

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?

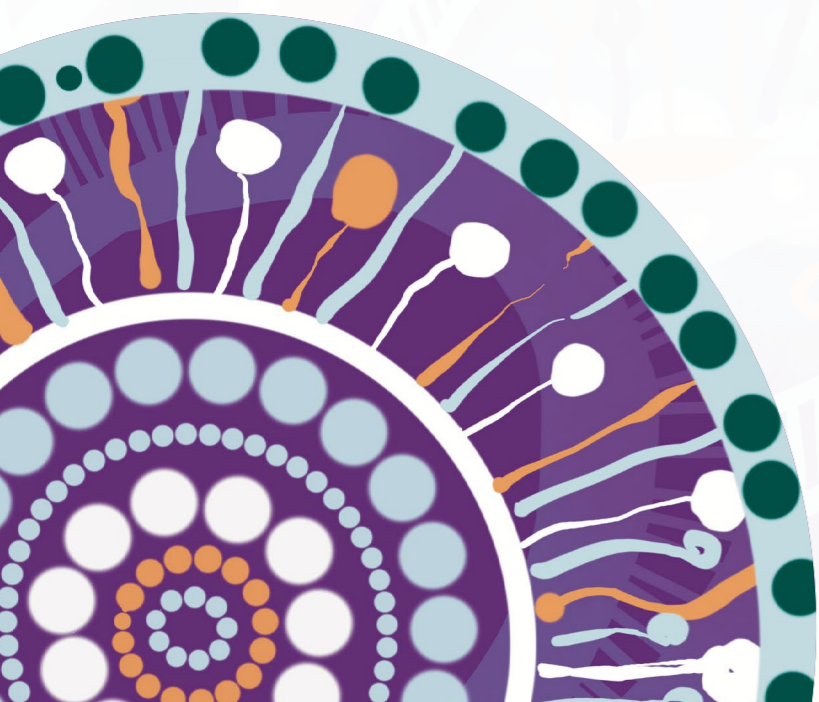
- Supervisors and teams should undergo:
 - Aboriginal Cultural Safety training to promote inclusivity and respect.
 - Aboriginal mental health training to better support emotional and cultural wellbeing.
- Conduct on-site inductions, including workplace tours and introductions, to help new starters understand 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](#)