



Government of
South Australia

Flying Start

Practice Guide:

Aboriginal Culturally Responsive Recruitment in Early Education

The aim of the Practice Guide is to build a workplace where Aboriginal employees feel safe, respected and supported from the moment they consider applying for a role, through to building a long and meaningful career.

This means embedding cultural safety, trauma-informed policies and inclusion into all areas of employment—from recruitment and onboarding to development and retention.



Why it matters

Fostering culturally safe and inclusive recruitment and retention practices within the early childhood development and care workforce delivers significant benefits for children, families, and Communities.

Creating meaningful employment pathways for Aboriginal peoples strengthens relationships with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Communities, supporting culturally responsive care and genuine Community engagement.

Aboriginal educators often bring deep connections to local Communities and a long-term commitment to their roles, which enhances workforce stability and continuity of care—particularly in regional and remote areas.

The importance of respecting Aboriginal culture and how you can support self-determination in employment is explored in more detail within:

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

Is this guide for you?

This resource has been created to support and guide early childhood services as they recruit, retain, and support 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 workplace.

Building a culturally safe and inclusive workplace is a critical step in growing the Aboriginal workforce in the early childhood sector. Cultural safety is explored in more detail within:

- What does cultural safety mean in the workplace?

How to use this guide

This guide 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 guide 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.

For detailed guidance on implementing this guide including answers to each of the questions posed, please visit <https://www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au/working-in-early-childhood/im-interested-in-career-pathways-for-aboriginal-peoples>

We acknowledge KSJ Consulting Service, the Aboriginal business engaged to develop the content for this resource and we thank them for their cultural knowledge and expertise.

Approaches to culturally safe Aboriginal employment

Respect for culture and self-determination

Self-determination means enabling Aboriginal peoples to lead and make decisions about matters that affect their lives, careers, and Communities. Employment strategies must uphold the right of Aboriginal peoples to lead and influence decisions that impact their careers and Communities. Cultural knowledge, lived experience, and connection to Country should be recognised as valuable strengths.

Aboriginal cultural safety throughout the employee journey

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. Aboriginal cultural safety must be upheld at every stage—from recruitment and onboarding to career progression.

When considering how to approach undertaking a culturally safe Aboriginal employment process, engagement is a key factor. This is explored in more detail within:

- [How can organisations genuinely engage Aboriginal Communities in employment programs?](#)

Community voice, partnership, and co-design

Genuine engagement requires the active involvement of Aboriginal peoples, Communities, and organisations in developing policies, designing roles, and delivering employment programs. Strong, long-term relationships with Communities enhance recruitment outcomes and ensure relevance and respect through co-design.

Whole-of-organisation commitment

Responsibility for Aboriginal employment must sit across all levels of an organisation, not just with Aboriginal staff. Inclusive leadership, Aboriginal culturally responsive practices and accountability are essential. Success should be measured by visibility, influence, and meaningful outcomes, not just participation numbers.

Understanding that a committed whole-of-organisation approach to building a culturally safe and inclusive workplace for Aboriginal peoples is everyone's responsibility. This is explored in more detail within:

- [Who is responsible for Aboriginal employment outcomes in an organisation?](#)

Understanding barriers and enablers

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.

Understanding the barriers experienced by Aboriginal peoples and the enablers for success is a critical element of Aboriginal people's employment journey. These are explored in more detail within:

- [What are common barriers to recruiting Aboriginal staff?](#)
- [What are common enablers to recruiting Aboriginal staff?](#)

Role design and job descriptions

Culturally responsive role designs and descriptions are critical for the effective recruitment of Aboriginal peoples because they reflect an understanding and respect for Aboriginal cultures, values, and lived experiences. When roles are framed in ways that resonate with Community priorities (such as connection to Country, Community relationships, and holistic approaches to wellbeing) they are more likely to attract and engage Aboriginal applicants.

Understanding how to co-design roles with Aboriginal staff and Community, using simple, plain English, removing unnecessary barriers, and acknowledging and valuing their lived experience are all essential factors in developing culturally responsive role designs and descriptions. These themes are explored within:

- [Why should we co-design job roles with Aboriginal staff or Community members?](#)
- [How does using plain English help in recruitment?](#)
- [Should we remove qualification requirements?](#)
- [Why is it important to value lived experience and cultural knowledge?](#)

Community-based advertising and networking

Community-based advertising and networking are vital for recruiting Aboriginal peoples because they are trusted, culturally relevant channels that are more likely to reach and engage Aboriginal job seekers. Many Aboriginal Communities rely on word of mouth, local networks, and Community organisations rather than mainstream job platforms.

Connecting with Community, Elders, local leaders and Traditional Owners is one of the most effective ways. Developing strong relationships or partnering with local Aboriginal organisations, and using Aboriginal specific media are also important factors in communicating culturally inclusive and respectful job ads. These themes are explored within:

- [How can we advertise jobs to reach Aboriginal candidates effectively?](#)
- [How should we design job advertisements to attract Aboriginal applicants?](#)
- [How can job descriptions be more culturally inclusive?](#)
- [How can we engage with Aboriginal Communities during recruitment?](#)



Selecting and recruiting Aboriginal staff

Simplifying the application and screening process, using strengths-based and empowering approaches, and ensuring equity in recruitment, retention, and advancement are all essential throughout the recruitment journey, and for creating accessible and culturally safe employment pathways for Aboriginal peoples.

Complex administrative processes can be a barrier, especially where formal qualifications or Western-style résumés don't always reflect the full breadth of Aboriginal knowledge, skills, and leadership. Embedding equity throughout the employment journey helps address systemic disadvantage, supports career progression, and fosters inclusive workplaces where Aboriginal staff feel respected, supported, and able to thrive.

Ensuring that your processes are culturally safe and applying a strengths-based lens throughout the selection and recruitment journey improves successful employment outcomes for Aboriginal peoples, including notifying successful and unsuccessful candidates. Some practical approaches to selecting and recruiting Aboriginal staff are explored in:

- [How can we simplify the application and screening process to better support Aboriginal applicants?](#)
- [What are strengths-based and empowering approaches in recruitment?](#)
- [What does equity in recruitment and advancement involve?](#)
- [What changes should we make to our selection process?](#)
- [What makes an interview culturally safe?](#)
- [Can we use assessment centres?](#)
- [How do we communicate the interview outcomes?](#)

Welcoming new staff to your service

Welcoming new Aboriginal staff to your service is an important step in building a culturally safe and inclusive workplace. A thoughtful and respectful welcome helps new staff feel valued, respected and connected from the outset. This might include a culturally responsive induction, opportunities to meet with other Aboriginal staff or Community members, Acknowledgment of Country, and open conversations about cultural safety and workplace expectations.

Creating space for Aboriginal staff to bring their whole selves to work, including their culture, perspectives and ways of knowing, supports belonging, retention, and the overall wellbeing of your workforce. When planning how this may look in your service, there are some things you may like to consider. These are explored within:

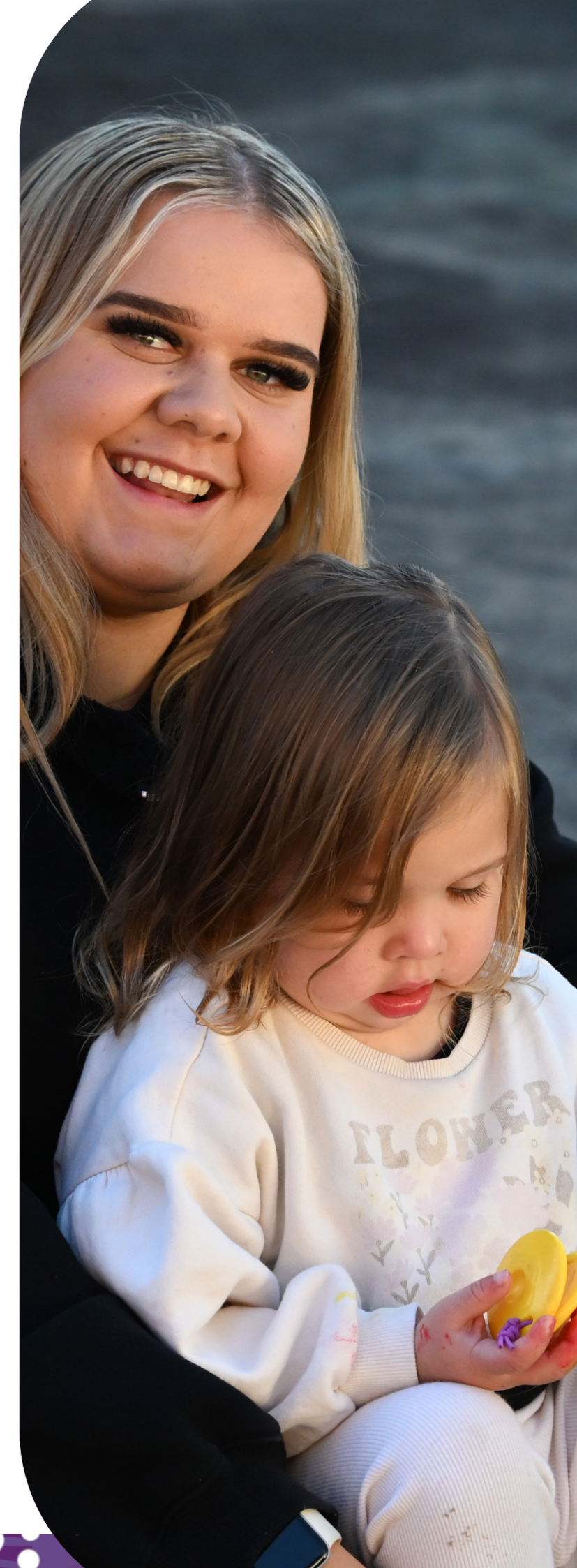
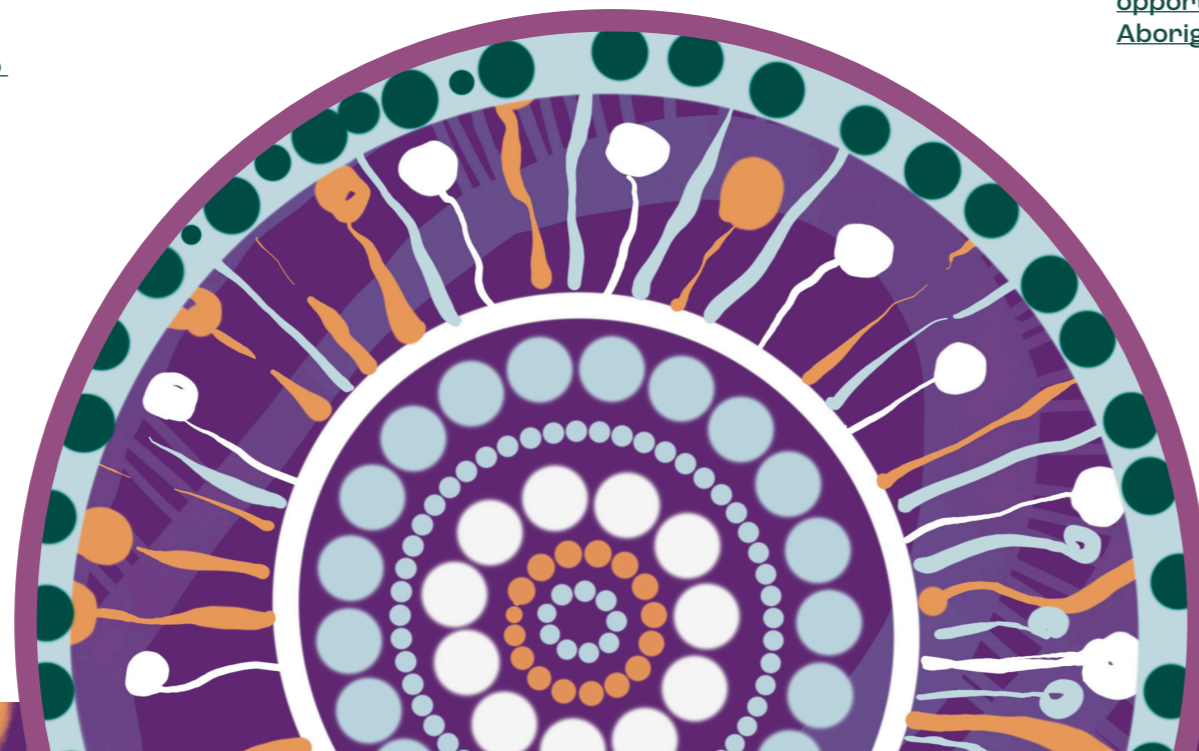
- [How can we support Aboriginal staff once they are hired?](#)
- [What should be included in the onboarding process for Aboriginal staff?](#)
- [How can I build trust and encourage open communication?](#)

Supporting Aboriginal staff

Supporting Aboriginal staff through retention and development strategies is essential for building a strong, culturally safe and responsive workforce. Providing clear career pathways, culturally safe mentoring programs, and leadership opportunities helps Aboriginal employees grow in their roles and feel empowered to contribute meaningfully.

Ongoing support, such as access to professional development, regular check-ins and recognition of cultural obligations and identity, reinforces that their presence and perspectives are valued. When Aboriginal staff see genuine commitment to their growth and advancement, it builds trust, strengthens retention, and encourages the next generation of leaders within the service. The themes and practical supports for Aboriginal staff are explored within:

- [What retention strategies work well for Aboriginal staff?](#)
- [How can we develop strong Aboriginal career pathways?](#)
- [How can we support Aboriginal employee engagement and feedback?](#)
- [What does a culturally responsive mentoring program look like?](#)
- [How do mentoring and targeted support help with retention?](#)
- [How are professional development opportunities tailored to support Aboriginal employees?](#)





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