Aboriginal mentoring program

Agency guidelines

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Commissioner's message

The Public Sector Commission is committed to developing a talented and versatile Aboriginal workforce in the Western Australian public sector. The aim is for a sector where Aboriginal people are employed in a wide range of roles at all levels, from trainees to agency chief executive officers. Improving employment opportunities will contribute to 'closing the gap' in economic participation for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal employment enhances our workforce diversity and improves the services we deliver. It helps us to better understand Aboriginal customers and communities and to develop and deliver improved policies and programs.

The WA public sector has made good progress in Aboriginal employment over the last four years. However this year, we see the Council of Australian Governments' National partnership agreement on Indigenous economic participation draw to a close and WA's *Aboriginal employment strategy 2011-2015 – Building a diverse public sector workforce* comes to an end.

With this in mind, it is imperative the sector continues to provide Aboriginal employees with access to training and development opportunities to identify meaningful career pathways. This will have a significant impact on the ability and willingness of Aboriginal employees to build careers in the public sector and positively influence service delivery.

Mentoring offers a great opportunity for both mentors and mentees to develop their skills, share key knowledge, encourage the formation of networks and work towards future goals. Mentoring for Aboriginal employees has been developed around the concepts of contemporary mentoring, but has individual key considerations consistent with the diversity, values and characteristics of Aboriginal people.

I hope these guidelines assist you in developing a mentoring program that not only benefits your organisation, but assists in creating exciting opportunities for Aboriginal employees.

M C Wauchope
PUBLIC SECTOR COMMISSIONER

Introduction

About the guidelines

In response to the specific focus on supporting and mentoring Aboriginal employees as outlined in the *Aboriginal employment strategy 2011-2015 – Building a diverse public sector workforce*, the Aboriginal Employment Strategy Governance Group endorsed the formation of an Aboriginal Mentoring Working Group, to produce guidelines for an Aboriginal mentoring program.

These guidelines are for public sector agencies who wish to establish, or build on, existing mentoring programs that incorporate Aboriginal employee capability and career building requirements.

These guidelines are not intended to be used as a rigid template, but as a template that can be adapted to suit the context of each agency.

The term 'mentee' is used in these guidelines to define the person being mentored, but it is acknowledged that other terms such as 'mentoree' may be preferred.

During the development of these guidelines, it was acknowledged by the Working Group that a definition of mentoring is a key component of an effective mentoring program and should be adopted. As a result, the following definition of mentoring has been adopted.

Workplace mentoring is a structured agreement between two people. It is designed to help those being mentored achieve their full potential, both professionally and personally, through their work experiences. The mentoring relationship involves sharing experiences and expertise through which advice, support, encouragement and reciprocal learning takes place.

It is a supportive and mutually beneficial relationship based on honesty, mutual trust, respect, encouragement, confidentiality and a willingness to share and learn. Mentoring is supported by the organisation with process, training and resources.

To supplement these guidelines, a number of sample templates have been developed to assist agencies that would like to establish their own program. A list of formal public sector mentoring programs that have been documented by the Working Group is also available as examples of good practice.

Mentoring for Aboriginal employees

Mentoring for Aboriginal employees shares many elements with mainstream mentoring, but it is important to ensure the process is culturally appropriate and consistent with the diversity, values and characteristics of Aboriginal people[1].

It is important to understand that Aboriginal people differ from each other in values, beliefs, language and in many other aspects of their identity[2]. Effective mentoring for Aboriginal employees will include mutual trust, empathy and respect between the mentor and mentee, to facilitate the sharing of backgrounds and cultural backgrounds[3].

While it is acknowledged that informal mentoring of Aboriginal employees is used effectively in many public sector agencies, structured mentoring programs operate with a specific purpose and are more likely to deliver tangible and measurable outcomes. It is important that the program be embedded into the larger organisational context, and perceptions within the organisation are managed to avoid perceptions of favouritism.

Some benefits of establishing an Aboriginal mentoring program is that it can:

- increase employment and retention of Aboriginal employees

- provide a cultural exchange and increased awareness of Aboriginal culture

- provide an opportunity for Aboriginal mentors to develop their own leadership capability

- assist Aboriginal employees to feel secure in the workplace

- provide a framework for positive interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees.

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1 Department of Housing, Mentoring Program 2014-15 intake Information kit, page

2 Mentoring Worx, Guide to Mentoring Aboriginal Young People, page 4.

3 Mentoring Worx, Guide to Mentoring Aboriginal Young People, page 8.

The following sections provide the guidelines for an Aboriginal mentoring program through four key elements. Many elements are shared with mainstream mentoring, as these are consistent across any effective formal mentoring program. These guidelines have incorporated the necessary elements to best meet the specific needs of Aboriginal employees.

1 Intent and expectations

To determine the **purpose** and **outcomes** for establishing a formal mentoring program for Aboriginal employees

2 Establishing relationships

To consider the recruitment, selection and **matching** of mentors and mentees

3 Program elements

To **develop** and **document** specific details of the program to maximise its effectiveness

4 Evaluation

To **monitor** and **review** the program to ensure continuous improvement

Intent and expectations

While the mentoring relationship is primarily a partnership between two individuals, it is important to recognise that all mentoring programs operate within an overall organisational context. The establishment of a mentoring program requires careful planning that aligns to the strategic direction and overall culture of the organisation, and is supported by ongoing endorsement and commitment from senior management.

Therefore an important first step in establishing a formal Aboriginal mentoring program is for interested parties to agree on a clearly defined program purpose, set of expectations and measurable outcomes.

Some key questions to ask when determining a program's purpose and intent include, but are not limited to:

- Does the program have a clear Statement of intent?

- Does the program have endorsement from senior executive?

- Is there a set of principles which will guide the program?

- Will this program meet the intended target audience needs?

- Does the program aim to understand Aboriginal issues in the organisation?

- Are the objectives of the program deliverable and measurable?

- How will the program benefit the overall agency?

- Is this program linked to the overall strategic and business goals of the agency?

- Is the program integrated into a broader diversity and learning and development plan?

- What is going to change as a result of this mentoring program?

A number of other factors to consider at this stage may include:

- How will consultation with Aboriginal staff and other stakeholders be achieved (e.g. establishing a working or advisory group)?

- Is the program based on voluntary participation of both mentors and mentees?

- Are clear definitions provided for the program and program roles?

- Are the roles and responsibilities of all program participants clearly defined and outlined?

- Will there be an internal coordinator or facilitator of the overall program?

- Is there an agreed time-frame for the program?

- Is there an agreed mentoring program cycle/stages approach?

- Are the overall program objectives and performance indicators for the monitoring and evaluation processes clearly identified?

- What resources will be required and are these feasible?

- How will the sustainability of the program be achieved?

A clear statement of intent and objectives of a formal mentoring program is provided in the following example.

Department of Housing

Aboriginal mentoring program

Statement of intent

The 'Aboriginal mentoring program' has been developed to address a key objective of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy and a key action in the department's Reconciliation Action Plan. One of the key objectives of the *Aboriginal employment strategy* is to expand training and development programs and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees within the department.

The mentoring program will provide a support system and create and maintain a welcoming work environment that will attract Aboriginal people, and assist in retaining and advancing staff. The overall objectives of an Aboriginal mentoring program are to:

- assist Aboriginal employees to feel more confident working at the department and to build cultural security.

- provide an opportunity for Aboriginal mentors to develop their own leadership capacity

- provide additional support for Aboriginal employees to contribute effectively to their occupation, position, the organisation, and their future career at the department.

- increase the likelihood of retaining Aboriginal employees at the department.

Establishing relationships

In any mentoring relationship it is important that participants complement each other and that the mentor's experience, knowledge and disposition are aligned to meet the needs of the mentee.

In order for the relationship to be well established and sustained the mentee must experience a level of comfort, particularly in respect to language, culture and gender, and know that their confidence will be kept. Both participants need to be prepared to invest in the relationship, have a sound understanding of their reciprocal responsibilities and have realistic expectations.

Some key questions to ask when establishing mentoring relations include, but are not limited to:

- How will all participants be recruited, selected and matched?

- Are there specified eligibility requirements for program participants (e.g. whether mentors can be Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff)?

- Has the mentor had the opportunity to specify their skills, experience and what they can offer?

- Have the needs of the mentee been considered (e.g. goals, expectations, position, age, family, aspirations)?

- Are all program participant roles and responsibilities clear, well communicated and understood?

- Is there a shared and agreed understanding of relationship boundaries, confidentiality protocols and ethical issues?

- What program orientation and/or training will be provided?

- Is there a shared agreement on the partnership features (i.e. partnership duration, frequency of meetings, method of meeting)?

- Is there an understanding that the experience of mentors and mentees will influence the type of training required (e.g. cultural awareness training for mentors, understanding of cultural protocols)?

- What type of ongoing support will be available for both mentors and mentees as the relationship develops?

- How will ad hoc queries from mentors or mentees be dealt with?

- Will there be ongoing monitoring of the relationship?

- Is there a process for the resolution of relationship issues (i.e. what to do if the relationship is not working)?

- Is there an explicit 'exit' or 'closure' policy and process in place for the end of the relationship?

It is important to have diversity training either as a part of the mentoring program or an overall organisational strategy as stereotyping can be a major barrier to rapport building in any mentoring relationship.

The success of the mentoring relationship relies not simply on being suitably matched, but on how well the mentee perceives they are treated by the mentor. If there are significant cultural differences between mentor and mentee, it is important that they both accept that misunderstandings can limit potential to achieve, and having open communication built on trust and respect is the most effective way to prevent them.

Department of the Attorney General

Mentoring program

Mentor/mentee matching

The Program Coordinator is responsible for the selection and matching of participants. Assistance may be provided to the Coordinator by a consultant or committee.

Self-match

Potential mentee participants may network and identify a mentor and nominate that person on their application. If the potential mentor has also applied, and agreed to be the mentee's mentor, a match can be established. Support and training will be offered to these Mentors.

Facilitated match

Where no mentor has been identified in the application, the Program Coordinator will provide mentees with the names and details of up to three potential mentors. Mentees may wish to contact all three potential mentors to discuss their suitability. They must then return their list of potential mentors in preferred order to the Program Coordinator.

If more than one mentee has identified a particular mentor, a 'first in' approach will be taken and mentees will be matched with their second or third nominated mentor.

Mentors should not be the immediate manager in order for the mentee to expand networks and to avoid any potential conflicts. However, managers will be invited to attend a general information session on the program so that they can support the partnership.

Mentoring participants will ideally not be matched with people from within their own area.

Specific program elements

Further to defining the mentoring program's overall intent and expectations and the establishment of relationships, there are specific program elements that are recommended to be included in any mentoring program.

These include, but are not limited to:

- guidelines outlining roles and responsibilities for all program participants, including line managers and program coordinator/s

- mentoring program code of conduct

- mentoring agreement – reinforcing the roles and obligations of each party in the mentoring relationship

- fact sheets provided for all program participants on the overall program intent and expectations

- communication plan – strategy for the recruitment of participants, promotion of the program (e.g. agency newsletter updates, case studies), provision of contact person/program coordinator details

- record and information management plan

- provision of support mechanisms to participants (e.g. opportunity to meet as a group for further training, debriefing)

- program closure plan – participants recognise that the formal relationship has ceased.

A code of conduct included in a formal mentoring program is provided in the following example.

WA Country Health Service (WACHS)

Aboriginal mentoring program – Your footsteps, our future

Code of conduct

In participating in the 'Aboriginal mentorship program', all parties agree to adhere to this *Code of conduct* for the 'Aboriginal mentorship program', and to use this in conjunction with the Department of Health, WACHS and local health services, codes of conduct and ethics and all polices, procedure and guidelines that govern professional practice within these health services.

- It is expected that the mentors/mentees will complete the application form honestly, in order for the matching of mentor's/mentee's to be as suitable as possible.

- Mentoring requires commitment from both parties to make it work. All parties understand mentoring requires time and commitment from both the mentee and the mentor.

- The mentors/mentees are aware that once the 'Aboriginal mentorship program' has ceased, the formal oversight of the mentoring ceases and neither party is committed to continuing with the mentoring relationship.

- The mentors/mentees enter into the mentoring relationship with a commitment to assist each other develop and learn in an environment that supports honesty, fairness and respect.

- If the mentoring relationship is not working for any reason, notify your local Human Resource unit immediately to ensure that the matter is addressed.

Mentor name and signature: _____

Date: _____

Mentee name and signature: _____

Date: _____

Evaluation

The evaluation and measurement criteria should be directly linked to the objectives of the mentoring program, with short, medium and long-term criteria established. The evaluation process should consider how to gather information required for accurate program measurement, as well as monitor and evaluate without intruding on the mentoring relationships.

Potential methods can include:

- a survey
- structured interviews/focus groups
- a review conducted between mentor/mentee (and line manager)
- performance reviews.

Some key questions to ask when evaluating the mentoring relationship include, but are not limited to:

- Do the mentor and mentee understand the purpose of their mentoring relationship?
- Do the mentor and mentee have clear and achievable objectives?
- Is the mentee confident about raising issues for discussion?
- Is the mentor able to give honest feedback?
- Are there mutual expectations between the mentor and mentee and are these fulfilled?
- Is there a mentoring agreement?
- Are there regular purposeful meetings?
- Is there a sense of continuing progress and development?
- Should the relationship continue?
- Do others notice a positive change in the mentee and mentor?

A mentoring evaluation process undertaken in a formal mentoring program is provided in the following example.

Public Sector Commission

Foundations of government human resources (FoGHR)

Mentoring evaluation

Evaluation is a crucial part of informing our mentoring practice. Evaluation of the mentoring from both the mentor's and mentee's perspectives is a crucial part of a successful mentoring relationship.

Preliminary information will be gathered via the mentor application form. Formal evaluations will be undertaken during the mentoring component at key stages:

1. mid-way through the FoGHR program
2. following the graduation event.

Evaluation questions

Evaluation questions may include:

- What was your level of satisfaction with the resources provided?
- How often did you meet?
- What worked well in the mentoring experience?
- How suitable was your mentor or participant match?
- What were the key learning's from you mentoring experience?
- What part of FOGHR mentoring could be improved?
- Would you recommend mentoring as a professional development tool?
- Would you consider returning as a mentor?

Feedback from the evaluation will be collated and made available to mentors and participants. This information will be used to shape future FoGHR mentoring as a means of developing best practice.

Further information

List of formal mentoring programs

As part of the work undertaken by the Aboriginal Mentoring Working Group, the group researched, collated and examined existing mentoring programs across public sector agencies. Through this process, the group identified a list of formal public sector mentoring programs that it has recommended as examples of good practice.

It is acknowledged by the Working Group that the list of recommended formal mentoring programs is not all inclusive of agencies and programs across the sector.

An overview, containing further information, of the recommended programs can be found on the Public Sector Commission's website.

The programs recommended are:

Agency	Program	Program contact
WA Country Health Service	Aboriginal mentorship program	Ms Beverley Stone aboriginalmentorship@health.wa.gov.au
Department of Housing	'Your footsteps our future'	Workforce.Development@housing.wa.gov.au
Department of the Attorney General	Aboriginal mentoring program	Mr Stephen Cannon Stephen.cannon@justice.wa.gov.au
Public Sector Commission	Mentoring program	TheCentre@psc.wa.gov.au

Please note these programs are provided as examples of good practice only, and program coordinators should be contacted for specific queries and information relating to their agency's program only.

Sample mentoring program templates

To assist agencies that would like to establish their own program, a number of sample templates that relate to key elements in the coordination of a mentoring program have been developed. These templates are provided as a guide only, and can be adapted to the individual context and the aims and objectives of the mentoring program within each workplace.

The sample templates that are provided are:

- Mentor application form

- Mentee application form

- Mentoring agreement form

- Program evaluation form

Useful links

To assist agencies establishing, or building on existing mentoring programs that incorporate specific requirements for Aboriginal employee, a list of useful resources have been identified by the Working Group.

Mentoring for Aboriginal employees:

- www.communities.wa.gov.au/communities-in-focus/youth/youth-mentoring-reform-project/Mentoring-Worx/Aboriginal/Pages/Default.aspx

- www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/employeesandstudents/aboriginalworkforcedevelopmentcentre/mentors/Pages/default.aspx

- www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/employeesandstudents/aboriginalworkforcedevelopmentcentre/employers/Pages/understanding-aboriginal-employees.aspx

Mentoring resources

- www.mentoring.org/program_resources

- www.management-mentors.com/resources/corporate-mentoring-programs-faqs/

- https://www.usq.edu.au/current-students/services/careers/employers/mentor-a-student/what-is-mentoring

- https://www.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/documents/equality/MRC%20Guidance%20for%20Mentors.pdf

Appendices

Appendix 1: Aboriginal Mentoring Working Group

The Aboriginal Mentoring Working Group is comprised of the:

- Public Sector Commission
- Western Australia Country Health Service
- Department of Training and Workforce Development
- Department of Housing
- Department of the Attorney General
- Department for Corrective Services
- Department of Aboriginal Affairs