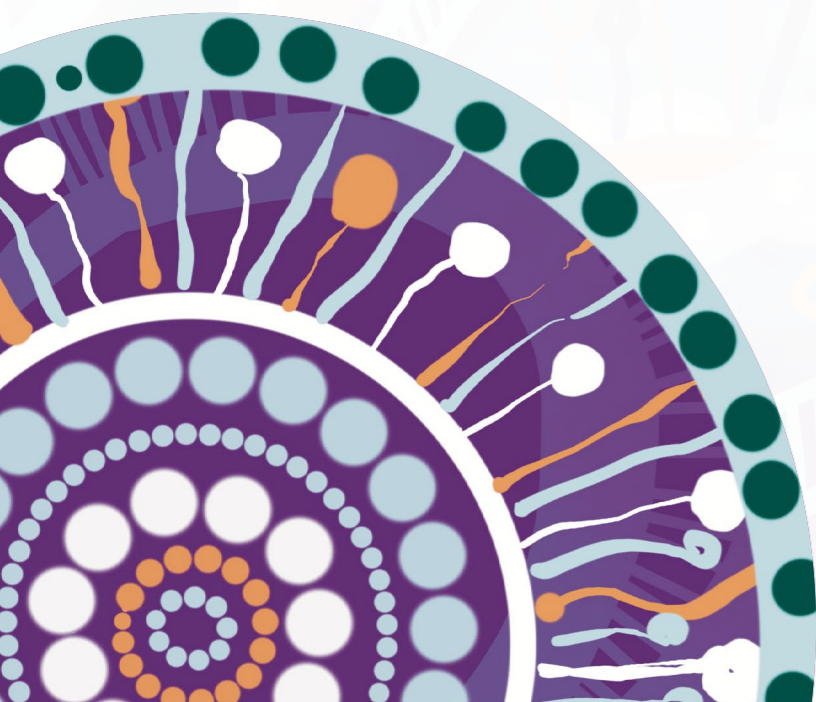
- Supervisors and teams should undergo:
 - Aboriginal Cultural Safety training to promote inclusivity and respect.
 - Aboriginal mental health training to better support emotional and cultural wellbeing.
- Conduct on-site inductions, including workplace tours and introductions, to help new starters understand workplace culture, conventions, and expectations in a practical setting.
- Provide clear communication on workplace policies, flexible work arrangements, and operational procedures tailored to the needs of Aboriginal employees.
- Establish a Performance Development Plan, or similar, as soon as possible which clearly defines work role and performance expectations as well as avenues for support and development.
- Offer one-on-one cultural coaching opportunities in partnership with Traditional Owners to support employees in balancing work performance and Community responsibility.

Cultural briefings and support

- For roles connected to Country or Traditional Knowledge, include local "on Country" briefings and cultural knowledge sharing relevant to the work location.
- Encourage participation in Aboriginal Employee Yarning Circles or other culturally safe peer support groups.
- Use induction feedback mechanisms to obtain qualitative feedback from Aboriginal employees and continuously improve the induction process.

How can we foster cultural and Community connection?

- Encourage connection with Aboriginal colleagues and Community members.
- Support participation in cultural and Community events.
- Provide access to Aboriginal-specific support services or Aboriginal cultural advisors.
- Where possible, offer cultural coaching with Traditional Custodians.



What should be included in the onboarding process for Aboriginal staff?

An effective onboarding process for Aboriginal staff should go beyond basic HR tasks. It should be culturally safe, welcoming, and relationship-based, helping the new employee feel supported, respected, and confident from day one.

A strong onboarding experience sets the foundation for trust, wellbeing, and long-term retention.

A culturally safe onboarding includes:

- Acknowledgement of Country or Welcome to Country.
- Tour of the workplace and orientation to workplace expectations.
- Clear explanation of cultural leave and flexible work options.
- Introduction to Aboriginal staff networks, mentors, and employee assistance programs (EAPs).
- A buddy or mentor program, especially for staff relocating from Country.
- Organisational structure and responsibilities - use the position description.
- Capabilities for the role - service providers are responsible for making sure workers have the capabilities they need for the work they do.
- Organisational policies and procedures - new recruits need to know about policies or procedures they need to follow.
- Ongoing support - consider how to provide regular points of connection and contact with other workers and supervisors.

Tips to welcome and connecting with Aboriginal employees

- Introduce new Aboriginal employees to Aboriginal-specific support areas as part of their induction program.
- Customise induction communication for Aboriginal new starters to include information on cultural supports, connections with other Aboriginal employees, and supervisor guidance.
- Provide information on cultural leave provisions, Aboriginal staff networks, and employee assistance programs tailored to Aboriginal employees.
- Managers should make a time to have regular chats with new employees to discuss whether the principles are being met to the satisfaction of employees.
- Provide an induction kit with organisational policies and other materials.
- Introduce the new staff member to other staff and management e.g., through a welcome morning tea.



How can I build trust and encourage open communication?

Building trust and encouraging open communication with Aboriginal staff and Communities requires more than good intentions; it takes time, consistency, and cultural humility.

Aboriginal peoples may carry historical and personal experiences of exclusion, discrimination, or tokenism, so trust must be earned through actions, not just words.

- Be approachable and open to dialogue.
- Provide regular check-ins and constructive feedback.
- Recognise that building trust may take time.
- Offer guidance to help Aboriginal employees adjust to the new environment.

Building relationships

Regular communication, recognition, and respect for their cultural values:

- Encouraging open and two-way communication with Aboriginal employees
- Providing opportunities to share their ideas and opinions
- Providing feedback on their work.

The role of managers

- Managers should hold regular conversations with new Aboriginal employees to ensure their needs and expectations are being met.
- Explain the employment strategy principles and workplace expectations clearly to new employees during induction.

Tips for using inclusive language

- When referring to or speaking with Aboriginal peoples, it's important to use respectful and inclusive terms. Preferred language includes phrases like "Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander". Where possible, use the specific Traditional Owner group name, such as "Kaurna", or "Adnyamathanha" to acknowledge the Country and peoples.
- Avoid using acronyms like "ATSI" or outdated terms such as "Aborigine/s," as these can be considered disrespectful or carry negative historical associations. Using full and accurate terminology shows cultural responsiveness and consideration.
- There are also many words and expressions from Aboriginal English. While it's great to learn about these, be mindful when using them, if the terms aren't part of your everyday vocabulary or cultural background, it's better not to use them casually, as it can come across as inauthentic or forced.
- The best approach is to listen, learn, and ask when unsure. Respectful language is one way to contribute to a culturally safe and inclusive environment for everyone.

Silence

- Silence shouldn't be assumed to mean a lack of understanding. For many Aboriginal peoples, silence is an important part of communication. An Aboriginal employee may remain quiet because they are actively listening, taking time to reflect, or waiting to hear from others before offering their thoughts.
- During meetings, interviews, or conversations, it's important to allow space for silence and give the person time to respond in a way that feels right for them. Avoid rushing to fill the silence; patience is a sign of respect.

Eye contact

- The meaning of eye contact varies across different Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Communities and individuals. In some cultures, avoiding direct eye contact shows respect, particularly when speaking with Elders or people in authority. In others, making eye contact may be seen as a sign of honesty and confidence.
- When engaging with Aboriginal employees, don't jump to conclusions if eye contact is not maintained. Instead, take the time to learn about the person's or Community's cultural preferences.
- You can respectfully ask about their views on eye contact, approach the conversation with curiosity, openness, and a willingness to understand their cultural perspective. Showing genuine interest and respect helps build stronger relationships.

Personal space and physical contact

- Awareness of personal space is important when working with Aboriginal employees, especially across different cultural or gender lines. Standing too close or towering over someone while speaking may be perceived as intimidating or uncomfortable. Always be mindful of how and where you position yourself during conversations.
- If you need to touch a staff member—for example, a light tap to get their attention—always ask for permission first and clearly explain why. This shows respect for personal boundaries and acknowledges the individual's right to feel safe in the workplace.



Read more about:

- [Inducting and welcoming Aboriginal staff](#)

Section six

Supporting Aboriginal Staff

Information Pack:
Aboriginal
Culturally
Responsive
Recruitment in
Early Education



What retention strategies work well for Aboriginal staff?

Retention of Aboriginal staff is strongly supported by creating workplaces that are culturally safe, inclusive, and respectful of Aboriginal identities and values. Building cultural safety means fostering an environment where Aboriginal employees feel confident that their culture is respected, their voices are heard, and they are free from discrimination or bias.

Organisations can embed cultural safety through ongoing cultural responsiveness training, recognition of cultural obligations such as Sorry Business, and creating spaces for Aboriginal staff to connect and share experiences.

Inclusion goes beyond cultural safety to ensure Aboriginal employees are genuinely involved in decision-making, leadership opportunities, and workplace initiatives. Supporting career development, mentorship, and leadership pathways tailored to Aboriginal staff helps build a sense of belonging and opportunity for progression.

Recognition and celebration of Aboriginal culture within the workplace through events, artwork, or storytelling and reinforcing positive identity and connection.

Useful Tips

- Providing ongoing Aboriginal Cultural Safety training and fostering an inclusive workplace culture.
- Supporting Aboriginal staff networks, peer support, and mentorship programs.
- Offering flexible work arrangements and recognising cultural leave needs.

Why are flexible working arrangements important for Aboriginal employees?

Flexible work supports employees in meeting cultural obligations, family responsibilities, and Community engagements. Examples include:

- 'Lifestyle rosters' offering extended breaks, shorter shifts for parents or carers.
- Flexible leave policies that account for Sorry Business or cultural ceremonies.
- Creating tailored career development and leadership pathways.
- Celebrating Aboriginal culture and achievements within the organisation.
- Engaging Aboriginal staff in organisational decision-making and planning.
- Maintain open-door policies for regular wellbeing check-ins.
- Culturally safe onboarding and induction.

Why it matters

- When Aboriginal employees feel culturally safe at work, they are more likely to stay, engage, and grow in their roles.
- Cultural safety supports mental health, reduces workplace stress, and enhances job satisfaction. It also fosters stronger team dynamics, and a workplace culture built on respect and mutual understanding.
- Cultural safety is a two-way street, it benefits both Aboriginal staff and non-Aboriginal colleagues, for organisations, it can lead to greater productivity, lower turnover, and improved Community trust, but most importantly, it's the right thing to do.

Further reading and resources

- [Reconciliation Australia – Workplace Cultural Competence](#)
- [Aboriginal Child Care Agency – Building Cultural Safety](#)

How can we develop strong Aboriginal career pathways?

Developing strong Aboriginal career pathways means creating structured, culturally safe, and supported opportunities that enable Aboriginal employees to grow, lead, and thrive within an organisation.

It involves acknowledging and valuing the diverse strengths Aboriginal people bring, including cultural knowledge, community experience, and leadership potential, and ensuring those strengths are reflected in career development plans.

Organisations must move beyond generic professional development models and instead provide tailored support that aligns with the unique aspirations and responsibilities of Aboriginal staff.

- Promote clear career development pathways from entry to senior roles, including pipelines of Aboriginal talent and leadership programs.
- Actively support Aboriginal graduates and trainees with career advice and planning throughout their employment program.
- Support flexible work and study leave options to help balance work, cultural obligations, and personal development, including pathways to career advancement.

Useful Tips: support strong Aboriginal career pathways

- Where possible, embed Aboriginal career development into workforce planning and organisational strategy. Creating pathways into leadership and executive roles, with appropriate support and succession planning. Involving Aboriginal staff in designing and reviewing career development initiatives to ensure they are relevant and effective.
- Offer or support culturally responsive mentoring programs that connect Aboriginal staff with experienced leaders. Provide access to and promote targeted training, scholarships, and leadership development opportunities to Aboriginal staff. Recognising community and cultural responsibilities as leadership qualities and professional strengths.
- Tracking progress and providing regular, supportive performance reviews tailored to individual goals and strengths.

Why it matters

- Clear career pathways help Aboriginal employees envision their future within the organisation, increasing engagement and retention. Supporting graduates and trainees with culturally aware advice ensures smoother transitions and ongoing growth.
- Flexible work policies respect cultural obligations and personal development, reducing conflict and stress. Apprenticeships and cadetships provide practical, meaningful routes into skilled roles, while informal development cultivates the next generation of Aboriginal leaders.

Links for further reading

- [Indigenous Skills and Employment Program \(ISEP\)](#)

How can we support Aboriginal employee engagement and feedback?

Supporting Aboriginal employee engagement and feedback involves creating culturally safe spaces where Aboriginal staff feel comfortable sharing their experiences, ideas, and concerns without fear of judgement or reprisal.

Engagement is not a one-off activity, it must be ongoing, two-way, and built on trust, respect, and genuine listening. Organisations must actively seek feedback from Aboriginal employees through culturally appropriate methods such as Yarning Circles, one-on-one conversations, or surveys that use plain English and avoid overly formal or corporate language.

Meaningful engagement also requires acting on feedback, being transparent about decisions, and involving Aboriginal staff in shaping workplace policies, practices, and priorities. This demonstrates respect and ensures that Aboriginal perspectives are influencing real change.

Tips for Aboriginal employee engagement and feedback

- Create culturally safe opportunities for feedback, such as Yarning Circles, informal discussions, or Community-style gatherings. Making sure interviews are led by someone trusted and trained in cultural competency. Record general themes (not individual responses) to maintain confidentiality.
- Use plain English and inclusive language in all engagement tools and surveys. Involve Aboriginal staff in decision-making processes and ensuring their voices are reflected in outcomes. Provide regular updates on how feedback is being used to make improvements.

- Ask thoughtful, culturally safe questions such as, “What makes you feel valued at work?” or “Are there changes that would help you feel more supported?”, making sure to share key insights with decision-makers and follow through with visible actions.
- Establish Aboriginal staff networks or working groups to guide engagement and support inclusion. Hold them during regular work hours and ensure participation is encouraged.
- Use ‘stay interviews’ as a proactive tool to understand what motivates Aboriginal employees to stay and what could be improved. Schedule these regularly to gather ongoing insights. A stay interview is a proactive conversation with current Aboriginal employees to understand why they stay and what improvements could enhance their experience. This helps identify and address potential retention risks early.

Why it matters

Listening to Aboriginal employees’ voices helps organisations identify barriers to engagement and retention early. Understanding their experience fosters trust and shows genuine commitment to improving workplace culture.

Supporting Aboriginal staff networks and forums enhances Community connection and allows issues to be raised collectively. Employee feedback loops help build workplaces where Aboriginal peoples feel heard, valued, and motivated to contribute long term.

Links for further reading

- [Fair Work Ombudsman – Culturally Safe Feedback Processes](#)

What does a culturally appropriate mentoring program look like?

A culturally appropriate mentoring program is voluntary, confidential, built on trust, and connects Aboriginal employees with culturally competent mentors, either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, while respecting cultural protocols and involving community and family where appropriate.

Useful tips

- Establish mentoring programs that are culturally safe, by pairing Aboriginal employees with senior Aboriginal mentors or trained culturally aware non-Aboriginal mentors. Allow mentees full choice and control over their mentoring relationships, including the option to change or end the relationship. Support both formal and informal mentoring networks and invest in mentor training focusing on cultural safety, empathy, and flexibility.
- Develop Aboriginal Buddy programs to help new employees, especially those relocating from Country, settle in smoothly. Include families in the mentoring process when appropriate and ensure regular contact during critical early employment periods.
- Plan for adequate funding, leadership, and ongoing evaluation to sustain program effectiveness and prevent burnout.

How do mentoring and targeted support help with retention?

Mentoring provides guidance, encouragement, and connection to career pathways. Targeted support—such as career planning, leadership development, and informal check-ins—ensures Aboriginal employees feel valued and supported in their career journey.

Why it matters

Culturally appropriate mentoring builds confidence, professional skills, and a sense of belonging for Aboriginal employees. Allowing control over mentor selection ensures trust and respect in the relationship. Informal and formal networks create broad support systems, reducing isolation. Buddy programs ease transitions for those moving away from Country. Regular evaluation and leadership maintain program quality and responsiveness, promoting sustainable success.

Links for further reading

- [Reconciliation Australia – Indigenous Mentoring Initiatives](#)
- [Supporting Aboriginal staff](#)





How are professional development opportunities tailored to support Aboriginal employees?

Professional development opportunities should be designed to align with Aboriginal learning styles and include leadership programs, scholarships, secondments, and literacy support, along with Aboriginal Cultural Safety training and personalised Performance Development Plans, or similar for career growth.

Useful Tips

- Implement Performance Development Plans, or similar that link day-to-day work performance with broader career goals, tailored to Aboriginal employees' needs. Offer professional development programs designed with Aboriginal learning styles in mind, including literacy and numeracy support where required.
- Promote scholarships, leadership awards and external Aboriginal leadership programs to encourage growth. Facilitate attendance at conferences, secondments, and acting roles to build skills and expand networks.
- Make Aboriginal Cultural Safety training an ongoing core requirement for all staff to build respectful, inclusive workplaces.

Why it matters

Professional development empowers Aboriginal employees to reach their full potential and prepares them for leadership roles.

Tailoring learning approaches respects cultural ways of knowing and boosts effectiveness. Scholarships and leadership programs provide vital opportunities to develop confidence and expertise. Participation in conferences and acting roles broadens perspectives and connections. Cultural competence training fosters an environment where Aboriginal culture is understood and valued by all.

Helpful tools and resources

Resource	What It Helps With	Where to Find It
ACCO-developed frameworks	Offers Community-led, culturally responsive approaches to hiring, retaining, and supporting Aboriginal staff	Examples available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NACCHO-Submission-to-the-Employment-White-Paper-1.pdf
Culturally safe recruitment toolkits	Provides practical steps to improve recruitment processes, including job ad language, interview questions, onboarding and retention support	Examples available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees-A guide for community legal centres.pdf • AHC5321-Managers-Booklet-final.pdf • Doing-It-Right-web-compressed.pdf • Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural capability toolkit - VPSC • Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations • Recruitment and Selection Resources
Example job ads	Includes templates and examples using inclusive language to appeal to Aboriginal candidates	Examples available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal Community Elders Services: Activities Assistant – Aboriginal Community Elders Services Inc (ACES) • Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative: Jobs Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative • https://youtu.be/LU7uAedQlpg • Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative (RAC): Program Manager – Family Safety - Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative • Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation: Employment Opportunities Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation (AHAC)
Identified positions	Factsheet providing information about identified positions.	Examples available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/12047
Cultural responsiveness training providers	Delivers training to help non-Aboriginal staff and managers build cultural understanding and work more effectively with Aboriginal colleagues	Search for cultural responsiveness training providers through the following resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Industry Advocate (www.industryadvocate.sa.gov.au) • The Circle - First Nations Entrepreneur Hub (www.thecircle.sa.gov.au) • Industry Capability Network (SA) (www.icn.org.au/regions/south-australia) • Supply Nation (www.supplynation.org.au)
Local job networks	Helps connect you with Aboriginal candidates and Community organisations for referrals and advice	Reach out to local Aboriginal training and employment service providers and networks such as the Aboriginal Employment Register <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (https://www.publicsector.sa.gov.au/Employment/aboriginal-employment) • Aboriginal Employment SA (https://www.facebook.com/p/Aboriginal-Employment-SA-100069580072299/), • Seek (https://www.seek.com.au/aboriginal-jobs/in-All-Adelaide-SA) • Tauondi Aboriginal College (https://tauondi.sa.edu.au/), Indigenous Workstars
Aboriginal leadership and development programs	Supports the growth and promotion of Aboriginal employees into leadership roles	South Australian Public Sector Aboriginal Leadership Program (https://www.publicsector.sa.gov.au/South-Australian-Leadership-Academy/aboriginal-leadership).



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