Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2019–2021

Our Strategy

Our Vision is simple: Great Cities. Strong Regions. Connecting Australians. However, to achieve our Vision, we must ensure we build a workforce that is representative of the Australian community.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this country and their continuing connection to the land and waters. We value the contribution and rich cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We are committed to empowering and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through our work and our actions.

We value the rich cultural heritage of our Indigenous communities through the acknowledgment of their connection to land, water and country. We broaden our perspective to develop better policy and program outcomes for all Australians. Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy (the Strategy) is based on this principle.

Our Strategy is reflective of the belief that generating meaningful career opportunities and pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a department-wide responsibility and we, as individuals, each have a critical role to play in ensuring its success.

Our Strategy has been developed in response to feedback provided by our staff and key stakeholders, and is designed to be equal parts ambitious and achievable. Our goal is to see a sustainable increase in the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in our workforce to 5 per cent by December 2021, and be recognised as an employer of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Through the remainder of the Strategy, the term ‘Indigenous’ has been used to collectively refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, we acknowledge the differences in cultures, history and language, not just between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but also between communities.

Our Commitment

To be successful, we recognise we will need to assess and refine our Value Proposition for Indigenous staff and actively test, review and refine our accepted systems, processes and structures during the implementation of this Strategy. We believe we can achieve our goal if we are committed to action across three critical areas of focus:

- Creating, increasing and sustaining employment opportunities
- Providing meaningful career pathways and capability development opportunities
- Building and sustaining a culturally capable workforce and culturally safe workplace

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting in relation to our outcomes as we implement the Strategy is critical. To ensure the Strategy becomes part of the ongoing conversation with Senior Leadership, our Indigenous Champion, supported by the People and Culture Committee, will report quarterly to the Executive Board on progress.

From Good to Great

We value stakeholder feedback, and have used this in partnership with our range of data sources to refine the direction of our current initiatives, and understand where we target our future initiatives. In this way, we have ensured this is an evidence-based Strategy that will elevate us from good to great.

When developing the Strategy we learned:

- The department’s Indigenous employment offerings have been predominantly lower classified positions and we recruited 55 per cent of Indigenous staff during 2018-19 via entry-level programs.
- The focus on entry-level opportunities has seen mixed success with the department, along with the wider Australian Public Service (APS), now seeing a bottleneck of Indigenous staff emerging at lower APS classifications.
- The department should continue to target recruiting Indigenous Staff into Executive Level positions in order to build a talent pipeline into the Senior Executive Service (SES).
- The focus on entry-level opportunities has also led to a perception of lack of development opportunities offered to Indigenous staff.
- There is a perception managers may seem reluctant to engage with their Indigenous staff due to a fear to offend from a ‘cultural’ perspective.
- There is a perception that understanding and appreciation of the rich history of Indigenous peoples and cultures is limited across the department.
- Our APS Census Results tell us we have stronger Indigenous representation than is reflected in our Human Resource Information System (HRIS) and we need to understand why people choose not to identify.
- There is a perception that the department is not a culturally safe workplace.
Commitment one:
CREATING, INCREASING AND SUSTAINING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Ensuring we have an ongoing range of employment opportunities to attract and retain Indigenous staff is key to building our brand as an employer of choice. We will offer employment opportunities that are fit for purpose and tailored to help us achieve our organisational objectives.

Our actions:
- Apply the Identified Position criteria to all positions across the department, tailored to reflect the level of involvement with developing policies and/or programs targeted at Indigenous peoples, or the level of direct involvement with Indigenous communities.
- Embed the use of the Affirmative Measure – Indigenous and Identified Position provisions into our recruitment activities at all levels.
- Identify critical positions across the department and their level of engagement with Indigenous communities to understand where significant employment opportunities exist and where we can leverage the expertise of Indigenous staff.
- Evaluate Indigenous recruitment initiatives and capability development programs to ensure we are investing in approaches that will see us recruit Indigenous staff across all classifications.

Our indicators of success:
- We are appropriately leveraging the use of the Affirmative Measure – Indigenous provision and the Identified Position provision becomes business as usual in all recruitment processes.
- Our people demonstrate a well-informed understanding of the critical engagement points within our business with Indigenous communities.
- We see an increase in Indigenous peoples applying for positions with our department.

Commitment two:
PROVIDING MEANINGFUL CAREER PATHWAYS AND CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Our representation of Indigenous staff should more closely resemble non-Indigenous representation at each classification. When compared to the Australian Public Service as a whole, our Indigenous representation across classification levels is more positive1, and we want this trend to continue.

Our actions:
- Implement an Indigenous Career Planning Program in partnership with an Indigenous Executive Coaching provider to enable staff to articulate their career aspirations, map the appropriate pathways to achieve them, and involve their managers in the discussions.
- Build cultural confidence in managers enabling them to engage proactively with their Indigenous staff to understand their needs and support them in their every day work and careers.
- Create leadership opportunities, provide stretch opportunities and encourage Indigenous staff to aspire to senior leadership positions through visible mechanisms such as the use of the Affirmative Measure – Indigenous provision when advertising Executive Level and SES positions.

Our indicators of success:
- We see an improvement in the retention and subsequent promotion of our Indigenous staff.
- Our Indigenous staff indicate, through sources such as the APS Employee Census, that their manager confidently engages in performance and career planning discussions.
- We increase the number of Indigenous staff in Executive Level and SES positions.

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1 According to the APS State of the Service Report 2017-18, Indigenous representation across levels has a single peak at the APS level 4 with a dramatic drop at the Executive Level and Senior Executive Service cohorts.
Commitment three: 
BUILDING AND SUSTAINING A CULTURALLY CAPABLE WORKFORCE AND CULTURALLY SAFE WORKPLACE

We recognise the importance of acknowledging the rich cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples and we are committed to building cultural capability within our workforce. However, we must also ensure we create and sustain a workplace that is truly culturally safe, and our work practices must recognise and respect the cultural identity of our Indigenous staff. We cannot underestimate the behavioural change that may be required to be successful in this commitment but we will strive for a workplace that visibly models shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge, and experience of learning together.

Our actions:
- Ensure an appreciation of, and commitment to, cultural awareness forms part of the development pathway for all positions across the department including introducing mandatory cultural awareness training for all new starters to the department.
- Ensure our Leadership Pathway to the SES has a specific focus on fostering inclusive leadership behaviours.
- Improve our suite of cultural capability development options to better target the type of information and content required, for example, for leadership positions, recruitment and selection panels, or positions with direct community engagement.
- Pilot pastoral care initiatives to support Indigenous staff relocating to work with the department and recognise they made need additional support to adjust not only to a new workplace but also to a new city away from their family.
- Offer cultural immersion opportunities that recognise the value of integrating and living with community to build an appreciation of Indigenous culture and be more effective in our role.
- Acknowledge the inequality that continues to exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and commit to working collaboratively, transparently and accountably in relation to our employment initiatives on our path to reconciliation.

Our indicators of success:
- We see an improvement in the retention of Indigenous staff relocating to work with the department (both within the department and within the wider-portfolio).
- We confirm all recruitment and selection processes using the Affirmative Measures – Indigenous or Identified Position provisions have Indigenous representation on the selection panel.
- We confirm all managers supervising staff who identify as Indigenous have undertaken some form of cultural competency training.
- The Executive Board ensures each Division identifies how they will contribute to Indigenous employment outcomes in their operational workforce plan and/or business plan.
- We see an increase in our Indigenous staff indicating, through sources such as the APS Employee Census, they feel the department is committed to creating a diverse workforce, and the people in their workgroups behave in an accepting manner towards people from diverse backgrounds.
- We see a decrease in our Indigenous staff indicating, through sources such as the APS Employee Census, they have experienced bullying and/or racism.
- We see an increase in our Indigenous staff formally identifying through our HRIS.
- Our staff feel our senior leadership cohort is accountable for their leadership behaviours.

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