

# **Indigenous Employment Strategy**

**2011–15**

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The Reconciliation Action Plan is endorsed by Reconciliation Australia.

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# **1. Introduction**

The Australian Government is committed, under the National Partnerships Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation, to increase Indigenous employment in the Commonwealth public sector to 2.7 per cent by 2015.

AusAID supports diversity in the workplace and this document outlines tangible actions to increase Indigenous employment. The 2009–2010 State of the Service Report indicates that the Australian Public Service Indigenous staff level is 2.2 per cent. At 30 March 2011, 1.2 per cent of AusAID staff identify as Indigenous. To achieve the target of 2.7 per cent, positive action must be taken by all staff including a commitment to this strategy and its initiatives.

Indigenous Australians bring a wealth of knowledge to the workplace. The skills and experiences of Indigenous people can assist AusAID to meet organisational objectives. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples provide a unique community perspective to the delivery of aid. By recognising the value that a diverse and multi-talented workforce can bring to the organisation, AusAID actively continues to promote the principles and practice of workplace diversity.

The Australian Public Service Commission has developed the Australian Public Service Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees. The Commission has identified a number of strategies and programs to assist agencies in improving the representation of Indigenous Australians in the workforce. Under this strategy AusAID uses the programs developed by the Commission.

## **1.1. Purpose**

This strategy drives a more focused approach to Indigenous employment. The Indigenous Employment Strategy addresses workforce planning, development issues, and outlines initiatives to attract Indigenous Australians. The initiatives also: support a positive working environment; develop new staff skills and harnesses existing skills and capabilities; and achieve a diverse workforce.

## **1.2. Objectives**

The objective of the Indigenous Employment Strategy is to ensure that AusAID is more effective in attracting and retaining Indigenous employees, with an emphasis on issues relating to: workplace environment; attraction; recruitment; retention and staff development. Improvements in these areas will assist AusAID in reaching the target of 2.7 per cent Indigenous employees by 2015.

## 2. Key Initiatives

### 2.1. Recruitment, Workplace Environment and Retention

The employment experience of Indigenous Australians working at AusAID will be improved by implementing specific activities and initiatives thought the Reconciliation Action Plan and the AusAID Indigenous Employment Strategy. The Strategy outlines three key initiatives.

#### Attracting and recruiting Indigenous Australians by:

- advertising and promoting AusAID in Indigenous media and forums
- using Australian Public Service Commission recruitment processes designed specifically to attract Indigenous people
- developing a range of positions specifically for Indigenous Australians
- providing support to new employees during relocation to Canberra and transition to AusAID
- actively promoting the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in overseas volunteer programs and subsequent employment opportunities.

#### Improving the workplace environment by:

- identifying and implementing key roles and responsibilities in the Agency
- providing support to Indigenous employees and managers of Indigenous staff
- developing a culturally aware workplace that is respectful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

#### Retaining and developing AusAID's Indigenous employees by:

- developing mentoring programs
- supporting staff networks
- ensuring staff are supported and provided with relevant information during the induction period.

The AusAID Indigenous Employment Strategy should be read in conjunction with the Reconciliation Action Plan. The initiatives identified in the Strategy will be embedded into the corporate priorities of the Agency.

## **3. Workplace Environment**

### **3.1. The Workplace Environment**

In supporting Indigenous employees it is important, where possible, that AusAID recognises and adapts to meet the needs and expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

By implementing the initiatives and actions in the supporting implementation plan, AusAID will ensure Indigenous employees are welcomed and supported. This will ultimately contribute to higher retention rates.

### **3.2. Roles and Responsibilities**

AusAID's Executive is committed to increasing the employment levels of Indigenous Australians within the Agency. To achieve this and in support of activities under the Reconciliation Action Plan, an SES level employee will be appointed as an Indigenous Agency Champion. AusAID will also appoint an Indigenous Employment Coordinator to ensure that the Indigenous Employment Strategy is on track and to support the Indigenous Agency Champion.

### **3.3. Indigenous Agency Champion**

Under the IES, the Indigenous Agency Champion is responsible for:

- promoting Indigenous employment both within AusAID and externally
- providing strategic direction, support and encouragement for initiatives under the Indigenous Employment Strategy
- ensuring that Indigenous employment issues are considered in high level planning, and
- working with the Indigenous Employment Coordinator responsible for coordinating the Indigenous Employment Strategy.

### **3.4. Indigenous Employment Coordinator**

The key role of the Indigenous Employment Coordinator is to support the Indigenous Agency Champion in ensuring that strategy initiatives are undertaken. The Coordinator's responsibilities include:

- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the Indigenous Employment Strategy
- working with Human Resources to develop and implement effective, targeted recruitment and retention strategies
- participation in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio Diversity Working Group
- working with other agencies, including the Australian Public Service Commission to ensure that AusAID's strategy and activities draw on best practice from across the Australian Public Service
- contributing to induction processes of new Indigenous employees
- raising issues of concern when needed, through appropriate channels
- networking with other Australian Public Service agencies.

### **3.5. Supporting Indigenous Employees**

It is important to recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's life experiences and backgrounds can be different from other employees. Indigenous employees can face additional work-life balance challenges due to family and community responsibilities unique to cultural heritage. A Guide to employing and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be developed to provide managers with information about the work-life challenges Indigenous employees may face. Support through the Employee Assistance Program is also available for Indigenous employees.

Challenges should lead to opportunities such as acknowledgement that Indigenous employees may have a greater understanding of public scrutiny, service delivery modalities, remoteness, welfare (social safety nets), natural resource management, development (provision of basic services such as health and education) understanding of community led organisations and in some instances working through government (state and territory) systems.

### **3.6. Respecting Culture**

AusAID respects and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. This is encouraged throughout the Agency by:

- observing cultural protocols that recognise the position of the Indigenous Australians as the traditional custodians of the land. Acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land at the opening of key meetings
- inviting traditional elders to do a Welcome to Country at the beginning of significant events such as NAIDOC Week
- recognising cultural days of significance, such as National Reconciliation and
- NAIDOC Weeks, and celebrating these in the workplace
- using inclusive language and avoiding terms that are offensive to Indigenous people

- providing mandatory cultural awareness training to ensure that AusAID staff are better informed in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

## 4. Attraction and Recruitment

### 4.1. Attraction and Recruitment

To meet the target of 2.7 per cent Indigenous employees by 2015, AusAID has developed various strategies to assist in recruiting Indigenous Australians. The Australian Public Service Commission provides support in recruitment for programs such as Graduate, Trainee and Cadetships. However, this alone will not be sufficient for AusAID to contribute effectively to increasing employment of Indigenous Australians in the Australian Public Service. AusAID will need to diversify and have targeted attraction and recruitment methods.

The *Guide to employing and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people* will provide information on attraction and recruitment processes.

With the commitment to increase the aid program by 0.5 per cent of Australia's Gross National Income by 2015–16 AusAID staffing will increase. The increase in staff will also need to be reflected in the increase of Indigenous employees. Currently 1.2 per cent of AusAID employees are Indigenous. The table below shows the annual target of recruitment required for AusAID to meet its objective of 2.7 per cent Indigenous employees by 2015. The targets take into consideration an annual separation rate of 11.8 per cent and an increase in staff of 10 per cent. The AusAID separation rate at June 2010 was 8 per cent. The Australian Public Service wide separation rate for Indigenous employees is 11.8 per cent.

#### Recruitment Forecast 2010–15

	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15
AusAID APS staff	994	1093	1203	1323	1455
Indigenous staff	12	15	20	26	33
Separation of Indigenous staff	1	1	2	2	3
Number of Indigenous staff required to recruit per annum to meet 2015 target or 2.7%	4	6	8	9	9

The following table demonstrates staffing levels of self-identified Indigenous employees in AusAID since June 2006. There was a considerable increase in self-identified Indigenous employees in 2008–09. This increase coincides with an upgrade of the Human Resources reporting system and the ability for employees to enter their own information.

Date	Total APS staff	Indigenous staff	Indigenous staff %
30 June 2006	516	4	0.78
30 June 2007	583	3	0.51
30 June 2008	655	5	0.76
30 June 2009	914	11	1.21
30 June 2010	1004	14	1.39

## 4.2. Advertising Recruitment Opportunities

Job advertisements should be written in inclusive language, free of jargon and bureaucratic language. Advertisements should all include the tag line, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are encouraged to apply. Ten per cent of positions will be advertised through Indigenous media and circulated to Indigenous support units at educational institutions and Indigenous networks. Through AusAID, the Indigenous Employment Coordinator will build relationships with Indigenous community organisations as well as Indigenous support units at education institutions. The relationships will assist in AusAID promoting employment opportunities for Indigenous people and provide a contact point for the community organisations and education institutions.

AusAID will also advertise positions to the alumni lists from the overseas volunteer programs (to target Indigenous people with development experience).

## 4.3. Selection Practices

AusAID will continue to use Indigenous employment programs offered by the Australian Public Service Commission, including the Graduate, Cadetship and Trainee programs. AusAID will offer at least two positions through the Commission's Indigenous Graduate Program per annum. Cadetship and traineeships programs will also be considered for future employment opportunities.

The Australian Public Service application process may be unfamiliar for people who have limited experience in applying for Australian Public Service positions. Appointing a contact officer for the recruitment and selection process to discuss the position and answer questions will help to reinforce the genuine commitment and interest in recruiting Indigenous employees. The contact officer can also provide an insight as to how AusAID may use the valuable skills and experience the applicant may have developed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and how they will fit into a mainstream agency dealing with international development issues.

All selection documentation will provide links to the Australian Public Service Commission documents Cracking the code and Getting a job in the Australian Public Service. These documents provide information on addressing selection criteria and what can be expected during the recruitment process and will also help to ensure that potential employees are supported.

All panels recruiting for Special Measures positions will include at least one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander representative or someone with experience in Indigenous issues. If there is not a suitable person in the Agency available for the selection process contact should be made with the Australian Public Service Commission to recommend a suitable panel member from another agency.

AusAID is a highly desirable employer and values the skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Selective recruitment for experienced Australian Public Service staff will be considered when particular skills sets are required.

Managers recruiting new staff should consider the diversity that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can provide to the workplace. The skills that some Indigenous Australians have gained by living, growing up and working in Indigenous communities are transferable into the work that AusAID performs in the Aid Program. There are also similarities in the work performed by AusAID staff in countries such as Papua New Guinea and people who work in Indigenous communities. These links can be found in AusAID programs such as gender, health, community engagement

and education.

#### **4.4. Special Measures Positions**

The Special Measures provision allows for the targeted recruitment of Indigenous Australians into the Australian Public Service while adhering to the employment principles set out in the Public Service Act 1999. The purpose of employing staff under the Special Measures provision is to improve employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians and to ensure that the diversity of the Service's workforce reflects that of the Australian community. AusAID will aim to recruit Indigenous employees through Special Measures provisions, increasing the number of positions over the period of this strategy to reflect the required staffing numbers in the Recruitment Forecast 2010–15 table. Special Measures recruitment processes may be conducted at the same time as bulk employment rounds to provide a pool of suitable applicants to fill positions in various areas of the Agency, these processes will be open to potential Indigenous employees and existing Indigenous Australian Public Service employees.

Successful applicants will be placed through the Agency's bulk placements process.

#### **4.5. Supporting the Engagement of New Employees**

Moving to a new location and changing jobs can be stressful. Providing comprehensive information about moving to Canberra and making the transition to AusAID as easy as possible will assist towards ensuring the new employee feels well supported. All new Indigenous employees should be offered to have a contact person available to speak to regarding the transition. Relocation assistance will be consistent with the AusAID *Relocation within Australia policy*.

## 5. Retention and Development

The *State of the Service Report 2009–2010* reported a separation rate of 11.8 per cent for Indigenous employees. The main theme observed from exit interview/survey data on why Indigenous employees left an agency was reportedly pursuit of career progression opportunities and promotions outside the agency.

The 2009 *Census Report: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS Employees* survey results suggest that retention will continue to be a considerable challenge for the Australian Public Service in the years ahead. To improve retention AusAID will need to develop strategies that value employees and contribute towards higher job satisfaction. These strategies should include initiative to strengthen the focus on retaining Indigenous employees; recruiting Indigenous employees; promotion of wider job opportunities for Indigenous employees; and improving opportunities for career development and advancement.

### 5.1. Induction

AusAID will provide a thorough induction process to help build a good relationship between AusAID and the new employee. New Indigenous employees will be provided information prior to commencement regarding the AusAID working environment and services that are available to Indigenous employees. On commencement, managers will ensure that the employee is inducted into the work area.

The Indigenous Employees Network will develop an induction program specifically for new Indigenous employees. The induction will include:

- introductions to Indigenous internal and external networks
- orientation with Indigenous Australian Public Service Employee Network
- a brief on Indigenous specific events such as NAIDOC Week activities and Boomanulla Days.

### 5.2. Providing Career and Development Opportunities

As for all staff, providing career and development opportunities is essential to improving Indigenous employees' confidence and capabilities. A key to retaining Indigenous employees is support for personal and career development – a first step being to establish employees' development needs and aspiration. This can be done through the performance development planning process.

The Australian Public Service Commission provide a range of training courses for Australian Public Service employees, including courses specifically for career development of Indigenous employees. AusAID Learning and Development Section also provide a wide range of development opportunities that include; leadership, program management, AusAID specific skills, Australian Public Service skills, thematic training and career development. All Indigenous employees should be encouraged to apply for these development opportunities.

The study support scheme may be accessed for relevant qualifications, in accordance with the study support scheme guidelines. Additional study leave hours are provided through the study support scheme for Indigenous employees undertaking studies towards their first degree. These development opportunities should be discussed with managers and included in Performance Development Plans.

### 5.3. Secondments

AusAID can benefit from secondments and exchanges; they help to provide individuals with development opportunities, develop skills and build relationships, and knowledge exchange between agencies. AusAID will work with Portfolio agencies to explore secondment and development opportunities for Indigenous employees.

Development opportunities and leadership programs that are available through the Australian Public Service Commission and other sources specifically for Indigenous employees will be circulated to all staff that have identified as Indigenous on the Human Resources Connect system. Partnerships and linkages with other organisations will be developed as part of the Reconciliation Action Plan. This may include organisations such as; Australia and New Zealand School of Government, Indigenous Community Volunteers and other Australian Government agencies, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

## **5.4. Mentoring**

AusAID will develop a mentoring program to help guide new employees in their learning about the Australian Public Service and AusAID as well as achieving individual professional goals and long term career plans. The mentoring program will assist individuals in achieving their full potential, including guidance and advise on AusAID specific business challenges, strategies and policies.

Mentors will need to:

- be able to provide useful advice drawing on their own experience and knowledge
- generate respect and trust in their relationships
- communicate openly and honestly about personal, often difficult, issues
- establish boundaries in the mentoring relationships.

Mentors for Indigenous staff do not have to be Indigenous people, but should be people who can dedicate time and appropriate support to the mentee. Additionally they should have a good understanding of Indigenous issues. Mentors can have a remarkable and long-lasting impact on those they mentor.

## **5.5. Staff Networks**

Peer support is important to the well-being and moral of many Indigenous employees. All Indigenous employees will have access to the Indigenous Employees Network and will be supported to participate. The Indigenous Employees Network is run by the Indigenous Employees, has a corporate focus and plays an advisory role to units working on issues such as diversity, recruitment and training.

The Network is also responsible for:

- promoting linkages between Indigenous affairs and international development
- supporting organising Indigenous specific events (with the NAIDOC sub-committee)
- advocating for greater support for the development of Indigenous staff's skills and experience (including when not directly related to their specific work nor international development)
- having representatives attend various sub-committees such as the NAIDOC Committee and Reconciliation Action Plan Committee meetings.

Indigenous Australian Public Service Employee Network was established to provide a supportive environment and to create a sense of community that is empathetic to Indigenous employees. The network is also used to discuss broader issues that may be impacting on Indigenous employees in the Australian Public Service. Managers are to support Indigenous employees and encourage attendance at both AusAID Indigenous Employees Network and Indigenous Australian Public Service Employee Network meetings within operational requirements.

## **6. Evaluation**

AusAID will monitor performance against this strategy and report annually. The effectiveness of the strategy will be reviewed and updated.