



INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY

Version	003	Compiled By	Tara Doyle
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1.1 AIM and OBJECTIVES

The BIZLINK Indigenous Employment Strategy aims to support the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) “National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation” objective of increasing the representation of Indigenous Australians.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGY

- We value an inclusive and diverse workforce;
- We recognize the diverse knowledge, skills, traditions and cultures of Indigenous Australians.

1.2 SCOPE

This strategy covers activities related to the engagement and retention of Indigenous employees both within and external to BIZLINK. It includes the:

- Recruitment, training and retention of Indigenous BIZLINK employees;
- Service access for Indigenous clients;
- Promotion and job-matching of Indigenous clients;
- Training and retention of new or existing Indigenous clients who are already employed;
- Cultural awareness initiatives and training.

1.3 REFERENCES and DEFINITIONS

- National Standards for Disability Services
- ISO 9001:2008
- The Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)
- Disability Employment Services Deed
- Working with Aboriginal People NDS WA November 2010
- Council of Australian Governments “National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation” *
- **Indigenous Australian / Indigenous / Aboriginal** – refers to Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islanders, and is a person who satisfies each of the following criteria:
 - Is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent;
 - Identifies as an Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander; and
 - Is accepted as such by the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community in which he or she lives.

Please note that in Western Australian, the term “*Aboriginal*” is preferred to “*Indigenous*” as Indigenous refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is an international term adopted by the United Nations to identify all Indigenous peoples in a global context (ref: Working with Aboriginal People NDS WA November 2010), however, this document will use “*Indigenous*” as the general term, which complies with the National convention.

Also reference <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/indigenous-australians-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people> which explains the use of the term Indigenous Australians or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- **Client** – refers to people with a disability who have registered (or who seek to register) with BIZLINK for a service to find and maintain employment.

1.4 STRATEGIES

1.4.1 Indigenous Employment Strategy Document

The Indigenous Employment Strategy refers to:

- The purpose and the scope of the strategy;
- The relevant standards with which BIZLINK complies;
- Our commitment to the engagement and retention of Indigenous Australians;
- The strategy being available to stakeholders;
- Employees having an awareness of the strategy;
- Document and Data Control;
- Revision of the document

1.4.2 Collection of Equity Data

BIZLINK employees are asked to complete the Employee Details form which includes an optional section regarding Equity Data including identifying as Indigenous. BIZLINK will encourage employees to provide Equity Data and will assure employees that such information will not affect their selection or promotion opportunities. Employee selection, training and promotion practices within BIZLINK are based solely on merit and are not influenced by extraneous factors, including sex (gender), marital status, pregnancy, sexual orientation, family responsibility or family status, race, religious or political conviction, impairment, disability or age.

Client Equity Data is included on the Department database and clients can choose to disclose.

1.4.3 Strategy Objectives

Objective 1. Increase the participation of Indigenous Australians in employment

Skills gaps, skills shortages, an ageing workforce and labour shortages are issues of concern for all employers. It is in each employer's best interest to market itself as an employer of choice by adopting innovative recruitment and retention strategies. This can include strategies to explore relatively untapped labour pools, and invest in the recruitment and development of workers from non-traditional areas, including Indigenous people.

The Indigenous population in Australia is growing at a faster rate than the non-Indigenous population and has a very different age profile compared with the non-Indigenous community. About 56% of Indigenous Australians are under 25 years of age, compared with about 33% of the rest of the population. The growing number of young working-age Indigenous Australians is a valuable source of labour for Australia's workforce today, and an essential one for the future.

Employing more Indigenous Australians makes good business sense for a range of reasons, including the following:

- Attracting, retaining and developing the capacity of Indigenous employees now will assist an organisation to be seen as an employer of choice for Indigenous Australians in the future, particularly when the demand for skilled and talented staff increases;
- Indigenous employees' varying perspectives, experience and knowledge can add substantial value to business outcomes;
- Increasing the diversity of workplaces promotes cross-cultural interaction, enhancing knowledge and awareness of, and competence in, working with people from a range of backgrounds;
- Attracting, selecting and engaging with Indigenous employees will contribute substantially to the Australian Government's priority of closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

(Source: Building an Indigenous Employment Strategy – APSC)

BIZLINK Employee Recruitment

Attract Indigenous Australians to consider working for BIZLINK and facilitate engagement through our recruitment procedures.

Managers and employees will be aware of the BIZLINK Policy on Equal Employment Opportunity which ensures that employee selection practices within BIZLINK are based solely on merit and are not influenced by extraneous factors, including sex (gender), marital status, pregnancy, sexual orientation, family responsibility or family status, race, religious or political conviction, impairment, disability or age.

Managers will consider the content of our job advertisements and our website as regards attracting Indigenous Australians.

Managers will consider posting job advertisements on www.indigenousjobsaustralia.com.au a national employment website dedicated to connecting Indigenous job seekers with employers that are searching for Indigenous employees.

Managers will provide flexible interview and selection processes that are culturally appropriate (refer to Working with Aboriginal People NDS WA November 2010, available to BIZLINK employees within the E-Library).

Managers can provide additional assistance to any applicant as required to explain the selection process and how best to address the Selection Criteria and prepare for the interview.

Managers can invite applicants for a workplace visit prior to a formal interview to meet members of the BIZLINK team and become comfortable with the work environment.

Managers may choose to convene applicant interviews in a less formal environment and will consider the room set-up to ensure it is welcoming and relaxed.

Managers will consider work trials, work experience, School Based Traineeships, Work-based Traineeships, flexible employment options, including naturally occurring vacancies, job creation, job restructuring and job sharing to appropriately engage Indigenous Australians.

Indigenous Australians with a Disability Registering with BIZLINK

Attract Indigenous Australians with a disability to consider registering with BIZLINK and facilitate service access through our policies, procedures and employee training.

By increasing the number of Indigenous Australian clients using BIZLINK services we can build our reputation as an agency of choice for employers seeking to engage Indigenous Australians and diversify their workplace.

Employees can proactively promote BIZLINK as a service seeking to support Indigenous Australians with a disability, particularly as regards direct registration pathways via Schools and Community-based organisations.

BIZLINK will seek out community partnerships with Indigenous organisations to share resources and promote the registration of Indigenous Australians with a disability.

Employers Recruiting BIZLINK Indigenous Australian Clients

BIZLINK will promote Indigenous Australians with a disability to employers to increase their participation in employment.

BIZLINK will provide job-matching and on-the-job support to meet the individual needs of the Indigenous client and the requirements of the employer.

BIZLINK will reference this strategy to provide information to Employers (co-workers) on how best to engage and retain Indigenous clients.

Objective 2. Improve the job-retention rate of Indigenous Australians.

BIZLINK Employees

Provide current BIZLINK Indigenous employees with opportunities for skills and career development.

Managers are encouraged and supported to provide individually designed professional development opportunities for all BIZLINK employees in accordance with their Performance Appraisal, Key Position Requirements and Training Record.

Managers may implement flexible employee support strategies including mentor support and holistic or pastoral care (considering broader issues which may be outside of work e.g. personal and social wellbeing, health, social issues and emotional support) and will utilise community or natural supports wherever appropriate.

Managers and employees will be aware of the BIZLINK Policy on Equal Employment Opportunity which ensures that employee training and promotion practices within BIZLINK are based solely on merit and are not influenced by extraneous factors, including sex (gender), marital status, pregnancy, sexual orientation, family responsibility or family status, race, religious or political conviction, impairment, disability or age.

Managers are encouraged to access education and training (including work-based traineeships) to continuously improve and enhance the skills and knowledge of BIZLINK employees.

Indigenous employees who resign or exit BIZLINK for any reason will be encouraged to complete an exit survey/interview in line with the BIZLINK policy and procedures on the exit interview for all employees. This information can be used to improve our retention and attraction of Indigenous employees.

Employee / Employer Training

BIZLINK employees and Employers (co-workers) will be provided with information and/or opportunities for training and education regarding creating and maintaining a supportive and culturally respectful workplace. Ensuring Indigenous employees have positive experiences in their workplace with the aim of improving retention rates.

Managers will provide resources and seek out training opportunities to ensure that all employees have access to information regarding the maintenance of a culturally respectful workplace, which can be shared with Employers (co-workers).

BIZLINK will provide ongoing cultural awareness raising and cultural competence development opportunities for all employees.

Fostering a Culture of Inclusion / Work Environment

BIZLINK will promote events that raise awareness of Aboriginal issues, achievements and celebrations, for example, Reconciliation Week and National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebrations Week (NAIDOC), using, for example, Bizzybodies newsletter, Facebook, website and posters as appropriate.

Positive communication and attitudes are encouraged from the perspective that the language and terminology used provides direct evidence of employee's values e.g. employees speak positively and respectfully about Indigenous Australians and avoid the use of labels or derogatory language with regard to age, gender, race, culture, religion or disability.

Employees will be aware of the "Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Custodians Protocol" as per Appendix 1 of this document.

BIZLINK will share this Indigenous Employment Strategy as a resource for our employers who currently engage or who are seeking to engage Indigenous Australians. It will be available publicly on our website www.bizlink.asn.au/news-info

The following is an extract from "Working with Aboriginal People NDS WA November 2010" p 15 – 17:

Making people comfortable

Your office, or the place you meet people needs to be welcoming and culturally secure from the reception area onwards. It can take a great deal of personal courage for some people to walk through the door as they may feel that they are entering unknown country. Some people may arrive with small children or even other family members. Having a box of toys and similar child friendly additions in the reception area and your office is a good idea.

Consider allowing people to be seated facing the door

This could avert feelings of being trapped or closed in and will help to alleviate tension caused by unfamiliarity. Aboriginal people are not usually comfortable within an office environment.

It is common for children and other family members to attend scheduled appointments. If it is at all possible, have access to a larger meeting room. A good idea is to have colour-in books (or scrap paper) and colour pencils available. You could also put children's drawings on display. This proves to be a great icebreaker when meeting new people.

Try not to sit face to face across a desk with people, shift yourself to the side

Where possible, position your furniture so that you can sit to the side of your desk when talking with people. This is more comforting, and sets up an environment for yarning or relaxed conversation and helps to create an atmosphere that is not so tense and rigid. Sitting face to face across a desk can be uncomfortable to many Aboriginal people.

Simplify paperwork

It can be a very uncomfortable and uneasy decision for an Aboriginal person to seek your assistance and attend scheduled appointments in an office environment. The initial

appointment can be easier if you keep it short. Try simplifying the forms or electronic process and just do the necessary paperwork such as registration and signing the privacy act details.

Note; on your forms where it requests, are you Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander you should also add “do you identify yourself as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander”? Some people choose not to identify.

Visually comforting objects for your office

Aboriginal people are very patriotic about Aboriginal colours. The colours facilitate a sense of belonging, kinship and pride. Organisations could have the Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags represented in your office. Paintings and other art is helpful too. If you have an Aboriginal painting or other art make sure you find out who the artist is, and the story behind the painting, this is great as an ice breaker.

Written Information

Some Aboriginal people may not have adequate literacy and/or numeracy skills. If you suspect that this is the case, be sensitive and adapt information accordingly.

Keep a harmonious atmosphere in your office

If appropriate play music in your office. Music is a common conversational topic. You can use it as an icebreaker to assist in breaking down communication barriers.

Empower people

This can be achieved by ensuring people clearly understand everything you are trying to achieve together and allowing people to contribute and direct conversation.

Keep people actively engaged in the whole process.

Never make a promise or commitment that you may not be able to fulfil.

Where appropriate, reiterate your organisations privacy policy.

Aboriginal people can experience discomfort if they feel that others know or may have access to their private information. Periodically assure people that their personal information is kept secure and private.

Rapport development made easier

Share some of your own personal information during early rapport development. A common factor you may have is children, music, recreation or sport. Remember the three most important aspects to all Aboriginal people are *Family, Spirituality and the Land*. As an icebreaker, you could talk about your children, nieces, nephews etc. You could add why you are passionate about your chosen career and how you started in this field. Try to establish a relaxed, cheerful family orientated atmosphere. It is not good practice to get straight into business.

Eye contact can be offensive to some Aboriginal people

Some Aboriginal people can be offended by direct eye contact, even more so with staring. You will know if eye contact is offensive by the amount of or lack of eye contact your client initiates. It is better to avoid eye contact on initial meetings.

First time you meet a person

Always go out and greet people: offer to shake their hands (being aware of eye contact). Do not be offended if the handshake is not reciprocated. Some people may choose not to shake your hand: this can be the case with some Aboriginal Women. There is little chance of offending if you offer a handshake but there is more of a chance of offending if you do not. Address elders by the title, Mr or Mrs.

Questioning

If you ask for answers to an important question always allow the person the time they need to answer, there may be long periods of silence before the question is answered.

Beware of pre-conceived attitudes and prejudice

Do not pre-judge a person based on clothing, mannerisms, confidence or their verbal communication. Aboriginal people can be very down to earth. They may not be as concerned with their outside appearance as the wider population. An Aboriginal person's status is not based on appearance, self-image, money, education, or employment. It is based on their community standing and social status.

An Aboriginal person's speech may switch between talking in mainstream English to Aboriginal English. Aboriginal English is an accepted language in most Aboriginal communities in Australia. It is a mixture of English, local slangs and key words in local Aboriginal dialects. Each community has its own version of Aboriginal English, but it is easily transferable between communities.

You don't look Aboriginal?

Under no circumstances should you mention to an Aboriginal person that they don't look Aboriginal, nor ask them how much Aboriginal is in them. Saying "I would not have picked you as an Aboriginal" can also be insulting. If a person identifies as an Aboriginal, then this should never be questioned. End of Extract.

1.5 Review

The Indigenous Employment Strategy will ordinarily be reviewed every three years, however, if at any time the legislative, policy or funding environment is so altered that the document is no longer appropriate in its current form, it will be reviewed immediately and amended accordingly.

1.6 Documentation / Quality Records

Indigenous Employment Strategy
Employee Details
Employee Start & End Dates
Quality Review Committee Meeting Minutes
Policy on Equal Employment Opportunity
Employee Performance Appraisal
Key Position Requirements
Training Record
Board Reports

Appendix 1

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Custodians Protocol

Recognising traditional owners at meetings and inviting Aboriginal Elders to give a 'Welcome to Country' ceremony at special events is one way we can show our respect for Australia's first people.

This protocol can be used by employees as a guide to respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land at meetings and events and describes when a local Elder should be consulted about holding a traditional 'Welcome to Country' ceremony or when it is appropriate to use an Acknowledgment of Traditional Owners and Custodians.

Welcome to Country

A 'Welcome to Country' is when the traditional owner and custodian of the land or Elder welcome people to their land. This can be done through a speech, dance, song, traditional smoking ceremony or a combination of these.

When should a Welcome to Country be organised?

Traditional owners and custodians should be acknowledged when opening a significant event or new site, particularly involving larger numbers of people or when:

- Bringing people from outside the organisation together;
- People have travelled to meet together from other areas; and
- Discussing issues relating to Indigenous Australians and when Indigenous Australians are attending.

Contact with the traditional owners/custodians can be made to discuss what would be appropriate for the particular event.

How should a Welcome to Country be organised?

Following discussion with the Managing Director, contact can be made with the local Aboriginal Land Council (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council), Local Government or State Department for Indigenous Affairs (Western Australian Department of Indigenous Affairs) to help with identifying the traditional owner group/s and if they have previously provided Welcome to Country ceremonies.

The Welcome to Country ceremony should be the first activity at the event. After the ceremony, the following speaker or MC should thank the Elder/s who provided the 'Welcome to Country' and then acknowledge the traditional owners of the land by using the 'Acknowledgement specific to location and community' format as per below.

'Welcome to Country' can only be carried out only by the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the meeting takes place. If the Traditional Custodians cannot perform Welcome to

Country, then the next step is to ask another Aboriginal person and/or senior person to perform 'Acknowledgement of Country or Acknowledgment of Traditional Owners and Custodians'.

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Custodians

If the Traditional custodians are not available to conduct 'Welcome to Country', it is appropriate for an 'Acknowledgement of Country' to be conducted. This can be done by Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people.

At the start of a meeting, it is respectful for a senior person (e.g. Managing Director or Chairperson) and/or an Aboriginal person to recognise the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which the meeting is occurring.

1. General Acknowledgement

Use if unsure of the name of the group or if there is more than one group to be acknowledged)

"I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we are meeting today. I would also like to pay my respects to the Elders past and present and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present here today."

2. Acknowledgement specific to location and community

"I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet today, the people of the (Nation) and pay my respects to their elders both past and present and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present here today."

Example:

"To begin proceedings I wish to acknowledge the people of the Noongar Nation who are the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which this meeting is taking place. I would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present here today."

Noongar (alternate spelling: Nyungar / Nyoongar / Nyoongah / Nyungah / Nyugah / Noonga) people are the traditional owners of the south-west of Western Australia from Geraldton on the west coast to Esperance on the south coast. Their country extends from Jurien Bay in the north to the southern coast, and east to Ravensthorpe and Southern Cross. However, it is always good practice to seek advice to confirm who the traditional owner group/s are in the area of the meeting.

GETTING INFORMATION HOW YOU NEED IT

ABILITIES

BIZLINK assists people with a range of abilities.

ASSISTANCE

BIZLINK employees can read and explain this information as needed

ACCESS

BIZLINK can provide the information in different ways, such as in large print, another language or electronically, as needed.

BIZLINK services are provided with the assistance of the Australian Government. The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the Commonwealth.



East Perth
9/40 Lord St



Melville
7/275 Marmion St



Cockburn Central
1/437 Yangebup Rd



Disability™
Employment
Services
AN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

Rockingham
1/1 Benjamin Way

Tel: 1300 780 789

✉ bizlink@bizlink.asn.au | www.bizlink.asn.au | www.facebook.com/bizlinkqualityemployment

📮 **PO Box 284 Joondalup 6919**

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