NDS ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS

ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT GUIDE
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1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

National Disability Services acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the first people and custodians of Australia. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present. We are committed to conducting our business in a culturally appropriate manner.

The following materials are drawn primarily from:


Supplementary material is also drawn from a variety of sources including:

- Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre, *How Do I Find a Mentor For My Aboriginal Employee?* Factsheet.
- Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre, *What is Workplace Mentoring?* Factsheet.
2. PROGRAM INFORMATION

a. What is Aboriginal Jobs Together (AJT)?

The Aboriginal Resources and Pathways Project is an initiative to improve communication between disability service providers and Aboriginal Communities in order to enhance the rates of access and outcomes for Aboriginal people with disabilities. The program was developed in response to concerns and requests from disability service providers for capacity building assistance in networking with Aboriginal communities.

b. What are the key objectives of the program?

The objectives of the ARP Program are twofold:

➢ The development of an interactive online resource to assist disability services to implement evidence-based practical ways to improve service access and quality for Aboriginal people.
➢ To develop local networks of Aboriginal communities and disability services to foster information sharing, service planning and identify emerging unmet need at a local level. These networks enable community and service stakeholders to collaboratively work together to improve local service access, quality and awareness for Aboriginal people with disabilities.

c. Why do we need this program?

The access rates of Aboriginal people in government funded services are currently lower than the reported incidence of disability. This under-representation is reflected in research conducted recently by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) which indicates that the level of need for assistance with core activities for Indigenous people is almost twice as high as for non-Indigenous people.

d. What is causing the under-representation of Aboriginal people in disability services?

The causes of the low access rates of Aboriginal people in disability services are many and varied. However, recent reforms in disability services have shown that one of the causes of this under-representation is that disability services have been less successful than anticipated in addressing the cultural and social needs of Aboriginal people.

Many Aboriginal disability support workers assert that a more sustainable approach to ascertain the needs of Aboriginal people with a disability is to engage with Aboriginal families and Aboriginal provider groups.
e. What does the ARP Project involve?
The ARP Project is implemented through a two pronged strategy.

- The enablers and inhibitors in effective service delivery for Aboriginal people in disability services are identified through consultation with Aboriginal people and service providers.
- The development, or extension of existing networks of disability service providers, and Aboriginal communities to foster information sharing, service planning and identify emerging unmet need at a local level.

f. Establishing Networks
In developing the local networks the following strategies are adopted:

- Build trust and rapport with Aboriginal communities and disability services.
- Workshop a Terms of Reference and three year Action Plan with network members to establish and maintain a shared commitment among Aboriginal communities and disability services.
- Ensure that the work of the network complements the work of existing community forums and networks. This prevents duplication of community initiatives and builds community social capital.
- Building a sustainability model for each local network in consultation with all stakeholders.

g. What does it achieve?
The approach outlined above has achieved demonstrated successes through two documented pilot programs. The program has enabled a full range of human service agencies to collaboratively work together to improve local service access, quality and awareness for Aboriginal people with disabilities.
3. ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT

The importance of Aboriginal staff in engaging with Aboriginal communities is well-established. The benefits of recruiting Aboriginal workers extend beyond engagement with prospective Aboriginal clients. Aboriginal workers are also a sound investment in cross-cultural awareness. Aboriginal workers introduce non-Aboriginal staff to members of the Aboriginal community, such as Elders and workers in the Aboriginal community services sector. Aboriginal workers also inform the development of government funding applications. Disability service providers confirmed that following the recruitment of Aboriginal people they were better placed to compete in government funding to establish services targeted at the Aboriginal community.

An example of the potential impact that the employment of an Aboriginal worker can have on the engagement of Aboriginal service users is highlighted below:

"When Kurrajong Waratah employed Jayla we were anticipating it would support Aboriginal families to be engaged in early childhood intervention. However the reality was that through Jayla’s employment our expectations were totally exceeded. Since employing Jayla Kurrajong Early Childhood Intervention Service has increased Aboriginal enrolment by 400%. Employing Jayla as an Aboriginal support worker it has also helped our overall service to improve how we engage and work sensitively with Aboriginal people." (Susan Macgillycuddy KEIS Service Manager, June 2013).

As the evidence above indicates the employment of Aboriginal people to build Aboriginal client and community engagement represents one element of increasing organisational cultural capacity. However, consultation through the Aboriginal Resources and Pathways Program indicates that organisations must be realistic in relation to the expectations that they have in relation to viewing Aboriginal employment as the primary vehicle to increase engagement. To achieve actual results in relation to more effectively building engagement with Aboriginal clients and communities, Aboriginal employment must be viewed as only a part of a broader engagement strategy.

Many disability service providers have undertaken Aboriginal recruitment initiatives to establish a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal people. This is based on the established proposition that many Aboriginal people prefer to work with an Aboriginal person than a non-Aboriginal person. This can lead to management committees and staff making the assumption that placing responsibility for all “Aboriginal matters” and Aboriginal clients onto the Aboriginal workers is culturally respectful.

In practice this means that non-Aboriginal workers don’t have to engage in Aboriginal communities and as a result the non-Aboriginal workforce doesn’t learn about local Aboriginal community cultural protocols and practices. In this circumstance Aboriginal workers develop high workloads and are limited in their career development. The end result is that Aboriginal workers become dissatisfied with their workplace and resign.
4. CANDIDATE ATTRACTION

a. Attracting the right applicant

The last 200 years of Australian history has contributed to some Aboriginal peoples feeling pressure from perceived or real hostility from non-Aboriginal communities, services, organisation, companies and individuals. Whether accurate or not, these feelings and experiences actively reduce the likelihood of some Aboriginal peoples applying for employment.

So how can organisations work to increase the rate of Aboriginal applications? Services should:

- Actively work to build relationships between the organisation and local Aboriginal communities.
- Develop relationships with local Aboriginal community organisations, including lands councils. Let them know about your business, invite them to visit your workplace and keep them in the loop about current and future vacancies.
- Develop relationships with local service organisations specialising in Aboriginal employment. They often have databases of Aboriginal job seekers and good networks through which to circulate job vacancies. These organisations may include Aboriginal Service Providers and Job Services Australia providers.
- Establish links with schools, training providers and universities through their career advisors or Aboriginal programs staff. You can advertise vacancies through these channels or offer work experience to students or graduates.
- Use existing professional networks to gain access to, and support applications from local Aboriginal communities.
- Consult with Aboriginal organisations to identify the most suitable qualification and experience an appropriate Aboriginal applicant may require.
- Identify the minimum requirements for ANY employee to ensure that qualifications and experience requirements are not overstated in job description forms.
- Invite respected community elders to participate on the selection panel. Provide training for all panel members to increase their understanding of Aboriginal culture.
- Communicate to potential employees the networks and support mechanisms that are in place to support them in their role.
- Provide applicants with electronic and hard-copy job application kits as candidates may not have internet access. Subject to prescribed requirements (e.g. Public Sector Standards), assess whether applicants can apply for a position by completing a personal details form and submitting their resume as opposed to addressing selection criteria.

The NDS Regional Coordinator is available to assist you with achieving these priorities. The Regional Coordinator can also provide assistance in:

- liaise with job networks
- liaise with Aboriginal job applicants
- work with selection panels
• provide Aboriginal applicants with support in preparing their application (i.e. addressing selection criteria)
• offer application and interview advice
• work with human resources staff to develop and implement targeted recruitment and retention strategies
• contribute to induction process for Aboriginal employees
• help identify Aboriginal employees learning and development needs
• liaise with managers to rectify incidents of discrimination and racism
• support Aboriginal employees once employed.

Such a Coordinator would assist agencies to gain a clear understanding of the complexities of Aboriginal culture and family structures. As a manager recruiting Aboriginal employees it is your responsibility to understand and provide for the needs of your staff. Be aware that Aboriginal people may be required to attend multiple family commitments such as funerals and sorry time. It is important to have Aboriginal mentor/counsellors on hand to support your Aboriginal staff through these times.

Hints and Tips

i. Often the most effective way to circulate a particular job vacancy that you have for Aboriginal people is through ‘word of mouth’. Aboriginal people use ‘word of mouth’ to pass on information so news about your business and any job opportunities will quickly circulate.

ii. Advertising your vacancy through Aboriginal media is often far more effective than through mainstream media outlets such as:
   • Koori Mail
   • Vibe Australia
   • Aboriginal radio networks (listed on the National Indigenous Radio Service Network at www.nirs.org.au)

iii. Utilise specialist recruitment companies such as
   • Indigenous Jobs Australia (www.ija.com.au)
   • Australian Employment Covenant (www.fiftythousandjobs.com.au)
   • Aboriginal Employment Strategy (www.aes.org.au).

b. Job Advertisements and Position Descriptions

There are a number of factors that should be considered when you are drafting position descriptions and advertising vacancies to Aboriginal communities.

• Who are you advertising to? Is the language targeted at Aboriginal people?
• Where should you be advertising? Are you looking to recruit from specific local Aboriginal communities or from the wider population?
• What media should you use to advertise? Will you reach your preferred target through local newspapers, Aboriginal newspaper, local radio, Aboriginal radio, or ads at University/TAFE Aboriginal study centres?
Can you use Aboriginal organisations or communities to advertise job vacancies? Many Aboriginal Australians find out about work vacancies through word of mouth or personal referral.

What networks can you use to advertise? Aboriginal Employment Development Officers or Aboriginal Liaison Officers can be great avenues through which to make contact with local Aboriginal communities.

What are you looking for in your applicants? Skills and abilities, qualifications, previous experience etc? Aboriginal people often have fewer formal qualifications. Is your selection criteria acting as deterrent? Listing unnecessary formal qualifications or failing to recognise personal and professional experience may rule out highly suitable Aboriginal applicants.

What additional attributes are required? Does your applicant need to have cultural awareness of all local communities (there are often more than one community residing within a region).

What language are you using? Use plain English in advertisements, keep messages brief, make them eye catching (i.e. using artwork).

Who is the contact person? Are you using someone culturally unaware? Would it be useful for them to complete Cultural Awareness training? Think about how this may affect an applicant’s likelihood of applying for your vacancy.

Who else can you use to identify potential applicants? University Aboriginal centres, Aboriginal Liaison Officers (usually working out of hospitals and Aboriginal Medical Services) etc?

Can you establish a recruitment pool that can be drawn from each time you have a relevant advertised vacancy? When advertising, consider advertising a group of positions as a pool with an end date. Advise in the advert that applicants to one job may be considered for similar jobs. Alternatively, you can advertise an open-ended pool for vacancies to similar jobs.

NDS strongly encourages the use of the following statement in all position advertisements:

“The organisation is committed to achieving a diverse workforce and strongly encourages applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and people with disabilities”.

Hints and Tips

i. Use plain English, avoid jargon and language that is unfamiliar to the general public.

ii. Where appropriate, talk in terms of the abilities you require rather than the qualifications.

iii. Depending on the job, you may want to emphasise that potential and a willingness to learn are more important than formal experience.

iv. Include reference to any training and career development opportunities

v. Provide reasonable time before applications close to allow news of your vacancy to spread by word of mouth.

vi. If possible have an Aboriginal person as a contact for enquiries. This may be clear from the contact’s name. If not, you could refer to the contact as an Aboriginal Recruitment Officer.
5. CANDIDATE SELECTION

a. Selection Tools

Be creative with your application requirements. If historically you have had poor application rates or poor selection criteria responses from Aboriginal people, you may consider an alternative such as requesting examples of the work that they have done.

Please Note: flexibility in the selection tools and approaches used is encouraged, as long as the same tools and processes are used for each applicant.

b. Selection Panel

There are a number of strategies that can be used to ensure Aboriginal applicants are given a fair go throughout your selection process. For example:

- Include an Aboriginal elder and/or community representative on your selection panel
  You must ensure that this Aboriginal representative is fully informed of your chosen selection process and their role on the selection panel. As a member on the selection panel, this representative must have equal decision-making capacity to other selection panel members. It is important that the Aboriginal representative is skilled in recruitment and selection techniques.

- Provide Cultural Maintenance training for selection panel members
  When Aboriginal applicants are interviewed, it is essential that all selection panel members are aware of culturally appropriate communication techniques and potential gender issues for Aboriginal applicants. For example, if the interviewee is an Aboriginal male, he may be uncomfortable shaking hands with female panel members; direct all responses to the Aboriginal or male panel members; and avoid eye contact when responding to questions. While these behaviours may appear disrespectful, they can in fact be cultural displays of respect or confusion as to the meaning of questions.

c. Interview Techniques

Some Aboriginal applicants may find a pre-interview briefing session useful. Such a session will inform applicants of how to prepare for their interview and what to expect on entering the interview room. This session is also an ideal opportunity for applicants to be introduced to the panel, ultimately reducing the potential for ‘stage fright’. There is nothing wrong with showing applicants around prior to an interview. This may also make them feel more comfortable and confident in their interview.

The benefit of having trained, cultural aware interviewers on your panel is that they will be able to reword questions using plain English to suit individual applicants. Prompting of answers may be appropriate; however this must be done appropriately.
By restructuring, or rewording questions to suit individual applicants you can ensure that
each applicant is provided with equal opportunity to respond appropriately.

An example of how you can reword a formal question into an informal style would be:

**Formal:** Why are you the most suitable candidate for this job?

**Informal:** Why do you think you are the best person for this job?

**Note:** Remember that if you chose to question in an informal style, ensure that all applicants
are questioned in this manner.

Some Aboriginal people find it difficult to back themselves, particularly if it will make them
sound proud or pompous. Consequently some applicants may use ‘us’ or ‘we’ instead of ‘I’
or ‘me’. Panels should be sensitive to this and have the “people skills” that enable them to
understand this. In this instance it may be worthwhile considering to allow applicants to
bring support with them to the interview. If this is the case the panel must be fully briefed
about how to deal with supporting personnel.

Some applicants may feel threatened by interviews conducted in small closed rooms. To
reduce unwarranted stress, try to avoid placing physical objects (i.e. desks) between the
selection panel and the applicant, hold interviews in larger rooms, or consider interviewing
outdoors (when suitable). There is nothing wrong with having an interview at a local coffee
shop, or anywhere the applicant might feel more comfortable.

**Remember:** The need to consider these techniques is in its simplest interpretation, a sign of
respect for differences in culture.

**Hints and Tips**

i. Provide applicants with advice on the selection processes in advance so they know
what to expect and can prepare.

ii. Develop interview questions that encourage applicants to talk about their abilities,
potential and willingness to learn.

iii. Allow applicants time to read the questions prior to the interview so that they can
consider their response.

iv. Don’t rush the interview

v. Allow applicants to bring a support person with them if they wish.

vi. Include a local Aboriginal person on the interview panel. This can be a staff member
or someone from an outside organisation.
6. **CANDIDATE INDUCTION**

It may be useful for successful Aboriginal applicants to be taken through their induction program by Aboriginal colleagues. This will enable the new staff member to be shown around the service while being introduced to culturally appropriate mentors. An added benefit of this is that new staff will begin their work with your organisation through a stress free, supportive process that supports their individuality, culture and personal needs.

**a. Induction Packages**

To assist all employees to understand and become comfortable with their work environment induction packages should include as a minimum:

- Structure of the organisation and local work site
- Values of the organisation and Code of Conduct.
- Learning and professional development opportunities.
- Agency specific information such as roles and responsibility of staff and reporting structures.
- Information of Performance Development Plan specific to the employee’s role.
- Who to ask day to day questions.
- Advice of industrial entitlements and obligations such as hours of work, bereavement leave and cultural leave.
- Information about flexible work practices and work life balance options.
- Dress standards
- Who to ring when absent.
- Use of vehicles.
- Mentoring and coaching process, provide a coach/buddy if possible.
- Details of any relevant networks or support available.

Induction programs should be flexible so that they can be adjusted to meet individual employee’s needs.

**b. Cultural Awareness Training**

Racism and discrimination in the workplace can have a negative impact on the retention of Aboriginal staff. One way to help counter this is to provide cultural awareness training for all staff. It is particularly important for those in supervisory positions as they are in the best position to limit the potential for racist and discriminatory behaviour from other employees.

Cultural Awareness Training will give your staff a better understanding of Aboriginal life in contemporary Australia and help them find ‘common ground’ with their Aboriginal co-workers. It will also alert them to the different ways in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people communicate. This will help reduce misunderstandings that sometimes arise between Aboriginal staff, their co-workers, supervisors and managers.
Fostering a culturally aware workplace will also support an environment which enables optimal work performance from all individuals, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. As such, all induction programs should include elements of cultural awareness training. Where possible/practical this training should be delivered by local Aboriginal people and include Elder participation and dedicated local content. This training should be incorporated into induction programs for all new employees. If an employee is new to your site but has been working with your organisation for some time, they should still complete this training if they have not done so within the past two years. This training should be completed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff members.

It is also strongly advised that all existing staff complete the cultural maintenance training if they have not already done so. This includes Directors, Managers, Supervisors, HR staff, administrative staff, etc. By supporting a system wide approach to cultural awareness, your organisation will foster a supportive and competent workforce that is equipped with the skills and knowledge required to deliver culturally competent work practice and service.

c. Management

It is essential for Managers to develop clear and open communication systems with their Aboriginal employees. In circumstances where Aboriginal employees are comfortable communicating openly with their immediate Manager it will allow them to build confidence and knowledge of their workplace, and become familiar with reporting and accountability pathways.

On commencement of employment, the manager (and whenever suitable, supervisor) of the new employee should make time to sit with the Aboriginal employee in a semi-formal meeting. Discussions should take place around:

i. Understanding of work environment

This is a perfect time for management to identify the extent of the employee’s understanding of the organisational structure and work requirements relevant to their role. This discussion should focus on where the employee’s role fits within the structure of your workplace and how their duties will affect/interact with other colleagues.

ii. Application

This discussion will be useful to identify why the employee has chosen to work in this role. Identifying their personal values, commitments to their work, and perceptions of work standards and timelines will assist management in identifying what induction and training programs may be required to support the employee in achieving desired work performance.

iii. Personal development

It will be useful to discuss the employee’s work characteristics. Are they able to work effectively under limited supervision? Do they prefer to work in teams? How constructively
do they take criticism? Whose responsibility do they perceive it to be if they are unable to meet work demands, etc? Understanding the employee’s perspective on subjects such as these will facilitate management to implement suitable structures to support the staff member to develop professionally, in addition to addressing any apparent perceptual conflicts (i.e. if the employee does not see themselves as responsible for their work outcomes or ability to meet deadlines).

iv. Quality of work outcomes

This initial meeting will provide an ideal forum to discuss the new employee’s expected work performance. Having the manager and supervisor present will enable the employee to receive a complete managerial perspective of the scope of duties and standard of work required from them.

Initial discussions such as these can be a useful tool for identifying the work ethic, understanding of organisational protocols, and personal competencies of any new employee.

During this time the Supervisor should agree with the employee on a regular supervision schedule. This may involve meeting weekly or monthly depending on the perceived necessity of performance feedback, debriefing and support. It is recommended that these meetings be used as a structured forum in which the Aboriginal worker and supervisor discuss the employee’s expectations, performance, work related issues, mentoring and training requirements.
7. CANDIDATE RETENTION

a. Open Door Policy
Make sure that you establish a relationship and environment with all staff that encourages them to have the confidence to approach you directly to discuss matters of significance in their work or home life. Ensure that you take the time to listen to their concerns or matters of significance and provide them with clear unambiguous advice and guidance where possible.

b. Supervision
Make formal and informal appointments with your staff to discuss how their work is going. Find out if there are any areas in which they would benefit from professional development and training, discuss how their work arrangements and hours are suiting their needs, and talk about the opportunity for mentoring and support. Ensure that you follow up on any commitments or matters of particular significance for your staff.

c. Recognition
During team meetings make time to recognise and complement staff on their work. Ensure that the successes and good work of your Aboriginal staff is acknowledged to the same extent as that of the non-Aboriginal staff. This recognition will ensure that Aboriginal employees feel that they are an appreciated and valued part of the team.

d. Understanding Aboriginal Family Structures
It is important for Managers and Supervisors to be understanding of cultural and extended family obligations that may impact on an Aboriginal employee’s time. Some Aboriginal employees may require frequent or extended time off in order to fulfil their often unavoidable obligations.

In order to understand Aboriginal family obligations, management needs to appreciate the social organisation of Aboriginal communities, and the extent to which they vary from traditional western structures.

An example of the complexity of Aboriginal family relations is that an Aboriginal child’s father and all paternal uncles are considered to be fathers. A child’s mother and all maternal aunties are considered to be mothers. As such, parental responsibilities such as legal consent, discipline and personal care can be shared between several relations. In addition to this, cousins may be recognised as sisters and brothers, and close unrelated paternal/maternal figures may be identified as uncles/aunties.

Aboriginal people are expected to attend all funerals within their family. Given the high mortality rates of Aboriginal Australians, Aboriginal employees may be required to attend numerous family commitments such as these. It is important that management is
supportive of employee’s personal commitments, and provide support structures to assist people through such times.

Be frank and open when discussing work performance and time management. If you are open to cultural differences there should be little difficulty adapting time lines and working hours to meet the workplace and employee needs.

There are many flexible work options that management can explore that may meet workplace and employee needs. These include:

- job sharing between employees from different community groups
- flexible daily work hours
- rostered days off every fortnight
- family friendly work policies
- encouraging Aboriginal employees to provide advanced notice or leave requirements (whenever possible)
- Flexible leave opportunities (for example exploring opportunities for cultural leave).

Occasions may arise when you have concerns regarding an employee’s work hours and/or performance. If this does occur, always approach the employee directly and discuss the issue in a respectful manner. Some tips to remember are:

- Deal with the issue as soon as it arises.
- Approach the employee in a calm, respectful and friendly manner.
- Do not jump to conclusions. Their reasons may be completely warranted.
- Listen to the employee’s reasons with the intent of understanding their point of view.
- Do not get frustrated or angry if the employee is having trouble explaining their reasons to you. This does not indicate guilt, they may be unsure of how to explain their situation in terms you will be able to relate to.
- Discuss ways in which both you and the employee see that work demands can be met while accommodating personal commitments. It may be suitable for the employee to reduce their hours, begin job sharing, or change to a part-time contract.
- If relevant, suggest the employee complete time management training.

### e. Mentors

Mentoring is a supportive relationship between two individuals through which advice, support, encouragement, and reciprocal learning takes place. These relationships are designed to help individuals achieve their full potential, both professionally and personally, through their work experiences.

Aboriginal mentors can be useful for not only Aboriginal employees, but for supporting and informing whole of service work practice. For example, mentors can:

- Provide information on suitable Aboriginal organisations that may be able to assist in identifying and recruiting suitable Aboriginal applicants.
• Provide support and debriefing opportunities to new Aboriginal staff.
• Provide insight to non-Aboriginal staff on culturally appropriate work practice.
• Provide culturally appropriate techniques for dealing with difficult work and patient experiences.
• Support staff in servicing Aboriginal clients.
• Act as a mediator between Aboriginal clients and the organisation.
• Identify suitable Aboriginal contacts for consultation on community initiatives.
• Assist managers to identify developmental needs of Aboriginal staff.
• Identify staff that may require additional Cultural Awareness training.
• Support management with a confidential Aboriginal perspective on workplace issues.

Non-Aboriginal mentors may be used in circumstances where it is impossible and/or impractical to locate an Aboriginal mentor. However, in these circumstances it is imperative that the non-Aboriginal mentor is able to:

• Show a comprehension and commitment to equal opportunity and respect of Aboriginal culture.
• Generate trust and respect.
• Provide useful advice that draws from their experience of working in the sector.
• Communicate openly and honestly about their experiences and learning.
• Recognise that a mentor is a buddy, not a personal advocate.

Mentor and mentee do not necessarily have to be employees of the same organisation.

f. Staff Networks

Peer support is essential for the well-being of all employees. In order to support the interests of Aboriginal employees, work sites are encouraged to develop Aboriginal networks. These networks provide Aboriginal employees with opportunities to share experiences, foster culturally appropriate support structures, and offer invaluable opportunities for debriefing.

Such networks can also be useful in identifying incidents of harassment or discrimination, and assist in such incidents being dealt with in a firm and timely manner.

Aboriginal staff networks can operate on a formal or informal basis and are an ideal mechanism through which to orientate new Aboriginal employees to your work site.

Management support and resources is integral to the success of these networks.

g. Respecting Culture

Publicly demonstrating respect for Aboriginal culture is strongly supported by WA Health. Such demonstrations work to raise the profile of local Aboriginal communities, enhance the reputation of your organisation as an equal opportunity employer, and promote application to enter the public service workforce by potential Aboriginal professionals.
Cultural days of significance that should be recognised and celebrated in your workplace, in consultation with your Aboriginal workforce, include:

i. **Survival Day (Australia Day) - 26 January**

Australia Day for most Australians is a day that celebrates the disembarking of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove and the subsequent settlement that would be the colony of NSW and eventually Australia. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, this day represents the start of a history of invasion, dispossession, removals, cultural destruction and loss of sovereign rights. For the above reason and more, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people refer to Australia Day as Invasion Day.

ii. **Harmony Day - 21 March**

Harmony Day is an initiative stated in 1999 by the Australian Government aimed at creating and promoting harmony, embracing cultural diversity and addressing racism. Harmony day focuses on building relationships between people and is primarily a community based education program intended to increase our understanding and appreciation for the community we live in. Furthermore, Harmony Day which is held on March 21st is also the United Nations International day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

iii. **National Sorry Day – 26 May**

National Sorry Day was established by the National Sorry Day Committee on 26 May 1998, a year after the “Bringing them Home Report” was tabled in Federal parliament. The report was produced by the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families. There were 54 recommendations made in the report on a range of issues including establishing the community based National Sorry Day Committee. The primary aim of Sorry Day is to acknowledge at a national level, the hurt and distress felt by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as a result of removal policies and practices.

iv. **Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum – 27 May**

A day that may not have significant celebrations, the anniversary of the 1967 referendum on 27 May marks an important historical event that initiated meaningful changes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The 1967 Referendum saw two important changes to the Australian constitution which were:

1. To give the Federal Government powers to make uniform laws for Aboriginal people (rather than states making their own laws); and
2. The inclusion of Aboriginal people on the national population census.

This issue is especially significant as past practices denied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that sense of ownership of their own histories and cultural knowledge. There can be occasions where permission to undertake certain work may be refused, however there will often be good reason for this. Refusal of permission often may
particularly relate to specific issues that might be sacred or taboo, men’s or women’s business or could relate to death customs and beliefs.

v. **National Reconciliation Week – May/June**

National Reconciliation week is held each year beginning on 26 May and ending on 3 June being established in 1996. The main aim of Reconciliation Week is to acknowledge and celebrate the rich history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to discuss reconciliation and to consider ways to address disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

vi. **Mabo Day – 3 June**

Mabo Day is the day that marks the anniversary of the historic Native Title case on the 3 June 1992 when the High Court recognised Native Title existed for the Meriam Mir People of Murray Island in the Torres Strait. This judgement was significant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the judgement legally dismissed the idea of “Terra Nullius” The case also recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have rights to claiming Crown lands and potentially pastoral leases as Traditional Owners.

There was also recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have traditional laws and customs that assert rights over lands and waters which have continued after colonisation and can be recognised by the common law.

vii. **NAIDOC Week – Early July (celebrated by some communities in September)**

NAIDOC week is held in early July (usually the first full week) each year marked by celebrations that highlight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s culture, history and achievements. In addition the week provides opportunities for all Australians to participate in celebrating Aboriginal communities along with promoting a better understanding of Aboriginal people. NAIDOC stands for the National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration being originally focused on one day, being NAIDOC Day, though the acronym is now used to describe the week.

Throughout Australia local community celebrations take place during the week, these celebrations have been organised by community groups or organisations, government agencies, local councils, school and workplaces. It is also worthy to note that some communities choose to celebrate NAIDOC week in September.

viii. **Human Rights Day – 10 December**

10 December is the date of celebration for Human Rights Day which marks the anniversary of adoption of the universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. To date the declaration has been translated into 360 languages and is fundamentally important for people around the world, particularly Indigenous peoples in asserting their rights and freedoms.
NDS recognises the importance of these events and commits to participating in these events along with the local Aboriginal community as the opportunity arises.

### h. Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment

The 2005 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian Public Service Employee Census Survey* identified that 23% of Aboriginal employees had experienced bullying or harassment while at work compared to 17% of non-Aboriginal employees. In addition to this, 18% of Aboriginal employees reported having experienced racial discrimination; this is three times that of other employees (6%).

To improve Aboriginal attraction, job satisfaction and retention across your organisation, actively eliminating incidence of racism must be a priority within all work sites. Every employee has the right to attend work where they are treated with respect.

To ensure that all employees work in an acceptable fashion, exhibiting ethnical and cultural aware attitudes, all Managers need to ensure that employees are familiar with your Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Policy.