

**Review of current literature about
and tools available from other
organisations and/or industries to
improve recruitment and retention of
paid staff who identify as an
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait
Islander person**

Literature Review

**Prepared for:
ACTCOSS**



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Consulting



Review of current literature about and tools available from other organisations and/or industries to improve recruitment and retention of paid staff who identify as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person - Literature Review

March 2018

Prepared on behalf of the ACT Council of Social Service Inc (ACTCOSS)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

There is much espoused in strategic and business plans, human resource and diversity plans and even Indigenous employment strategies right across Australia about the need to focus on culturally appropriate Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander recruitment and retention strategies to address the significant levels of disadvantage Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people face. Further, there is a clear need to address the deficiencies that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees already face within organisations whilst also ensuring the employee base is representative of the client demographic.

One of the key outstanding questions that still needs to be answered is 'how'. How do organisations bridge the gap between theory and practice; between thoughts, words and actions and between intention and outcome? How do they focus their efforts and engage in recruitment and retention activities that will truly enmesh Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people at the heart of their organisations in the pursuit of achieving their stated outcomes? There has been much informal debate over recent years on the reasons why this might be the case, but the void remains in terms of published literature to answer these questions.

The purpose of this review is to delve into these issues and provide an overview of current literature, associated tools and other factors that promote recruitment and retention strategies for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. It will also examine available tools that lead to sustainable employment outcomes.

The context for this review lies within the overarching purpose of the ACT Council of Social Service Inc (herein after referred to as ACTCOSS); that being, to help provide capacity building services and resources to its community organisation members to better recruit and retain paid staff who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

2.0 SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

The scope of this review included a focus on understanding the key concepts, theories and practices various organisations employed in relation to current and historical Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander recruitment and retention (subject to data availability). Approaches included:

- An online search of existing literature that relates either directly or indirectly to the subject of this review
- An online search of existing tools developed/employed by organisations to improve recruitment and retention of paid staff who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Where applicable are there generic, organisation wide tools such as dashboards or HR systems or do organisations use single data sources to derive information for use in tools?
- A cross sectional search of sectors including: government, semi-government, NGO's, private and community
- Where available a view of trends associated with the implementation of existing tools and comparisons of effectiveness in their use.

This review did not include a review of ACTCOSS programs and services, such as the Gulunga Program, which has been reviewed separately as a companion to this review.

3.0 EXISTING INDIGENOUS RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION LITERATURE ACROSS AUSTRALIA

Considerable industry specific national and international research exists in relation to the notion of attraction, recruitment and retention generally (Biddle, N. et al 2012; Festinger, T. 2013; Kelaher, M. et al 2010; Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, 2008). By comparison there are fewer publications, reports and reviews (literature or otherwise) that have a specific or relevant focus on effective recruitment and retention processes/practices for paid Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff. Where literature does exist, it tends to focus on the front end, recruitment and development side of this equation, with a lesser focus on longer term retention.¹

An extensive online search also revealed a disparity across sectors and industries between espoused Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander recruitment and retention strategies - typically captured through Aboriginal Employment Strategies or Reconciliation Action Plans -and the lack of associated literature indicating success when implementing those plans.

¹ Such as can be seen in the 2013 IPAA/PWC paper: *Beyond Attraction and Retention: Indigenous Career Advancement in the Public Sector*

One of the most relevant research and evaluation reports was published in 2009 by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research - Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia.²This report, and its associated guide³, delivered an 'umbrella' view in that the combined documents reflect a series of interviews, documentation and analysis of the practices of nine organisations (largely employment service based organisations) operating across regional, rural and remote areas of Australia.

The specific aim was to examine the recruitment, retention, training and assessment of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people tasked with the responsibility of caring for children removed from their parents. The wider focus of brokering successful employment outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people also included the authors' views of common themes in good-practice models.

By way of an evidence base this guide conducted a series of interviews with management and staff across the nine organisations who have, as their goal, achieving sustainable employment outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Holistically it is also supported by interviews with a sample of job-seekers.

Based on this multi-faceted approach their findings suggested that the most common factors associated with success for organisations include:

- Targeted and integrated 'job related' and culturally appropriate training for staff
- Knowledge of the client group and its context (to provide the best outcomes for their clients)
- Provision of mentoring and support
- Partnerships and connections, particularly with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander leaders, community and business
- Skilled and dedicated staff
- Specialist strategies for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (provision of holistic support)
- Innovation
- Promotion of success and ensuring strong staff commitment.

The consistent themes emerging from this report – and supported by other like reports⁴ - revolved around the notion that successful organisations have insight and respond with sensitivity in a practical, timely manner to the full range of issues that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people experience; over the long term.

²Brokering successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes: Common themes in good-practice models – Literature review

³Guide to success for organisations in achieving employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

⁴As indicated in section 4.0 Specific Context Reviews of this review

In other words, they take a holistic view of the person rather than take a linear focus on the job candidate at the front end of the recruitment process. They provide the end to end support mechanisms to enable people to change their lives through empowerment rather than only assist until a person secures a job.

Some of the strategies or stepping stones along the way include the provision of:

- Intensive and practical support where needed (often beyond the scope of typical career advice and provided in a culturally appropriate way)
- Tailored pre and post placement mentoring for both the individual and managers inside the organisation to address any issues that may arise and ensure that misunderstandings are minimised and relationships are maximised
- Clearly defined individualised assessment process to ensure that organisations don't 'set people up to fail' before they have time to gain traction. This may include sharing stories or talking about shared histories
- Addressing (where possible) any potential barriers that could affect a person's chance of being successful in an organisation⁵
- Mediation services between employees and employers when needed
- Wide range of support services such as assistance constructing resumes or job applications.

4.0 OTHER SPECIFIC CONTEXT REVIEWS

Given the distinct lack of research in this specific focus area this review also took into account parallels that could be drawn from other reviews that, even though they were based within a specific industry, still encompassed both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and recruitment and retention with future oriented goals. They are explored below.

Foster Care Industry

Two reviews of recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander foster carers across Australia were conducted in 2005⁶ and 2017⁷. Both of these reviews evaluated the effectiveness of current Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander recruitment practices and explored the high turnover rates of carers whilst seeking to provide reasons for these figures.

⁵Barriers may include: transport, clothes, caring options, accommodation, drug and alcohol use

⁶ The Recruitment, Retention, and Support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foster Carers: A Literature Review

⁷ Australian Catholic University – Institute of Child Protection Studies (2017) Foster and Kinship Carer Recruitment and Retention

One significant concern explored in both reviews was the number of publications who laid claim to capturing good practice in relation to front end recruitment practices of foster carers particularly via broad based recruitment campaigns (inclusive of social media).

However, very few evaluated the effectiveness of these practices in terms of their ability to actually achieve an increase in the number of foster carers. They also appear to be silent on retention in this regard. Similarly, it was evident that, in the foster care industry, traditional screening and assessment processes at the front end of any type of 'recruitment' actions may prove alienating for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

The other significant issue arising from both reviews was the lack of cultural competence embedded in any recruitment and retention approaches and the lack of empirical models for cultural competence, particularly for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (Libesman 2004). The 2005 Australian Institute of Family Studies review (Richardson et al) describes cultural competence as: "ways of thinking and behaving that enable members of one cultural, ethnic, or linguistic group to work effectively with members of another cultural or ethnic group."

Both reviews found (in particular the 2017 report) that there is a clear need to:

- Include low key, personalised/relationship-based approaches
- Further access and expand word of mouth networks
- Consider the appointment of a specialised recruitment team inclusive of:
 - a recruitment manager who is a social worker
 - a marketing specialist
- Anticipate upcoming recruitment drives by engaging trusted people to encourage potential applicants to apply
- Ensure the validity of information being offered to potential applicants at the time of recruitment is correct (for example the role description is accurate)
- Consider a more visible online and social media profile for recruitment after their evaluation found that there was growth in both the number and proportion of enquiries generated through websites and social media sites
- Determine a baseline from which to compare or measure the outcomes of future recruitment approaches or campaigns. The current lack of baselines makes current analysis difficult.

The Forrest Review

In recent years the Commonwealth Government commissioned Andrew Forrest to conduct a nationwide review of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Training and Employment Programmes. He subsequently delivered a report entitled: *The Forrest Review: Creating Parity* (2014). This report confirmed the lack of focus in the areas explored within this review and detailed the case for change.

At the time of his review Forrest concluded that there was a lack of coordination and collaboration between Commonwealth, state and territory policies with regard to employment and training. This led him to conclude that many organisations policies only touch the symptom level of what he termed 'entrenched disadvantage' rather than addressing root causes and seeking to achieve prevention. He describes set targets as only aiming to reduce disparity and indicates there is a lack of accountability for the results of those targets at best.

While Forrest's recommendations do not directly discuss recruitment and retention practices they do speak to the wider impacts and outcomes associated with these practices. By way of example one of his recommendations requires the Commonwealth government to "purchase at least 4% of its goods and services within four years (either directly or through subcontractors) from First Australian businesses (with a minimum of 25% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ownership) and in particular from the new first Australian commercial enterprises once they are established".⁸

He then recommends a number of associated trickledown requirements attached to this high level intent. One of particular note requires successful tenderers to capture set levels of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment in the form of contracts and meet compliance requirements to ensure they are enforced. If this requirement is not met the tendering company would be prevented from competing for future government contracts.

The Field of Psychology

In 2013 a three year Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project (AIPEP) was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training.⁹ It recognised, as a central platform, the role of psychology in addressing the mental health crises facing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians as well as their critical lack of representation in psychological roles.

⁸ Page 58 *The Forrest Review: Creating Parity* (2014)

⁹Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project - Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students (2016)

The 2016 report release contained a set of guidelines which conveyed the intention to increase the recruitment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander psychology students for the benefit of not only the students but the people they would then be best placed to support through their work going forward. The guidelines were particularly aimed at supporting higher education institutions that provide psychology training programs to find avenues to increase the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students from enrolment to completing psychology training and successfully meeting training requirements associated with registration.

This report also developed fourteen critical factors to support the achievement of their goals. Of particular note were those relating to:

- a) Organisational leadership and enabling culture: This critical factor articulated the vital role leadership plays in creating an organisational culture that values and supports Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff and culture. It highlighted the need for top down ownership and accountability and the need to create, lead by example and maintain culturally inclusive environments where learning can flow between all staff.
- b) Community partnerships: This critical factor acknowledged the importance and place of community relationships in allowing shared learning to occur. By allowing students to directly interact with organisations or community groups as part of their training it will allow exposure to different knowledge systems and ways of operating that they might not otherwise have had the opportunity to connect with.
- c) Mentors and role models: This critical factor recognised that different people at different points in time can provide a range of support for students across their educational journey. It acknowledges that mentors may be interchangeable at different points in time as the student progresses throughout the qualification and will, therefore, have different support needs.

5.0 TOOLS

For the purpose of this review the term 'tool' has been defined as any instrument, data capture mechanism, guide or other process that can be used to measure recruitment and/or retention activity. After conducting a wide search for any tools that fit the above description there do not appear to be specific or separable tools used to measure Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander recruitment and retention. Instead, data gathered in this regard is captured and reflected as an integrated component of organisations' existing human resource systems (i.e. dashboards, diversity statistics and/or workforce planning mechanisms).

Federal, state and local government set requirements to gather, analyse and report on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander recruitment figures annually as part of their annual reporting requirements. This data appears to be captured via these mechanisms. Commonwealth government sets targets to be met and has included flexibility in legislation for recruitment practices but this doesn't align with any specified tool. There are also additional hierarchical reporting layers for the equivalent of the Department of Premier and Cabinet in each jurisdiction.

Specific measures such as the Affirmative measure for recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians exists as part of the *Australian Public Service Commissioner's Directions 2016*. This measure was designed to tackle the very real issue of under-representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians in the Australian Public Service. One of the aims of this measure is to assist agencies in meeting the objectives of the Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy.

This Strategy (last updated 2015), addresses the priority to build and embed Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment within the Commonwealth public sector and sets a three percent employment target to be achieved by 2018. This particular strategy also forms part of the Government's initial response to the Forrest Review. The intended measures to monitor achievement of this figure include:

- i. Specific agency level targets reflecting current Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation
- ii. Variable minimum targets specified by agency
- iii. Annual reporting requirements to the Australian Public Service Commission and via annual reports reflecting current Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation
- iv. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet will publicly report agency by agency progress against targets from September 2015
- v. Statistics will be included in the Closing the Gap Report from February 2016.

Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs)¹⁰ are increasingly being developed, enhanced or reviewed by Reconciliation Australia.¹¹ A number of organisations (particularly in the non-government sector) are using RAPs as their primary tool to measure achievement of recruitment action although, generally their content is highly input rather than outcome focussed. However, any data tracked as part of these RAP's is then reviewed under different committees who oversee RAP progress and not widely or generally reported.

Private sector data capture appears to largely occur where there are contractually tied requirements to collect data on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff and many do not fully report. The main tool available to review in this regard was the *Indigenous Engagement Survey* conducted by the Business Council of Australia (2016). Trends to note include:

- Coles experienced strong growth in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment figures during 2016; employing 2,715 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander team members across Australia. This number includes over 90 staff employed in management roles.¹²
- Westpac's numbers of staff who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander reached 4 per cent in 2016 with almost 400 additional employees progressively joining the company over the previous three years.¹³
- BHP Billiton employed approximately 860 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in 2016 and has a commitment to providing employment opportunities to Traditional Owner groups with whom they share land access agreements.¹⁴

¹⁰A RAP (as defined by Reconciliation Australia) is a strategic document that supports an organisation's business plan. It includes practical actions that will drive an organisation's contribution to reconciliation both internally and in the communities in which it operates.

¹¹ During 2016 the Business Council of Australia's Indigenous Engagement Survey noted an increasing trend in organisations employing RAPs.

¹²Business Council of Australia's Indigenous Engagement Survey (2016) page 5.

¹³Business Council of Australia's Indigenous Engagement Survey (2016) page 5.

¹⁴ Business Council of Australia's Indigenous Engagement Survey (2016) page 7

6.0 CONCLUSION

There are a number of industry specific publications available that traverse the realm of general recruitment and retention. There is also a range of documentation that exists in relation to industry specific Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment strategies. Within these specific contexts (some of which have been explored in this review) there are examples of longer term, end to end views of recruitment and retention for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

It is in this context, however, that more work needs to be done to create viable, community enriched relationships and partnerships between organisations and employees with a shared focus on creating a trajectory of highly engaged, appropriately skilled and supported Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff. This then needs to translate to hard data that forms part of a baseline, an evidence base from which to measure progress against with a goal of seeing an exponential success rate over time. In this vein it will then be possible for leaders with vision to achieve an increased uptake and retention and a positive impact on the lives of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff, management, peers, co-workers and community.

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