



Closing the Gap Through Place-Based Employment



National Local Government Indigenous Employment Position Paper

November 2012





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An Australian Government Initiative



1 Introduction

Local Government Managers Australia National (LGMA), as consortium partner of the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government, has developed this *National Local Government Indigenous Employment Position Paper* ('the Position Paper') to encourage and facilitate increased Indigenous workforce participation in local government.¹ The Position Paper is designed to underpin the Indicative Strategies and Strategic Actions outlined in Section 4 of ACELG's *Future-proofing Local Government: National Workforce Strategy 2012-2020*.

The Position Paper is a response to an urgent need to increase the pool of available talent within local government to deal with the considerable workforce challenges that lie ahead for the sector, to improve capacity and to address key recommendations of the National Skills Shortage Strategy for Local Government 2007. A key recommendation of the strategy was the need to grow the regional workforce by developing approaches that bring previously under-employed and under-utilised local populations into the local government workforce i.e. women, Indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse population groups and those over 50.²

The Position Paper provides a suite of key elements and a continuum of actions for local government authorities to consider in developing their approach to increasing the employment of Indigenous people in their workforce. It is targeted to assist councillors and the senior management of local government to work with their local Indigenous communities to develop policies and processes to increase the potential for their workforce needs to be met through the recruitment and employment of Indigenous people and in their retention and development as valued employees. It is relevant to councillors, CEOs and senior managers across the Human Resource, Finance and Administration, Planning, Infrastructure and Community Services functions of local government.

Take up by local government authorities will depend on where they are already placed in relation to their efforts in engaging with Indigenous communities in their local areas, and facilitating improved employment outcomes for Indigenous people. Many councils will be starting out while others will already be well engaged with their Indigenous communities and active in the employment and training of Indigenous people. Accordingly, application of the key elements will vary across councils located within remote, rural, regional, urban and metropolitan areas of Australia.

Successful implementation will take time – there is no 'quick and simple fix' – and a concerted long-term approach will be needed. Some of the successful strategies in the mining sector have taken ten years or more to develop outcomes which they and their communities can be proud of.

The development of this Position Paper has involved a four step process:

- the preparation of a Green Paper *Closing the Gap Through Place-Based Employment: Local Government Indigenous Employment Program 2010* developed through consultation with Indigenous Chief Executive Officers in local government, other Indigenous leaders, key people involved in Indigenous employment programs, and other Indigenous and local government stakeholders. The purpose was to commence a conversation on the potential for the development and implementation of a National Local Government Indigenous Employment Strategy;
- a National Roundtable on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment in Local Government on 26-27 July 2011 in Redfern, Sydney NSW, to share information and best practice, and to inform development of potential cross-sectoral and intergovernmental partnerships and alliances and replicable and sustainable demonstration projects;

1 The term 'Indigenous' as used in this Position Paper refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, consistent with the use of the term by the Australian Government.

2 *National Skills Shortage Strategy for Local Government – New ways of thinking, Doing business differently*, National Local Government Skills Shortage Steering Committee May 2007

- feedback on the proposed key elements of the draft Position Paper at the 5th National Local Government Workforce Development Forum held on 16-17 April 2012 and at the Local Government Workforce Development Reference Group meeting on 27 July 2012; and
- further consultations with key stakeholders, including feedback from a sample of local government organisations with a high percentage of Indigenous people in the local population.

The feedback from consultations has been clear about the need for a change in approach in preparing this Position Paper. The Position Paper is not proposing yet another employment program that will only have a short life, resulting in frustration and disappointment for Indigenous people. Creating positions especially for Indigenous candidates, funded by external sources which terminate when the funding runs out, is not a sustainable approach.

The ‘cultural shift’ advocated in this Position Paper is to move the emphasis from the creation of a specific National Local Government Indigenous Employment Program to a more strategic approach where the potential for the employment of Indigenous persons is incorporated within the permanent on-going workforce established through

“Local government is uniquely positioned to play a greater role in Indigenous employment as it is a place-based employer with national reach, offering secure and diverse occupational opportunities throughout most of Australia.”

a local government workforce development strategy. It is recognised that ensuring sustainability and success will involve some additional resourcing over the long term to support Indigenous staff and to develop their skills in the same manner that other employees are supported and developed.

The Position Paper proposes that implementation is developed through a partnership arrangement and is premised on a shared responsibility, with councils committing resources to the recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff in mainstream employment within their organisation, local Indigenous communities working with local government authorities to support the employment of their people, and with support available through Australian and State and Territory Government programs and services for employers to implement strategies to increase the number of Indigenous people participating in the workforce. If structures and feedback mechanisms are established locally or regionally and involve the partners, the potential exists under shared responsibility arrangements for barriers and issues that may arise to be addressed more efficiently.

The Position Paper aims to support the Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) ‘whole of government’ approach to Closing the Gap through providing place-based employment and contributing to the COAG target ... *an additional 100,000 Indigenous Australians will need to find and keep jobs...*,³ and to one of the six Closing the Gap targets which is to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people within a decade.⁴ The Position Paper advocates that Indigenous employment in local government targets be at least at a rate that reflects the local Indigenous population ratio.

Local government is uniquely positioned to play a greater role in Indigenous employment as it is a place-based employer with national reach, offering secure and diverse occupational opportunities throughout most of Australia. This Position Paper provides a framework for building the capacity of local government to assist, as it identifies and highlights the opportunities available to fulfil its future workforce needs, with Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders working together for mutual benefit, while at the same time contributing to COAG’s ‘whole of government’ goals to Closing the Gap.

3 Australian Council for Local Government Background Paper, November 2008 meeting.
http://www.aclg.gov.au/media_centre/backgrounders/files/indigenous_engagement.pdf

4 COAG Communiqué 2 October 2008 <http://www.coag.gov.au/node/290>

2 Workforce Demographics in Australia

The local government sector profile

The local government sector comprises 565 local government authorities with a wide range of statutory and governance responsibilities for the wellbeing of the communities they govern. Local government authorities also play a significant role in the Australian economy accounting for ...\$22.10 billion of expenditure in 2006-07, representing 2.16% of gross domestic product (GDP).⁵ In terms of employment, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures for 2010-2011 indicate that the local government sector employs approximately 195,500 employees.⁶ The 2010-11 figure for local government employees nationally is a 13.9% increase on the ABS figures for 2008 which indicated that the sector employed around 171,700 people.⁷ In the 2001-2006 period local government was recognised as the 7th fastest growing industry in Australia.

Major challenges and trends in workforce development

Whilst a significant sector nationally, the sector is not without its challenges. Government Skills Australia reports that, based on the workforce development activity they have undertaken and a 2011 survey of local government authorities which received a 23% response, the following issues remain a concern for the local government sector:

- *salary competition from other sectors, particularly the resources sector which continues to lure existing staff and potential new recruits;*
- *impending retirements of the baby boomer generation resulting in a significant loss of staff and corporate knowledge;*
- *reduced training budgets due to economic constraints;*
- *a perceived lack of career pathways and opportunities, particularly in the face of amalgamations and restructures;*
- *the image of the sector and its job roles not seen as desirable; and*
- *lack of workforce planning which is resulting in skill gaps and labour shortages.*⁸

Current and future labour supply and skill shortage issues in the sector

Nationally, there is a growing demand for skilled workers. At the same time labour shortages are also a key issue and are expected to impact significantly on the local government sector over the next five years.⁹ Skill shortages regularly change in line with national and local economic developments, can be affected by turnover, and at times can exhibit sharp variations in regional activity.

Local government authorities have also indicated that they have had difficulty recruiting for positions over the last 12 months and expect to face continued recruitment difficulties in the next two to five years. The situation will rapidly deteriorate as local government experiences the 'double whammy' effect due to a challenging combination of an ageing workforce within the sector, where almost one third of the local government workforce is aged over 50, and an ageing population placing more pressure on already stretched aged care and other age-based services, many of which are provided by the sector.

5 2006-7 Local Government National Report, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government http://www.regional.gov.au/local/publications/pdf/Local_Government_National_Report_06-07.pdf, page 3

6 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Employment and Earnings, Public Sector Australia 2010-2011, Cat 6248.0

7 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Employment and Earnings, Public Sector Australia 2007-2008

8 2012 Environmental Scan, Government Skills Australia, page 19

9 2012 Environmental Scan, Government Skills Australia, page 11

An ageing workforce

Within the workforce generally, the non-Indigenous Australian workforce is getting older:

- approximately 2 of every 5 workers are aged 45 years or older;
- around half of the workforce in agriculture, forestry and fishing, education, health and community services are aged over 45 years;¹⁰

while the Indigenous population is significantly younger. 2011 Census data¹¹ indicates:

- there are now 548,370 Indigenous people in Australia, constituting 2.5% of the population, up over 20% from 455,023 or 2.3% in 2006;
- the Indigenous population is projected to grow at a faster rate than the non-Indigenous population between 2006 and 2021 – 2.2% compared with an annual growth rate of 1.2-1.7%;
- Indigenous people have a very different age profile compared with the non-Indigenous community:
 - the median age for Indigenous Australians is 21 years as opposed to 37 years for the general population. In 2006 it was 20 years;
 - just over 68% of Indigenous people are under 34 years of age, down from just over 70% in 2006;
 - about 55% of Indigenous Australians are under 25 years of age, compared with about 32% of the rest of the population;
 - 36% of Indigenous people were under 15 years, compared to just over 19% of non-Indigenous people; and
 - only 3.8% of the Indigenous population was over 65 years, compared with 14.2% of the non-Indigenous population.

“ If present levels of fertility and mortality continue, there will be 1 million Indigenous Australians by 2040 with significant growth in the Indigenous population in Australia’s main cities. ”

Key Indigenous statistics are provided in **Appendix A**.

If present levels of fertility and mortality continue, there will be 1 million Indigenous Australians by 2040¹² with significant growth in the Indigenous population in Australia’s main cities. Given this projected population, the ageing of the non-Indigenous population and the workforce issues facing local government, strategies to increase its capacity to attract, recruit and retain Indigenous employees will be a key component in ensuring a sustainable workforce for the future.

10 Ivan Neville, Branch Manager, Labour Market Research and Analysis Branch, DEEWR – presentation at 3rd National Local Government Workforce Development Forum, March 2010, with statistics attributed to the ABS Labour Force Survey 2009

11 ABS, *2011 Census Data, Aboriginal and Torres Islander Peoples, Indigenous Community Profile*

12 *Specific plan needed to close the gap for Urban Aborigines*, Nicholas Biddle, Research Fellow, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), ANU – Sydney Morning Herald, 7 August 2009 <http://tinyurl.com/nwdydc>

3 The Business Case for Indigenous Employment in Local Government

Local government needs to be proactive and innovative in order to build sufficient capacity to address the demands it will be expected to meet. The demands include basic infrastructure and community facilities and a range of programs and services for young people and their families in new housing areas and for retirees and associated aged services in established areas. There will also be a range of emerging demands arising from the impacts of climate change.

The need for new talent

Given the demographics of the workforce and the skills and labour shortages already being experienced by local government, the sector needs to grow its talent pool now in order to meet future demands. Without this, local government will be engaged in a talent war, particularly in regional and remote Australia where skills and labour shortages are an even bigger issue, especially in regions of mining activity. In areas where the economy is improving, the talent war will only get worse as competition intensifies for limited pools of skills and labour.

The Australian Public Service Commission has summarised the business case for Indigenous employment in the public sector in *Building an Indigenous Employment Strategy – A Starter Kit for Commonwealth Agencies*.¹³ The business case for Indigenous employment in local government is no different.

Being an employer of choice is essential in the face of skills gaps, skills shortages, an ageing workforce and private sector competition. Innovative recruitment and retention strategies can include exploring relatively untapped labour pools, and investing in the recruitment and development of workers from non-traditional areas, including Indigenous people ...The growing number of young working-age Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a valuable source of labour for Australia's workforce today, and an essential one for the future.

This young and growing Indigenous population has the potential to form a substantial component of the local government workforce.

The benefits for local government increasing its employment of people

Employing more Indigenous Australians makes good business sense for a range of reasons. Direct benefits include:

- filling jobs where there have been difficulties sourcing labour and skills;
- having a pool of local employees who can move between projects and operations as demand changes;
- accessing local knowledge and expertise, especially with respect to land management from the relevant traditional owners;
- a stable, mature workforce of local employees who are living 'at home', not intent on leaving the Indigenous region to pursue careers elsewhere, and participating in the activities of strong local community groups and civic institutions;
- being viewed as an employer of choice for Indigenous Australians in the future, particularly when the competition for talent and skill is forecast to increase, and raising the sector's profile as a good place to work;

¹³ *Building an Indigenous Employment Strategy – A Starter Kit for Commonwealth Agencies*, Australian Public Service Commission, 2011, page 9. http://www.apsc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2161/ieskit.pdf accessed 15 August 2012

- Indigenous employees' varying perspectives, experience and knowledge can add substantial value to business outcomes, and make significant contributions to the development of Local Government policies and the delivery of services to the Australian community; and
- improved understanding of the role and functions of local government in local Indigenous communities, potentially leading to greater Indigenous involvement at a local governance level.

For those Indigenous people employed who are work ready and skilled and operate as independent workers the costs of employment will be no different to those for other similarly skilled employees. It is recognised however, that there will be additional financial costs associated with supporting those who do not have these skills initially and who require significant support to enable them to be 'work ready'. These additional costs are likely to decline over time as skill levels increase but nevertheless need to be factored into any business case for increasing the number of Indigenous employees in the workforce and the benefits weighed against the costs of 'importing' labour from other parts of Australia, which may of itself be 'transitory'.

Notwithstanding the potential additional costs associated with employing some Indigenous people, many of the benefits of employing a local Indigenous workforce have been a feature of the strategies adopted by the mining industry, but could equally be extended to the local government sector. Fundamentally, local government authorities which adopt a strategic approach such as this will not only benefit from addressing their direct workforce needs, but will also benefit in a number of indirect ways. These include:

- Indigenous employment has a profound multiplier effect with potential for community cohesion and stability. It extends to improving the lives of that person's whole family and community;
- different cultural perspectives, experience and knowledge contributed by Indigenous employees can add substantial value to the development and provision of services;
- enhancing the industry's sustainable development credentials by contributing to the development of prosperous and sustainable regional communities;
- increasing the diversity of Local Government employees promotes cross-cultural interaction, enhancing knowledge and awareness of, and competence in, working with people from a range of backgrounds;
- facilitating legal compliance through the protection of Indigenous cultural heritage; and
- ensuring better outcomes in environmental management through access to local and traditional ecological knowledge.

Mutual benefits

There are also mutual benefits to be gained.

Both Indigenous communities and the sector have much to gain from working together to increase Indigenous participation in local government, not the least of which is the creation of a sustainable regional workforce. It is one of many ways in which the sector can engage and work with Indigenous communities to progress initiatives to produce mutually beneficial outcomes. The Minerals Council of Australia and the Australian Government have formally recognised the advantages of such partnerships in the Memorandum of Understanding they formed in 2005, and updated in 2009:

The Minerals industry recognises that the effective engagement of Indigenous people in our industry is not only the right thing to do, but there is a compelling business case. The majority of our operations are co-located with Indigenous communities – local workforces and communities with shared aspirations to create societal value from minerals development...

Members of the Minerals Council of Australia are committed to building and maintaining a social licence to operate, recognising the mutual benefits of Indigenous engagement and sustainable local communities.¹⁴

¹⁴ MOU on Indigenous Employment and Enterprise Development between the Australian Government and the Minerals Council of Australia, Minerals Council of Australia, May 2009

Whilst generally targeted to regional and remote communities, the development of such partnerships is just as applicable to the urban areas of our large cities because, as reported earlier in this paper, nearly 36% of Indigenous people live in the major cities.

Contributing to the COAG targets – local government: “The place where change can happen”¹⁵

The Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation¹⁶ was signed in February 2009. The aim is to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and involves complementary investment and effort by the Commonwealth, States and Territory governments to significantly improve opportunities for Indigenous people to engage in private and public sector jobs through:

- creating jobs in areas of government service delivery that have previously relied on subsidies through the Community Development Employment Projects program;
- a national target of at least 2.6% of public sector employment for Indigenous employment across all classifications by 2015 to increase employment to reflect the expected national Indigenous working age population share;
- building Indigenous workforce strategies into implementation plans for all COAG reforms contributing to the ‘Closing the Gap’ targets; and
- strengthening government procurement policies to maximise Indigenous employment.

There are many examples of local government authorities initiating approaches targeted to increase the employment of Indigenous people, with the challenge of meeting COAG targets being a key driver in some communities. As a third level of government, local government is well positioned to participate in a ‘whole of government’ approach to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians *...with grassroots, practical solutions delivered locally. To achieve national goals to turn around Indigenous disadvantage, we need to harness the capacity of all levels of government. On the ground, we need to tap into the opportunities and services offered by local government.*¹⁷

Local Government: A place-based employer with national reach

Local government is a major employer in regional, rural and remote communities and can play a key leadership role in the employment of Indigenous people in local communities. It has the capacity to take advantage of its unique position as a ‘place-based’ employer, a point that is particularly attractive to potential Indigenous employees given the importance of place in Indigenous culture. It is a natural fit. Local government:

- is uniquely positioned with national reach and offers diverse occupational opportunities;
- is a significant Australian employer with access to substantial resources;
- is located no matter where Indigenous Australians live – in the metropolitan, regional and remote areas of Australia.

‘Place-based’ employment, in turn, has the additional advantage of improving community cohesion.

15 The late Patricia Dixon, from a speech to the International Union of Local Authorities Congress, Toronto, Canada, made in 1994 when she was a councillor. Patricia Dixon was the first Aboriginal woman elected to local government in New South Wales.

16 <http://www.coag.gov.au/node/362> accessed 15 August 2012

17 *Closing the Gap: Indigenous Engagement in Local Communities* Background Paper to November 2008 meeting of the Australian Council of Local Government (ACLG)

Identifying, attracting and engaging with Indigenous candidates will play an important role in improving outcomes for Australian society generally. It will also contribute substantially to the Australian Government's priority of closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, an ambitious aim that requires 'sustained action across all levels of government, all sectors...' and '...better engaging Indigenous people in developing solutions...' ¹⁸

Key factors for success: Learning from others and leading by example

Local government has much to learn from the experience of other organisations which have already developed Indigenous employment strategies, e.g. other levels of government, the private sector and from councils leading the way in Indigenous employment.

The latest biennial *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID)* report, released in August 2011, highlighted that in the analysis of successful Indigenous programs, four factors stand out (as they did in the 2009 OID report):¹⁹

- co-operation between Indigenous people and government;
- 'bottom up' community involvement;
- ongoing government support; and
- good governance, within Indigenous communities and within government.

These four factors have informed the planning and implementation processes proposed in this position paper.

“To achieve national goals to turn around Indigenous disadvantage, we need to harness the capacity of all levels of government. On the ground, we need to tap into the opportunities and services offered by local government.”

Closing the Gap: Indigenous Engagement in Local Communities,
Australian Council of Local Government Background Paper 2008

In the area of Indigenous employment, local government authorities can follow the lead set by those employers who have achieved reasonable success, especially those in the mining industry. government can learn from these and other best practice examples and develop an environment that will then set the benchmark for other local employers.

Best practice strategies for attraction and retention in the mining sector are outlined in the Australian Government publication *Working with Indigenous Communities*. These could be readily adapted to use in local government and include:

- demonstrated organisational commitment to improving Indigenous employment outcomes;
- providing transition to employment, pre-employment or pre-vocational training that prepares Indigenous employees for life in the local government workforce. This includes life skills training and a sustained mentoring program;
- adopting recruitment strategies that focus on personal communication and the opportunity to demonstrate skills and abilities; and

18 *Building an Indigenous Employment Strategy – A Starter Kit for Commonwealth Agencies*, Australian Public Service Commission, Op Cit.
http://www.apsc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2161/ieskit.pdf

19 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011* Productivity Commission, August 2011

- developing organisational policies that encourage Indigenous employees to remain in the workforce. This may include flexible leave and roster arrangements and ongoing mentoring and support, to assist employees in managing family, cultural and financial responsibilities.²⁰

as well as:

- establishing and maintaining cross-cultural awareness and understanding on both sides and in doing so, build a culturally safe and competent organisation;
- establishing a strong foundation of literacy and numeracy skills in transition to employment and pre-employment training;
- explaining and promoting career pathways and career development opportunities;
- explaining and providing access to Recognised Prior Learning (RPL); and
- addressing racism in the workforce.

Learnings from other Indigenous employment initiatives

The Business Council of Australia's publication *Many Connections, One Goal – Closing the Gap* lists some important lessons that have emerged from the response and experiences of their member companies engaged in Indigenous employment initiatives:

- get involved;
- establish the business case;
- lead from the top;
- secure broad buy-in;
- build cultural knowledge and respect;
- foster Indigenous partnerships;
- be realistic;
- stay focused; and
- review and revise.

Priorities for further attention:

- increase the pool of work-ready Indigenous job candidates;
- improve the responsiveness and flexibility of training providers and programs;
- better facilitate job matching;
- explore the scope to develop employment models that are able to be scaled up;
- better promote emerging 'best practice' models and initiatives so they can be replicated;
- increase information sharing and collaboration, particularly among companies; and
- continue to work with government to enhance the effectiveness and flexibility of government funding and programs and to improve the ease of collaboration with business.²¹

20 *Working with Indigenous Communities – Leading Practice Sustainable Development Program for the Mining Industry*, Australian Government Department of Industry Tourism and Resources, 2007, page 60

21 *Many Connections, One Goal – Closing the Gap*, Business Council of Australia pages 18-21

4 National Indigenous Employment in Local Government – Strategic Framework, Key Elements and Actions

The development of this position paper on National Local Government Indigenous Employment has drawn heavily on the experience of the Australian and State and Territory governments, the private sector and from local government authorities which have been active in this area.

Objectives

This position paper has five objectives:

- **To provide** a framework for assisting councils to increase the number of Indigenous people working in local government;
- **To access** an ‘untapped’ talent pool to work in local government to alleviate skills shortages and the ageing workforce crisis that started to impact the sector severely from 2011;
- **To provide** secure and sustainable ‘place-based’ employment opportunities to Indigenous people;
- **To advocate and promote** the employment of Indigenous people by local government at least at a rate that reflects the local Indigenous population ratio; and
- **To provide** guidelines and best practice examples to encourage local implementation of the framework’s key elements and actions.

“ **Objective #4** – To advocate and promote the employment of Indigenous people by local government at least at a rate that reflects the local Indigenous population ratio. ”

To assist in implementing the directions outlined in this position paper, a series of sustainable and replicable demonstration projects with real and meaningful outcomes are being developed.

The strategic framework, key elements and actions

The framework for this position paper underpins the Indicative Strategies and Strategic Actions outlined in ACELG’s *Future-proofing Local Government: National Workforce Strategy 2012-2020*. It assumes that, following a self-assessment, a local government authority has decided that their workforce plan needs to include a strategy to increase the employment of Indigenous people within their organisation. This might include the setting of targets over time and consideration of how these might reflect the Indigenous profile of the area or how these might contribute to meeting the COAG national target of at least 2.6% of public sector employment by 2015.

It is recognised also that this Position Paper may be one of a number of strategies used to address identified workforce needs and that it will be more successful if integrated as part of an overall plan containing a number of coherent workforce development strategies, not an isolated strategy developed separately within the organisation.

This *National Local Government Indigenous Employment Position Paper* contains a continuum of eight key elements and 21 specific actions which local government councillors and senior management might consider in developing their own strategy for increasing the employment of Indigenous people to meet their workforce needs and, in the process, be inclusive of Indigenous culture. The elements and actions have been identified as critical to the successful attraction, recruitment, employment and retention of Indigenous employees within the mainstream employment required by local government to undertake its core functions.

The employment mode utilised by local government to undertake this work usually occurs through direct employment within the organisation or indirect employment through ‘third party’ contractual arrangements e.g. where goods or services might be provided by Indigenous enterprises; or where employment of Indigenous people can take place as a result of the inclusion of social procurement policies in contractual arrangements; or through the use of Group Training Organisations.

The 8 key elements in this *National Indigenous Employment in Local Government Position Paper* are:

- Committing to engagement;
- Directly employing Indigenous workers;
- Support for Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees;
- Indirectly employing Indigenous workers;
- Building alliances – collaboration is the key;
- Support from governments;
- Adopting good practice and communicating and celebrating achievements; and
- Monitoring and evaluating implementation.

Implementation will vary across local government authorities, dependent on their location within remote, rural, regional, urban and metropolitan areas, and reflect where each is currently positioned in relation to their existing efforts to engage Indigenous communities and facilitate improved employment outcomes.

Councils in locations with a low percentage of Indigenous people in their communities and with few Indigenous employees and who wish to attract and employ Indigenous people to assist in addressing their workforce issues will need to consider the full range of elements and possible actions in order to develop a comprehensive approach to developing an Indigenous employment strategy. Councils in locations with a high Indigenous population are more likely: to be governed by a Council with a majority of Indigenous Councillors and employing significant numbers of Indigenous employees; to be engaged with their Indigenous communities; to have significant experience in working with the support mechanisms provided by State and Australian government departments; and to be skilled in developing partnerships with industry and non-government organisations. In these instances, their strategic needs will more likely be focused on building even stronger alliances, upskilling staff in higher level qualifications, and increasing the representation of Indigenous employees in supervisory, senior management and other leadership roles.

1 Committing to engagement

1.1 Commitment by councillors and/or senior management to increasing the employment of local Indigenous people and engaging with local Indigenous communities to achieve this

Crucial to getting moving is for the council and/or senior management of a local government authority to endorse, actively support and authorise strategies and actions to engage Indigenous people in employment in local government, based on a business case for doing so. The message needs to be that 'our' council is embracing the need to engage and employ Indigenous people as a permanent part of its workforce so that the organisation can become an employer of choice for Indigenous people.

Starting with either the council itself or through the Chief Executive Officer/General Manager and other executive members, an 'authorising' environment needs to be created which legitimises action by senior management within the organisation to:

- assist Human Resources staff and middle management to commit the resources needed for the recruitment, employment and retention of Indigenous staff;
- prioritise staff time for this work;
- demonstrate and promote their will to actively facilitate employment opportunities and to increase engagement with their local Indigenous communities across the municipality/shire; and
- progress the development of long term Council strategies, plans and budgets to increase the employment of Indigenous people in a manner which is 'in sync with' the employment aspirations of local Indigenous people.

It is recognised that in many instances one or more councillors and/or senior managers will champion the issue.

1.2 Community mapping and conversations – engaging and understanding your Indigenous communities

Engagement with local Indigenous groups and individuals is a critical step for local government authorities which aim to grow their own workforce and develop a future talent pool.

Local government authorities should prepare a community profile of their Indigenous communities in consultation with local elders, community organisations and groups in order to provide a basis for understanding the nature and size of their Indigenous population. Without this, target setting and effective engagement with Indigenous communities in developing employment strategies will be difficult.

Just as other segments of the population are diverse, so also is the Indigenous population. Indigenous communities around Australia differ culturally, economically and socially. Within a local government area there will often be diverse Indigenous groups and individuals, and divisions between Indigenous groups and organisations which can be difficult to navigate and may restrict engagement. Local government staff should not expect to engage Indigenous communities as homogenous groups via a single approach such as a forum, or keeping the door open and adopting the usual approaches to consultation. They will not work.

Engagement with Indigenous people and communities requires patience and understanding, and a long term commitment to developing a deeper understanding of their culture, of their diversity, of their values and perceptions, as well as their needs and aspirations. Effective partnerships are built on trust and that takes time to build. At the same time, recognising differences will be crucial in the design of initiatives and also crucial to successful implementation.

Developing an understanding of local Indigenous communities will assist staff to identify the key organisations and individuals to engage with and appropriate ways of communicating with them. Local government authorities may find that some Indigenous groups and individuals are reluctant to engage, with possible reasons relating back to past experience of piecemeal, inconsistent dealings with governments at all levels and/or a perception that governments do not understand or respect their history, needs and aspirations. These divisions and differences need to be overcome through careful engagement and a commitment to the processes of reconciliation.

A set of *Principles for Engagement with Indigenous People* has been developed to assist local government authorities. The principles have been adapted from a range of sources including the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, the New South Wales Department of Community Services, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the United Nations Forum on Indigenous Issues. They are provided at Appendix B.

1.3 A Statement of Commitment to Indigenous People or Memorandum of Understanding

The approach a local government authority makes to formalising its relationship with its Indigenous communities will depend on what 'stage' they are at with engaging the local community. Engaging and building effective and mutually beneficial arrangements will take time and may start with a Statement of Commitment to Indigenous People and/or to Reconciliation.

Local government authorities that have established relationships with local Indigenous groups and individuals may enter into a more formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlines shared goals and commitments, and which spells out culturally acceptable means of engagement and actions.

These might be led by council and/or by senior management. Many local government authorities have already developed a memorandum of understanding or statement of reconciliation, and many examples of these can be found on the Agreements, Treaties and Negotiated Settlements database developed by the University of Melbourne (www.atns.net.au).

1.4 Reconciliation Action Plans

A Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is a tool, developed by Reconciliation Australia, to help organisations promote reconciliation and contribute to closing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The RAP is a nationally recognised framework and is generally perceived to be a simple, clear and practical way to understand and approach reconciliation through the common language of relationships, respect and opportunities.

RAPs have been found to be effective in supporting local government authorities to improve their relationship with Aboriginal communities. It is understood that 250 organisations across Australia have launched a RAP.

The key distinction of the RAP approach from most existing local government plans and strategies, like Indigenous Action Plans, is that the emphasis is on affecting change *within* local government organisations, rather than through programs delivered by the organisation.

Successful strategies with Indigenous communities have substantial local input and support. Local Indigenous people know the best way to engage with their young people and it is important that their knowledge and contacts are harnessed. Information on the benefits and processes for developing a RAP are available on the Reconciliation Australia website www.reconciliation.org.au

2 Employing Indigenous workers

2.1 Direct Employment – Human Resource policies and practices reflect the cultural needs of Indigenous people

Organisational policies need to be developed and adopted that attract Indigenous people to be directly employed on the payroll by Local Government and once recruited, encourage Indigenous employees to remain in the local government workforce. In particular, the development of Human Resource policies and practices geared to understanding the needs of Indigenous employees and focused on building a culturally competent and safe workplace is crucial to assisting local government authorities to recruit, induct, employ, train and retain Indigenous staff. Mechanisms also need to ensure the process facilitates a positive experience for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff.

Council's recruitment, induction, employment and employee development processes must be attuned to the values of Indigenous people and tailored to address any barriers to participation. This may include, as identified in the Australian Government publication *Working with Indigenous Communities*, "flexible leave and roster arrangements and ongoing mentoring and support, to assist employees in managing family, cultural and financial responsibilities".²²

2.2 Establishing employment pathways

An effective employment strategy needs to include pathways which can be utilised to attract young people to choose employment within local government and be available for employees once in a job to assist with their long term career development and retention within the organisation. This is particularly important not just for addressing the skill shortages faced by local government authorities but also because much of current Indigenous employment in local government is at the lower skill and qualification levels.

School students in their senior secondary certificate years can undertake a range of programs which are structured to link with the workplace. Whilst some programs have a 'light touch' by incorporating a short term work experience component into a program of study, others have a very strong vocational basis, providing clear pathways into employment in specific industry areas. These pathways include:

- formally accredited Vocational Education and Training in Schools programs requiring structured work placement in a particular industry area; and
- School-based Apprenticeships or Traineeships which involve schooling and part-time employment under a modern award.

The opportunity is available for local government to take a pro-active role in providing work placement opportunities for school students in specific industry areas as a strategy to attract Indigenous young people as potential employees or to employ school students in an apprenticeship or traineeship and keep them on as employees after they finish their schooling.

“An effective employment strategy needs to include pathways which can be utilised to attract young people to choose employment within local government and be available for employees once in a job to assist with their long term career development and retention within the organisation.”

²² *Working with Indigenous Communities – Leading Practice Sustainable Development Program for the Mining Industry*, op. cit.

Students undertaking Vocational Education and Training pathways in TAFE or with private providers could also be attracted to work in local government through the provision of work experience programs associated with their courses. Local government authorities might also consider direct employment via the apprenticeship/traineeship pathway to attract potential long term employees. Areas of skill shortage might be strategically targeted, in conjunction with local schools and RTOs. Successful retention policies rely on the provision of clear pathways for existing workers, where they can see there are opportunities within the organisation for progression and that there will be training and assistance/mentoring to help them get there.

The provision of employment pathways into and within local government will require strong relationships with partner organisations to ensure education and training opportunities and employment arrangements are developed and capable of delivery in a flexible, tailored manner e.g. with schools, TAFE institutes and private providers. In many cases funding and support from the Australian, State or Territory governments will be available.

Information about the career pathways available and potential opportunities for articulation will be important for parents, school students, students of Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and potential workers.

3 Support for Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees

3.1 Develop managers to manage, including in diverse workforce environments

Local government workplaces need to have a strong culture of acceptance of differences and respect for the various approaches that need to be taken for some communities, including Indigenous communities. Racism and subtle forms of discrimination need to be tackled in local government through clear policy statements with practice led by the most senior management personnel and driven through the organisation at all levels.

Good managers have the confidence to operate effectively no matter how diverse the workforce they are responsible for. Cultural awareness training for those working with Indigenous people is important and should be incorporated within management development programs but essentially, if management is not effective, fair and respectful, no amount of cultural awareness training will help to support and mentor Indigenous people in that workplace.

In the first instance therefore, it is critical that managers are provided with cultural awareness training within an overall approach to management geared to ensure all managers and supervisors are cognisant of a range of cultural issues associated with the workplace, including an awareness of Indigenous culture as well as of cultures from other Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) people.

Good management which demonstrates cultural awareness will improve engagement with Indigenous people and create a more welcoming and culturally inclusive environment for community and staff. Managers and supervisors need to be trained to understand issues faced by some Indigenous people that inhibit their participation in the workforce and workplace.

At the same time, it is recognised that training needs to be provided to all employees to facilitate recognition and respect for Indigenous values and cultures in order that co-workers in the workplace do not raise barriers to Indigenous participation.

3.2 Assisting new Indigenous employees to learn about the culture of the organisation

Just as an awareness of Indigenous culture is important for non-Indigenous staff in local government so also is there a need for new Indigenous employees to learn about the culture of the organisation and ways of operating in the workplace with fellow workers and with management.

Traditional staff orientation programs will not be enough to assist Indigenous employees to operate in 'two worlds'. A concerted effort will be required over a period of time to assist new Indigenous employees adjust to work in the organisation and its 'cultural' processes and practices. This role can be undertaken directly by managers, supervisors undertaking a mentor role, or by the mentor and support arrangements put in place as outlined below.

3.3 Selecting and training dedicated staff to mentor and support Indigenous employees

Indigenous staff are more likely to be retained if they are valued for their contribution and provided with appropriate support by culturally competent and supportive managers and have access to mentoring and career development opportunities. Support strategies include:

- assisting Indigenous people to retain employment by making mechanisms available for referral and advice on any accommodation, children and family services and health concerns;
- establishing an internal support group, including cultural mentors, to enable Indigenous employees to share workplace experiences and provide support and encouragement to existing employees as well as new Indigenous staff;
- appointing an Indigenous Development or Liaison Officer who can work between two cultures. This can assist Indigenous staff to feel confident and comfortable about asking questions and learning more about how local government works and non-Indigenous staff to raise issues to assist their understanding of Indigenous culture. However, caution needs to be applied to ensure that this staff member is not seen as having single responsibility for this work and there is a shared responsibility across the organisation.

The selection and training of dedicated staff to undertake these support roles will be crucial to the success of a local government Indigenous employment strategy.

3.4 Building the capacity of Indigenous leadership and management roles

Many local government authorities across Australia employ Indigenous people. However, most of the staff are not in leadership and management positions. Training and career development opportunities need to be provided, both to assist Indigenous staff to aspire to senior management positions, and for existing Indigenous Chief Executive Officers and senior managers, incorporating:

- ongoing mentoring and exchange programs;
- fostering the 'best and the brightest' e.g. providing scholarships;
- cross-cultural exchange to facilitate exchange of leadership styles and approaches, where emerging Indigenous CEOs and senior managers can learn from non-Indigenous CEOs and senior managers, and in turn non-Indigenous CEOs and senior managers can learn from Indigenous leaders;
- forming local government groupings to share training and mentoring resources in areas of greatest need; and
- adopting the methodologies of best practice examples of programs that have had positive Indigenous leadership outcomes e.g. mentoring programs for Councillors.

3.5 Ensuring employees have the necessary Foundation Skills for a career in local government and that opportunities are available to improve the vocational education and training skills of Indigenous employees

The upgrading of workforce skills as part of the drive to increase productivity is a key component of *Future-proofing Local Government: National Workforce Strategy 2012-2020*. The need to continually equip and re-equip the workforce is critical to both organisational effectiveness and individual employee development and retention as this ensures that staff are able to undertake core duties and build and adapt skills for work in a constantly changing environment, and that the organisation meets community needs and expectations. Local government organisations across Australia already provide training for staff in a range of skills and functions with many basing their priorities on training needs analyses.

A comprehensive approach to training will be required, linked closely to many of the other key elements and actions in this position paper in order to best attract, develop and retain Indigenous employees. The approach needs to:

- be developed in conjunction with local Indigenous communities as partner organisations;
- contribute to the development of employment pathways;
- work in partnership with schools and RTOs responsible for delivering Foundation Skills²³ and/or VET In Schools or pre-apprenticeship programs to Indigenous people in order to:
 - ensure local government staff understand the nature of programs undertaken by prospective employees; and
 - assist with identifying the VET content relating to work in local government which can be delivered to employees within and/or alongside a Foundation Skills program to contextualise the learning undertaken;
- utilise the resources available under the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program to develop the literacy and numeracy skills of existing employees;
- provide opportunities for employees to undertake and complete Vocational Education and Training qualifications in aspects of local government, with specific attention being targeted to skill shortage areas and opportunities provided for Indigenous employees with base level qualifications to be supported to achieve higher level skills and qualifications in specific industry areas; and
- develop supervisory and management skills.

It is acknowledged that the delivery of Foundation Skills and Vocational Education and Training qualifications is not the core business of local government. Opportunities to partner with Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) should be explored and, in remote and rural areas, with mining companies which have established training programs in training centres.

The resourcing for many of the strategies above will be available via the mainstream funding arrangements for public and private Registered Training Organisations (see Action Item 7.2).

“ Training and career development opportunities need to be provided, both to assist Indigenous staff to aspire to senior management positions, and for existing Indigenous Chief Executive Officers and Senior Managers. ”

23 Foundation Skills refers to the skills to be developed for employment and encompasses:

- *The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)* which consists of learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy;
- *The Core Skills for Work Framework*; and
- Digital Literacy.

The Foundation Skills Training Package is being developed during 2012 by Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA).

3.6 Support for Indigenous Language and Culture

Opportunities may also be available for local government to work closely with local Indigenous communities and community organisations to focus on the maintenance of Indigenous language and culture within a community, through the delivery of programs utilising local government infrastructure. Local government authorities could develop initiatives aimed at strengthening cultural identity as a vital source of individual and community strength and pride. These could include:

- building the capacity of individuals to overcome barriers to learning in order to enable their participation in the social and working life of communities; and
- making learning fun, particularly for early childhood and adult literacy programs, utilising arts and craft, computer and internet usage.

For example, a range of such services, in addition to traditional library services, are provided by twenty Indigenous Knowledge Centres in Queensland, and are a partnership between the State Library of Queensland and local government.²⁴ Similarly, 16 Library and Knowledge Centres operate in libraries in the Northern Territory.²⁵

In September 2012, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs tabled its report on the inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities entitled *Our Land Our Language: language learning in Indigenous communities*.²⁶ This report highlighted the important role that Indigenous languages play in terms of a connection to culture, kinship, land and family, as was the devastation to communities that results when language is lost and states that *Indigenous languages are the foundation upon which the capacity to learn, interact and to shape identity is built*.²⁷

The Committee made 30 recommendations in its report, including incorporating an acknowledgement and focus of Indigenous languages into the Closing the Gap framework. It also made recommendations relating to expanding the Indigenous Languages Support program and prioritising the development of language nests, issues closely associated with the concept of the Indigenous Knowledge Centres outlined above.

4 Indirectly employing Indigenous workers

4.1 Implementing Social Procurement Policies and Supporting Indigenous Owned and Operated Enterprises

Local Indigenous employment can also be promoted in an indirect manner when local government encourages the employment of Indigenous people through the social procurement policy arrangements they establish or through their encouragement of Indigenous owned and operated enterprises.

Local government organisations can utilise social procurement policies and processes to generate positive social outcomes by inserting contractual clauses in tenders for work that requires evidence of the employment of Indigenous people. Clauses can specify that specific groups are employed as a percentage of the labour used on a job, or that particular work is to be undertaken by specific groups, with the condition being that this is not to diminish the delivery of efficient goods, services and works. Systems may need to be established with contractors to ensure that they implement employment arrangements which assist in retaining Indigenous workers.

24 State Library of Queensland, <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/about/who/orgchart/ils/ikc> accessed 15 August 2012

25 Department of the Arts and Museums, www.artsandmuseums.nt.gov.au/northern-territory-library/about_us/knowledgecentres, accessed 8 October 2012

26 http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=atsia/languages2/report.htm

27 Ibid page vi

A number of State and Territory Governments and agencies and local government authorities have used this procurement mechanism to contribute to building stronger communities and to meet their social objectives. It is recognised, however, that this approach needs to take into account regulations and processes relating to the use of this practice within States and Territories, noting that these will differ. Councils can also support Indigenous employment in a community through the direct purchase of goods and services using its significant buying power to buy from Indigenous owned and operated organisations, organisations employing Indigenous people or through local Indigenous community enterprises.

Local government authorities could consider becoming a member of the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council (AIMSC).²⁸ The AIMSC provides a direct business-2-business purchasing link between corporate Australian, government agencies and Indigenous-owned businesses. Their mission is to contribute to the creation of a sustainable, vibrant and prosperous Indigenous Enterprise sector in Australia.

Benefits to local communities include increasing Indigenous employment outcomes through indirect employment and developing the capacity and sustainability of Indigenous businesses through commercial activity.

4.2 Growing a Trained Workforce – Utilising Group Training Organisations

Where a local government authority wishes to grow and train its own apprentices or trainees it can employ direct and, as an employer, arrange training through a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). Alternatively, a local government body might seek to achieve this through indirect employment by arranging with a Group Training Organisation (GTO) to employ the apprentice or trainee and host them back to the local government organisation to undertake the work involved as part of their training to become a qualified tradesperson. Many GTOs employ Indigenous people on behalf of a host employer and have a record of achieving strong outcomes. They also have a strong record of working with schools and providing the employment mode for School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships.

“Local Indigenous employment can also be promoted in an indirect manner when local government encourages the employment of Indigenous people through the social procurement policy arrangements they establish or through their encouragement of Indigenous owned and operated enterprises.”

Effectively, through a partnership arrangement with a local GTO, a local government authority can promote the training of its Indigenous workforce by purchasing the work of an apprentice or trainee from a GTO and, following the completion of their training, extending that pathway by employing the apprentice/trainee as a qualified tradesperson.

5 Building alliances – collaboration is the key

5.1 With State, Territory and Commonwealth Government Departments and Government and Non-Government Agencies

Collaboration is fundamental to developing an effective Indigenous Employment Strategy in Local Government. Taking the lead is also important in order to ensure key local stakeholders are all on ‘the same page’ – that there is a well recognised community plan, activities are coordinated and facilitated, resources are leveraged and communication occurs within the community. Many local government

28 Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council (AIMSC), <http://www.aimsc.org.au/> accessed 15 August 2012

authorities have taken a lead role in undertaking community reviews and identifying strategies for increasing Indigenous employment; others have played a crucial support role in a consortium organised through others.

Local government organisations are unlikely to succeed with the implementation of a Local Government Indigenous Employment Strategy if they tackle the issue alone or focus only on the issue of employment. Strong relationships will be required, not just with local Indigenous organisations, but also with other levels of government and with the range of government and non-government agencies associated with Indigenous lives, including those associated with employment, education and training: schools, TAFE, universities, GTOs, Job Service Australia providers and State and Territory support services; environment departments, agencies and groups; housing; physical and mental health and allied agencies which may need to be involved in counselling, including countering any negative peer pressure associated with working; the justice system; and the welfare system.

A ‘whole of government’ and ‘whole of life’ approach will be needed.

Having these relationships to call on will assist local government to work through barriers that may exist and which inhibit the engagement of Indigenous employees and their potential contribution in the workforce and workplace. Experience with the implementation of strategies by large mining corporations suggests that the existence of these relationships is crucial to becoming an employer of choice for Indigenous people.

Local government authorities have a lot to learn from each other, from Indigenous communities, private sector programs and non government organisations. Flexible structural frameworks for collaboration need to be in place that build on the capacity for lateral as well as linear approaches in order to accommodate different cultural requirements and working styles. These might include, for example:

- collaboration with relevant local Aboriginal organisations is a key ingredient, especially with the relevant Traditional Owner group(s), where they exist, as the ‘preferred’ or first point of contact;
- partnerships with Indigenous businesses, community and social enterprises;
- collaboration with relevant Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) is also important, from the point of view of being able to deliver skills training flexibly to meet local needs;
- forming regional groups of councils, and actively encouraging sharing and co-operation between neighbouring groups of councils, will improve prospects of success:
 - acknowledging that some individual councils do not have the capacity, skills and experience to implement the strategy on their own, nor to access government and other sources of funding; and
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will sometimes only work on their own country and may be reluctant to work on other people’s country unless they are authorised to do so by the right people under their system of law or custom;
- forming partnerships with individuals and organisations who have expertise and have run successful Indigenous employment programs e.g. Aboriginal Employment Strategy, Ganbina;
- forming cross-sectoral alliances with other employers, especially in the local area or regionally.

“Flexible structural frameworks for collaboration need to be in place that build on the capacity for lateral as well as linear approaches in order to accommodate different cultural requirements and working styles.”

There are clear opportunities for State and Territory based local government associations to broker these arrangements and to disseminate information on funding and advice that is available from State, Territory and Australian Governments as well as highlighting examples of successful implementation.

6 Support from Governments

6.1 Assistance from the Australian and State and Territory Government Departments and Agencies

Representatives from a number of Australian and State and Territory government departments and agencies are available to work with local government to develop approaches that increase the employment of Indigenous people. Relevant Australian Government departments and agencies include the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR),²⁹ the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE)³⁰ and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).³¹

Direct assistance to local government is available through:

- 30 Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs)³² located across Australia. Working with local Indigenous people, the ICCs work to broker whole-of-government solutions to local and regional needs using both Indigenous-specific and mainstream funding;
- Regional Operations Centres to obtain assistance, information and resources where needed. There are six Regional Operations Centres where both Australian and State/Territory Government staff work together. This network is ideally placed to support local government authorities as they have existing relationships with local Indigenous communities and are well placed to broker connections into existing services and funding;³³
- Local Employment Coordinators to assist in the development of partnerships and to maximise Commonwealth Government assistance;³⁴ and
- The new network of Regional Education, Skills and Job Coordinators.³⁵

State and Territory Governments will have separate arrangements in place through their departments and agencies responsible for Indigenous issues.

6.2 Training and Employment Funding and Related Resources

Significant funding and support is available to assist local government in the training and employment of Indigenous jobseekers and their retention in the local government workforce.

Local government authorities will need to make themselves aware of the funding and support available to local government bodies to provide Indigenous people with real jobs and career pathways in a range of occupational roles in the sector. Many opportunities are available to local government to make a greater contribution to 'growing their own' and developing a future talent pool, for example, through the following pathways:

- Indigenous school based traineeships;
- Apprenticeships;
- by maximising new Australian Government initiatives such as DEEWR's Indigenous Youth Careers Pathway Program, Australian Apprenticeship Mentoring and Accelerated Australian Apprenticeships;
- access to accredited language, literacy and numeracy training under the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program (WELL);

29 www.deewr.gov.au

30 www.innovation.gov.au

31 <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au>

32 <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/programs-services/communities-regions/indigenous-coordination-centres-and-regional-operations-centres> accessed 15 August 2012

33 ibid

34 <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/Programs/PEA/Pages/LEC.aspx> accessed 15 August 2012

35 <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Skills/Programs/RESJ/Pages/default.aspx> accessed 15 August 2012

- the reformed Indigenous Employment Program (IEP) can provide employers with tailored assistance to help them provide more job opportunities for Indigenous Australians. Employers can receive assistance either directly through DEEWR or through one of DEEWR’s providers. This assistance can be obtained through a panel member to provide a package of financial assistance tailored to an employer’s needs and/or through streamlined access to predesigned packages. These predesigned packages include:
 - Indigenous Cadetship Support;³⁶
 - the Indigenous Wage Subsidy;³⁷
 - the CDEP Work Experience Subsidy;³⁸
- through a new simplified contracting arrangement employers will find it easier to access the services offered under the reformed IEP. The new simplified contracting arrangements will also ensure that there is less red tape and a reduced workload for the employer;³⁹
- the former Structured Training and Employment Projects (STEP) Program, now incorporated into the new Indigenous Employment Program,⁴⁰ provides flexible funding for packages of tailored assistance, including structured and accredited training, to help employers give long term jobs to Indigenous Australians. Assistance is tailored to business needs and can include approaches such as funding for apprenticeships and mentoring that can lead to lasting employment; and
- the Aboriginal Employment Covenant (AEC) is one national Indigenous employment program which has received a lot of publicity and has attracted 60,600 pledges as at 30 August 2012.⁴¹ It is aimed at securing 50,000 sustainable jobs for Indigenous Australians. The majority of employers are from the private sector, although it is not limited to the private sector.

“ The Commonwealth Government’s policy focus, with the backing of COAG through the Closing the Gap strategy, has resulted in a variety of significant funding initiatives being available which could be accessed by local government authorities, in conjunction with partner organisations, to improve the participation of Indigenous people in the local government workforce. ”

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7 Adopting good practice and communicating and celebrating achievements

A range of local government organisations and private enterprises have been active in the development of strategies to increase Indigenous employment in their workforces, some for 10 years or more. There is much to be learnt from them about what works, what has not worked, and what activities lead to the best outcomes. Learning from others is critical to the development of an individual local government Indigenous employment strategy.

36 <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Employment/Programs/IEP/Pages/IndigenousCadetshipSupport.aspx>

37 <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Employment/Programs/Pages/IndigenousWageSubsidy.aspx>

38 <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Employment/Programs/IEP/Pages/CDEP.aspx>

39 Indigenous Employment Program, Information for Employers, DEEWR website

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Employment/Programs/IEP/Pages/InformationforEmployers.aspx>

40 Indigenous Employment Program, <http://www.deewr.gov.au/employment/pages/changestotheIndigenousEmploymentProgram.aspx>

41 Australian Employment Covenant, <http://www.fiftythousandjobs.org.au> accessed 30 August 2012

7.1 Learning from Demonstration Projects in Local Government

Building capacity within a local government authority will be important. Many have already developed and implemented some of the elements within this position paper and can advise on the benefits and challenges of various approaches. A separate but related piece of work is currently being developed by ACELG to identify potential sustainable and replicable demonstration projects that could be rolled out in local government authorities across Australia. The intention is to test some of the strategies identified in this paper to maximise the employment outcomes for Indigenous people.

7.2 Learning from private corporations

Local government can learn from private corporations when it comes to the recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees, with some mining companies having a strong reputation and record for increasing their Indigenous workforce, targeting and engaging local communities. The Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSRSM) based at the University of Queensland has undertaken major research projects on Indigenous employment in the mining industry. A report on this program of research, *Indigenous Employment in the Australian Minerals Industry*⁴² has been highlighted in several publications, including those from the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse,⁴³ indicating the following as the critical success factors characteristic of companies successful at Indigenous employment:

People factors

An executive leadership team that has publicly committed to improving Indigenous employment outcomes and backs this commitment by providing adequate financial and human resources.

A commitment to the development of honest and transparent relationships with Indigenous communities.

Corporate champions who 'go the extra mile' in supporting Indigenous employees and who have influence with the operation's management team to ensure that Indigenous employment issues remain on the corporate agenda.

Suitably qualified, skilled, informed and committed personnel in training and liaison positions, who are respected by the local Indigenous community.

Strategies for increasing retention

Provision of ongoing mentoring and support.

More flexible work and leave rosters.

Provision of career development opportunities.

Provision of family support.

Addressing racism in the workforce.

In addition the project report highlights the following as critical success factors - recruitment strategies, contractor issues and resources for practitioners;⁴⁴

- non-standard recruitment strategies to increase the likelihood of Indigenous people who would be screened out from conventional selection processes having the opportunity to win jobs;⁴⁵
- Rio Tinto, as one of the largest employers of Indigenous people in Australia, has a comprehensive range of initiatives designed to increase Indigenous employment through their *Indigenous Employment in Australia* Strategy that includes job readiness training and recruitment, literacy

42 *Indigenous Employment in the Australian Minerals Industry*, Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, University of Queensland

43 *Issues Paper No 3: Increasing Indigenous Employment Rates*, Australian Government Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, page 25

44 *Indigenous Employment in the Australian Minerals Industry*, op. cit. page 3

45 *Issues Paper No 3: Increasing Indigenous Employment Rates*, op. cit. page 20

and numeracy support, skills development via traineeships and apprenticeships retention and career development. Rio Tinto attributes its high retention rates to family and community support programs that help Indigenous employees and their families settle into work and a mining town, prevocational training and support to develop workplace communication and life skills, mentoring, usually by Indigenous employees during the first year of employment, and cross-cultural education programs;⁴⁶

- mining companies have established procurement practices including contracting local Indigenous companies to supply services such as catering and minor earthworks. These are services that local government across the country purchases regularly;
- since 2002 the ANZ Bank has recruited over 400 Indigenous trainees in branches around Australia. The ANZ offers school-based traineeships for Indigenous students while they are completing year 11 and 12 studies, enabling them to earn an income while learning new skills and gaining a nationally accredited qualification;
- BHP Billiton has undertaken various case studies on how to increase Indigenous employment. Under their Sustainable Relationship Program they have a Training and Indigenous Employment Strategy which has proven to be successful. They have been working towards an Indigenous employment target of 14% by 2012; and
- Telstra's 2008-2010 Reconciliation Action Plan committed to increasing Indigenous employment opportunities by 25 per cent. Telstra was on track to exceed this target with the number of opportunities having increased by 29.2% at 30 June 2009.

“ Indigenous ambassadors could promote and celebrate home-grown talent and successes, e.g. Indigenous CEOs, planners, environmental health officers, engineers, building surveyors and community services and development officers working in local government. ”

7.3 Communicating and celebrating achievements

Local government authorities might consider a targeted campaign to raise the awareness of careers in local government and portraying a more positive image of the sector with local people, particularly Indigenous people. Emphasising the 'point of difference' and 'selling' the benefits of working for a local government organisation as an employer of choice will be important. For these reasons the achievements and outcomes arising from the implementation of a local government Indigenous Employment Strategy should be communicated broadly within the community, as well as to the broader local government audience, utilising a range of media.

Marketing and communicating the Indigenous Employment Strategy locally will need to be cognisant of using a concept that is identifiable, meaningful and accessible to both cultures, using both English and Aboriginal words and/or symbols when naming the strategy or project.

7.4 Promoting home-grown Indigenous talent

Indigenous ambassadors could promote and celebrate home-grown talent and successes, e.g. Indigenous CEOs, planners, environmental health officers, engineers, building surveyors and community services and development officers working in local government.

46 Ibid, page 17

8 Monitoring and evaluating implementation

The implementation of an Indigenous Employment Strategy within a local government authority needs to be regularly monitored and evaluated to measure success and to identify where opportunities exist to improve processes, impact and outcomes. The collection of quantitative and qualitative data throughout the implementation process is vital; and without data it is difficult to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the strategy against the targets set and outcomes expected.

It will take time to achieve results and the process will not be simple. Levels of success will be dependent on the range of 8 key elements and the sub-set of 21 specific actions chosen for implementation from the continuum outlined in this position paper.

The Indigenous Employment Strategy developed by a local government authority should include agreed methods and the frequency of monitoring arrangements and set evaluation criteria right from start up.

5 Implementation

Implementation of a sustainable Indigenous Employment Strategy by a local government authority will require a number of steps in decision-making. It will also take time to get right – there is no ‘quick, simple fix’.

Where to start will depend upon the nature of the approach to workforce development and existing experience with strategies to increase Indigenous employment within their workforce. The steps outlined below are designed for local government authorities just starting out. Those already well engaged with their Indigenous communities and active in the employment and training of Indigenous people will already have undertaken Steps 1 and 2. Their strategic planning is more likely to focus firstly on monitoring progress and outcomes to date (as outlined in Step 5) prior to further refining or expanding their current actions and/or approach (as outlined in Step 3), e.g. building stronger alliances or upskilling staff in higher level qualifications..

Step 1 Assessing current and/or future workforce needs

The decision to develop an Indigenous Employment Strategy to address current and/or future workforce needs requires a series of preliminary actions to be taken within the context of the organisation’s workforce strategy. These include an assessment of:

- available data on the current workforce and on forecasting likely future needs, including data on the current participation of Indigenous employees within the organisation;
- LGA profile data, including data on the Indigenous population in the community;
- the most appropriate strategy to address specific workforce needs, i.e. whether an Indigenous Employment Strategy is the most appropriate, whether other strategies are more suitable, e.g. attracting or retaining mature age workers, targeting other population groups, developing more flexible work arrangements such as teleworking, or whether a combination of strategies is required;
- the business case for developing such a strategy; and
- the risks involved in implementing the various strategies above.

Step 2 Assessing current efforts to increase Indigenous employment

When the development of an Indigenous Employment Strategy is one of the choices made to address workforce needs, the local government organisation needs to make an assessment of where it is currently positioned in relation to efforts to engage Indigenous communities and in facilitating improved employment outcomes. The key elements of the Strategy outlined in Section 4 may provide a checklist for assessing actions taken to date.

Step 3 Deciding on a course of action to meet your needs and your capacity

The framework of this Strategy contains 8 key elements and within these elements 21 specific actions which have been identified as crucial to the development of an Indigenous Employment Strategy leading to the successful attraction, recruitment, employment and retention of Indigenous employees. Depending upon the assessments undertaken in Steps 1 and 2 above, the course of action developed by a local government authority might consider the choices from the range of key elements and specific actions outlined in the table below.

Key elements	Specific actions
1. Committing to engagement	<p>1.1 Commitment by councillors and/or senior management to increasing the employment of local Indigenous people and engaging with local Indigenous communities to achieve this.</p> <p>1.2 Community mapping and conversations – engaging and understanding your Indigenous communities</p> <p>1.3 A statement of commitment to Indigenous people or memorandum of understanding</p> <p>1.4 Reconciliation Action Plans</p>
2. Employing Indigenous workers	<p>2.1 Direct employment – human resource policies and practices reflect the cultural needs of Indigenous people</p> <p>2.2 Establishing employment pathways</p>
3. Support for Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees	<p>3.1 Develop managers to manage, including in diverse workforce environments</p> <p>3.2 Assisting new Indigenous employees to learn about the culture of the organisation</p> <p>3.3 Selecting and training dedicated staff to mentor and support Indigenous employees</p> <p>3.4 Building the capacity of Indigenous leaders and managers</p> <p>3.5 Ensuring employees have the necessary Foundation Skills for a career in local government and that opportunities are available to improve the vocational skills of Indigenous employees</p> <p>3.6 Support for Indigenous language and culture.</p>
4. Indirectly employing Indigenous workers	<p>4.1 Implementing social procurement policies and supporting Indigenous owned and operated enterprises</p> <p>4.2 Growing a trained workforce – utilising Group Training Organisations</p>
5. Building alliances – collaboration is the key	<p>5.1 With state, territory and commonwealth government departments and government and non-government agencies</p>
6. Support from governments	<p>6.1 Assistance from the Australian government and state and territory government departments and agencies</p> <p>6.2 Training and employment funding and related resources</p>
7. Adopting good practice and communicating and celebrating achievements	<p>7.1 Learning from demonstration projects in local government</p> <p>7.2 Learning from private corporations</p> <p>7.3 Communicating and celebrating achievements</p> <p>7.4 Promoting home-grown talent</p>
8. Monitoring and evaluating implementation	

The choice of key elements and specific actions to implement will vary across local government authorities, dependent on their location within remote, rural, regional, urban and metropolitan areas or on the capacity within the organisation to gain traction in the short term towards longer term goals and outcomes.

Step 4 Developing a detailed plan and setting a timetable for implementation

Not all actions can be implemented immediately. Implementation will require detailed planning and in some instances, development will need to take place in a sequential manner as follows:

- a commitment to engagement by council and/or senior management will be the first action to be implemented;
- establishing a community profile in which clear baseline information is available;

followed by:

- the development of mechanisms which clearly commit to in-principle support, in conjunction with local Indigenous organisations;
- learning from others, building alliances and seeking support from governments;

leading to:

- setting targets against which success can be measured;
- action taken to employ Indigenous workers directly or indirectly and putting in place support mechanisms to ensure their retention.

Step 5 Monitoring implementation to check outcomes and refining strategies as required

A robust and preferably independent monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement framework is the final element of an implementation plan. Monitoring and evaluation should be an intrinsic part of the overall implementation plan to ensure that, over time, the plan is achieving its intended results. Independent monitoring and evaluation will provide credible, timely and objective findings and conclusions, and will assist in making any adjustments to the plan.

A monitoring, evaluation and reporting and improvement framework should include a number of key questions for evaluating the Indigenous Employment Strategy developed by a local government authority. The key questions should focus on appropriateness, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and legacy.

Appendix A - Key Indigenous Population Statistics

General population statistics

According to the 2011 Census, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was 548,370 (or 2.5% of the total Australian population). This is a 20.5% increase from the 2006 total of 455,023 (or 2.3% of the total Australian population).

More than half (59.9 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders live in the Eastern states of Queensland and New South Wales. There were 172,624 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in New South Wales, and 54,746 persons in Greater Sydney. There were 155,825 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Queensland with 41,904 persons in Greater Brisbane.

Meanwhile, there were 69,665 and 56,779 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Western Australia and the Northern Territory respectively, while there were 37,991 in Victoria, 30,431 in South Australia, 19,625 in Tasmania, and 5,184 in the Australian Capital Territory.

The percentage of Indigenous people within the population varies across States and Territories. Whilst 2.5% of the total Australian population is Indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up 26.8% of the population in the Northern Territory, and in the other States they account for 4% or less of the population, with Victoria at the lowest proportion at just 0.7%;

75% of Indigenous people live in urban environments with 25% living in remote and very remote areas, compared with 2% of non-Indigenous people.⁴⁷ 35.84% of Indigenous people live in major cities (ie the major capital cities), up 4% since 2006.

The Indigenous population is significantly younger, having a very different age profile compared with the non-Indigenous community;

- the median age for Indigenous Australians is 21 years compared to 37 years for the general population. In 2006 it was 20 years;
- just over 68% of Indigenous people are under 34 years of age, down from just over 70% in 2006;
- about 55% of Indigenous Australians are under 25 years of age, compared to about 32% of the rest of the population;
- more than one in three (35.9%) Indigenous people were under 15 years, compared to just over 19% of non-Indigenous people;
- only 3.8% of the Indigenous population was over 65 years, compared to 14.2% of the non-Indigenous population.⁴⁸

47 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2009 Fact Sheet – The Indigenous Population*

48 ABS, 2011 Census Data

Projections

Based on a series of assumptions which incorporate recent trends in Indigenous fertility, mortality and internal migration, Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) population is projected to reach between 713,300 and 721,100 people in 2021, according to new figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).⁴⁹ A 2.2% growth rate per year is projected between 2006 and 2021, compared with an annual growth rate of between 1.2% and 1.7% per year for the total Australian population.

The Indigenous populations of all states and territories will continue to grow. By 2016, Queensland is projected to overtake New South Wales as the state with the largest Indigenous population in Australia.

The higher growth rate for the Indigenous population is due to large numbers of Indigenous births, mainly as a result of high levels of fertility in the Indigenous population and increasing numbers of Indigenous women entering peak child-bearing ages. If present levels of fertility and mortality continue, there will be 1 million Indigenous Australians by 2040.⁵⁰

Significant growth is already apparent in the Indigenous population in Australia's main cities. Based on 2006 data:

- in the 10 years to 2016 alone, the Indigenous population in Australia's main cities could grow from about 164,000 to 220,000;
- this equates to a growth rate of almost 3 per cent a year, which far outpaces growth rates for the Indigenous population nationally (2 per cent a year) and for the non-Indigenous population in the main cities (1.5 per cent).⁵¹

Projections relating to the age profile of the Indigenous population for 2021 show:

- the number of Indigenous children (0–14 years) is projected to increase from 194,200 in 2006 to between 242,600 and 243,400 in 2021;
- the number of Indigenous people aged 25–54 years is projected to increase from 183,000 in 2006 to between 260,100 and 262,300 in 2021;
- the number of older Indigenous people (55 years and over) is projected to more than double, from 40,000 in 2006 to between 82,000 and 86,600 in 2021;
- the median age of the Indigenous population is expected to increase from 21 years in 2006 to 24 years in 2021;
- the proportion of Indigenous children aged 0–14 years is projected to decline from 38% of the Indigenous population in 2006 to 34% in 2021;
- the proportion of Indigenous persons aged 55 years and over will increase from 8% to between 11% and 12%.⁵²

49 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Source: 3238.0 – *Experimental Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 1991 to 2021*

50 *Specific plan needed to close the gap for urban Aborigines*, Nicholas Biddle, Research Fellow, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU - SMH 7 August 2009 <http://tinyurl.com/nwdycs>

51 Ibid

52 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Source: 3238.0 - *Experimental Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 1991 to 2021*

Employment, Education and Training

Although there have been substantial increases in the rate of employment for Indigenous men and women between 1994 and 2008, nonetheless the Indigenous population continues to have much lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates than the non-Indigenous population. For example, in 2008, the employment rate for all Australian males was 84.8% compared to the Indigenous rate of 58.8%. The employment rate for all Australian females in 2008 was 69.4% compared to 42.9% for Indigenous females.⁵³

Indigenous females and males are employed in very different occupations to that of other Australian workers. Indigenous workers are much more likely to be employed in low status occupations. For example, Indigenous females and males are between 2 to 3 times more likely to be labourers than the total Australian workforce and, conversely, are much less likely to be in high status occupations such as managers and professionals.⁵⁴

Employment is strongly associated with educational attainment with the completion of Year 12 or equivalent being viewed as a strong indicator of employment success. 2011 Census data indicates that 25% of the Indigenous population has completed Year 12 or equivalent. Whilst this does not compare favourably with the 49.2% of the general population achieving this level of education or training, it nevertheless represents a 48% increase on the numbers from 2006.

Work undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 2010, utilising 2008 data, identified that:

- higher levels of education attainment are associated with improved employment outcomes:
 - among Indigenous people aged 25–64 years, 58% of those who had completed Year 12 were in full-time employment in 2008, compared to 24% of those who had left school at Year 9 or below;
 - similarly, 60% of Indigenous people aged 25–64 years who had completed a non-school qualification of Certificate III or above were in full-time employment compared to 29% of those without a non-school qualification.
- in 2008, 22% of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over (excluding those still in secondary school) had completed Year 12, up from 18% in 2002. As outlined above this rose to 25% by 2011;
- younger Indigenous people were more likely than older Indigenous people to have completed Year 12, with 30% of those aged 25–34 years having completed Year 12, compared to 8% of those aged 55–64 years;
- there was a corresponding decrease in the proportion of people who had completed Year 9 or below, 34% in 2008 down from 41% in 2002, indicating a higher proportion of young people are continuing with their studies; and
- the unemployment rate for Indigenous Australians at the time had fallen from 23% in 2002 to 17% in 2008, but remained more than three times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous Australians (5% in 2008).⁵⁵

53 *Issues Paper No 3: Increasing Indigenous Employment Rates*, op. cit. page 25

54 *Ibid*, page 29

55 Australian Bureau of Statistics (Source: 4704.0) *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2010*

Appendix B – Principles for engagement with Indigenous people

The following principles for engagement with Indigenous people are adapted from a number of different sources. Additional information and guidance can be obtained by accessing the resources listed at the end of this appendix.

Respect and sensitivity

Respect is very important in every social structure in Aboriginal communities. Elders, the land, animals and ancestors are fundamental aspects of Aboriginal culture. Like all genuinely mutual and productive relationships, engagements with Aboriginal communities need to be based on respect. We need to offer and earn respect, particularly in dealings with community Elders, who should be accorded the same courtesies that are accorded to other dignitaries. (DoCS 2009:18)

Recognise diversity and uniqueness of peoples and individuals

The diversity of Indigenous peoples, including their different languages, cultures, histories and perspectives, must be recognised. The diversity of individuals and groups within communities must also be recognised. (AIATSIS 2011:5)

Free, prior and informed consent are the foundations for consultation and negotiation with or about Indigenous peoples

Indigenous peoples have the right to full and effective participation in decisions which directly or indirectly affect their lives. This can be achieved by applying the principle of free, prior and informed consent as the basis for any consultations or negotiations. Free, prior and informed consent means that agreement must be obtained free of duress or pressure, and ensuring that Indigenous people are fully cognisant of the details and risks of what is being discussed with them. Informed consent of people as a group, as well as individuals within that group, is important. (AIATSIS 2011:8-9. AHRC 2010:20-25)

Responsibility for consultation and negotiation is ongoing

Consultation and negotiation is a continuous two-way process, and ongoing consultation is necessary to ensure free, prior and informed consent is obtained and to maintain that consent. Community representatives, individual participants including Traditional Owners, and the wider Indigenous community may need time to consider a measure, proposal or project and to discuss its implications, both before it begins and at various stages in its implementation. Measures, proposals or projects may therefore need to be staged to allow continuing opportunities for consideration by the affected community. (AIATSIS 2011:10)

Use of appropriate language

There is no universal Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language. Each nation has its own distinct language and/or dialect. Aboriginal English, an adaptation of the English language, is spoken by many Aboriginal people throughout Australia. Just as there are similarities between traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and dialects vary between areas, the use and meaning of Aboriginal English also varies according to geographic location.

Think about the language used (written, verbal and non-verbal) when communicating with Aboriginal people. Use clear, uncomplicated language. Do not use jargon. Be mindful of potential language barriers. Respect the use of silence and don't mistake it for misunderstanding a topic or issue. Always wait your turn to speak. (DoCS 2009:21-24)

Communication techniques

All levels of government and non-government agencies have a responsibility to build effective working partnerships with Indigenous people and communities. Indigenous communities have constantly met barriers within mainstream systems and Indigenous cultural priorities have been largely discounted, ignored and undermined. If engagement seems difficult or time-consuming, remember that history has not given Indigenous communities and families much reason to walk forward confidently in partnership. Local Governments will benefit by gaining an understanding of community life and working more effectively with Indigenous people and communities. (DoCS 2009:25)

Building rapport and working with Indigenous organisations

Local Indigenous corporations, land councils or other Indigenous organisations are good points of contact for establishing the correct people and groups to consult with in a particular Indigenous community. It may take time to establish these networks or to find out who the right people are. Spending the time to do this properly will help lay the groundwork for meaningful interaction with the community.

When building good rapport with the Indigenous community remember that time spent with local Aboriginal community organisations, groups, Elders, children and families makes a difference to the engagement process. A couple of hours in the community each week and getting to know the people, is likely to save hours of work in the long run. Forging strong working relationships with local Indigenous community groups and organisations in the local government area and surrounding region will help provide a better understanding of local issues, knowledge of family links in the community, expertise held by community members, and what Indigenous community services are available in the local area. Indigenous organisations are often very eager to establish a regular contact they feel comfortable working with. (DoCS 2009:26 and 32)

Cultural bias

Cultural bias influences our actions as our perceptions are shaped by our own cultural context and experiences. When working cross-culturally it is easy to misinterpret what is going on within communities, and such misinterpretation can lead to poor outcomes. For this reason, we need to actively recognise and monitor our own cultural bias and behaviour. (DoCS 2009:27)

Consultation or Negotiation?

A **consultation process** is used to seek information, advice or an opinion, permission or approval for a proposed action. Consultation processes would be used when approval of a program, policy or service (something that has already been developed) is required, and the process can be held at the beginning, middle and end of a project (preferably all three).

A **negotiation process** is used to confer with others in order to reach a compromise or agreement. The negotiation process should occur at the very beginning of a process, before anything has been developed. Negotiations take place to determine the overall purpose and direction of a measure or project. (DoCS 2009:31)

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