

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).