

# Sharing the lessons learned



The Aboriginal Employment Industry Clusters have many valuable lessons to share about the design and delivery of Aboriginal employment programs, including...

## Creating a culturally competent workplace

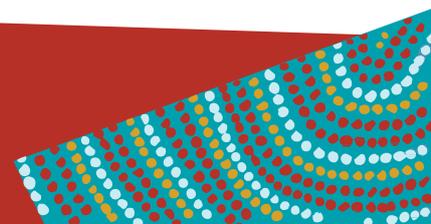
- Cultural competency training at executive level creates the desire for business leaders to actively address the underrepresentation of Aboriginal people within their industry.
- Successful employment strategies are built on culturally competent organisations, including:
  - senior leaders, HR professionals and line managers who undertake training in and understand Aboriginal history, culture and contemporary issues; and
  - a workplace that promotes flexibility, respect and trust.

## Communication, Collaboration and Partnerships

- Communication and collaboration between all levels of government, employment agencies, employers and Aboriginal participants is critical to the success of any Aboriginal employment strategy.
- Aboriginal participants who have progressed some way in an industry, but are not able to find employment, can be very good candidates for roles in other industries. For example participants not suited for hospitality may have the skills to succeed in another industry such as retail. The Industry Cluster model facilitates this movement between industries.

## Pre-screening

- Aboriginal people must have a good understanding of what working in the industry really involves. Models that try to recruit a large pool of participants and filter potential Aboriginal employees through the process are not efficient. For example early pre-employment programs across all the Clusters had a number of withdrawals because participants were not aware of what the industry specifically entailed. The Advanced Manufacturing Cluster, in particular, found that the large pool approach was not successful.
- There are considerable benefits in potential employees spending time in an organisation to experience the culture and learn what is expected of all staff.
- Significant work needs to be undertaken during the pre-screening process to ensure that Aboriginal jobseekers are suited to the industry. This reduces the number of people withdrawing.
- Support for numeracy /literacy skills prior to applying for apprenticeships is critical - targeted training and support over a long period is essential if applicants are to be successful.
- Where jobs are identified, effort needs to go into identifying and defining the actual skills required and then how these can be acquired and/or selected for. Opportunities such as call centre and meter reading need specific skills and personal abilities. If these can be identified and candidates chosen on the basis of these skills, success is likely. Targeted selection and pre-interview training and job exposure improves the success rate.





### Recruitment and interviews

- Selection processes matter. Formal selection processes can be daunting for some Aboriginal participants (long term unemployed, first formal interview) who may have trouble presenting themselves with confidence and addressing selection criteria.
- Informal meetings prior to the interviews are a good way to build confidence in participants. The Energy, Water and Resources Cluster experienced this issue when participants completed a pre-employment program but were unable to address the selection criteria at interviews. SA Water now has a series of informal meetings with potential Aboriginal employees which makes the formal interview process less intimidating.
- When interviewing applicants, interested in working in hospitality, the Cluster organised *Skills for All* training for participants who weren't quite ready. After the participants gained the qualification they had another interview with the employer. This reduces the number of Aboriginal people who become disengaged or fall through the gaps after being unsuccessful in a selection process.

### Sustainability

- For Aboriginal employment programs to be maintained long term they need to be embedded within organisations.
- Organisations that have their own Aboriginal employment and training targets have a clear sign of intent, drive greater accountability and ultimately achieve better outcomes.

### Mentoring

- Mentoring (both for employers and participants) is a powerful tool in removing personal and vocational hurdles for participants as well as employer perceptions and misunderstandings.
- Aboriginal participants who face economic and social barriers to employment can overcome these through professional, structured and culturally competent mentoring and support.
- Providing mentoring support (even shared over a number of employers) has been crucial in helping people to cope with the pressures of employment, including personal and family pressures.

### Thinking outside the box for opportunities

- From the industry perspective, it is important to spend time thinking outside the square as to what the job opportunities might be that suit Aboriginal people best.
- Pre-employment projects need to be at different levels (entry, professional, graduate) to reflect the skills and aspirations of Aboriginal people, and the needs of employers. Aboriginal activities across the Clusters have a focus on entry level employment but there are also opportunities for Aboriginal people to be placed into professional employment.
- Through procurement processes, large employers can support Aboriginal businesses and influence businesses tender for work to create Aboriginal employment strategies.
- Industry networks are vast and influential; sharing success and encouraging other employers to become involved greatly increases the opportunities available for Aboriginal people and encourages long term change.

