



# **An evaluation of Aboriginal employment practices**

A report on key performance factors to support  
Aboriginal employment outcomes

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# Executive summary

There continues to be a considerable gap in employment rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Optimising opportunities for Aboriginal Australians<sup>1</sup> to engage in employment contributes both to the broader capability of the workforce and to the economic wellbeing of Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal people have unique skills and knowledge which add significant value to the organisations that employ them.

Between March 2014 and July 2014, the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment (DEOPE), in support of Aboriginal employment, engaged with a sample of five public sector entities<sup>2</sup> to better understand the extent and nature of challenges being experienced in this area by public authorities. The sample was selected to include a range of agency types, sizes and Aboriginal representation rates.

An internally developed desirable controls model was used as the primary tool to assess Aboriginal employment activities across the sample authorities. The model comprised eight 'key success factors' believed to be fundamental to the achievement of sustainable improvements to Aboriginal employment outcomes.

The key success factors included leadership, awareness, culture, strategic alignment, recruitment and selection, retention, monitoring, and reporting. A total of 43 desirable controls were identified for evaluation across the eight success factors. Each sample authority was assessed against four and not the full eight key success factors.

The four key success factors chosen to assess each authority were indicative of positive highlights and real challenges experienced by those authorities in achieving Aboriginal employment outcomes.

The extent to which the key success factors were developed within authorities was assessed by undertaking the following activities:

- obtaining the views of human resource managers, Aboriginal employment officers and workforce planners within the five entities
- examining the nature, sophistication and status of relevant strategies referenced in equal employment opportunity or integrated workforce and diversity plans

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010: Persons of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent who identify as such and are accepted as such by the community in which they live.

<sup>2</sup> Department of the Attorney General, Department of Training and Workforce Development, Legal Aid WA, Disability Services Commission and Kimberley Training Institute

- observing the visibility of the Aboriginal employment agenda in corporate documentation.

A four level rating scale was used to summarise the extent to which the desirable controls are developed within the sample of authorities.

## Key findings

The evaluation highlighted the challenges that some authorities are facing in improving Aboriginal employment outcomes, such as competition with the mining and resources sector.

Analysis of the evaluation's findings indicated that:

- 'awareness' and 'culture' were the most developed success factors across the sample of authorities and a large proportion of these desirable controls were assessed as being either fully or partially implemented
- 'monitoring' was the success factor requiring the most attention to support improved outcomes into the future and a large proportion of these desirable controls were assessed as not developed.

It was also found that Aboriginal employment outcomes are best achieved when:

- senior leadership is accountable for the achievement of Aboriginal employment outcomes through measurable key performance indicators
- there is a robust corporate induction process, covering all aspects of equal employment opportunity, and this process is supported by cultural awareness and training, providing an important platform for cultural understanding and inclusiveness
- a culturally appropriate professional development program is in place that adds value to the development and retention of Aboriginal employees
- good practice and knowledge is shared across authorities.

There were many examples of effective and innovative approaches identified through the evaluation process. These included:

- the development of culturally inclusive selection and recruitment training modules that bring awareness of different Aboriginal cultural issues
- the use of advanced Aboriginal awareness training within manager and supervisor professional development programs to strengthen cultural understanding
- the establishment of an authority 'champion' at the senior executive level to drive Aboriginal employment outcomes
- the use of local and broader Aboriginal networks to advertise vacancies resulting in opportunities reaching a greater potential pool of applicants.

## Conclusion

The evaluation found a strong commitment at the leadership level to Aboriginal employment outcomes, and a pleasing range of innovative strategies being used across the public sector to increase representation and understanding.

While it is acknowledged each sample authority is at a different stage of maturity, the evaluation noted that those public authorities with strong awareness and culture controls in place were more likely to achieve better Aboriginal employment outcomes.

Authorities in the sample believed that the following actions would assist them in improving Aboriginal employment outcomes:

- sharing Aboriginal employment 'best practice' across entities through regular and facilitated collaboration activities
- sharing Aboriginal skills and expertise across the public sector through improved and centralised professional development and mobility opportunities.

The DEOPE will continue to work with the Centre for Public Sector Excellence (the Centre) in the Public Sector Commission, and via the 'Aboriginal employment strategy governance group', to progress these and other actions.

The Centre is already progressing options for more information sharing across the sector and is exploring further professional development and mobility opportunities for Aboriginal employees.

A special thank you to the sample of agencies for participating in the evaluation and allocating key staff during the discussion process.

# Detailed report

## Background

As one of the bigger employers in the state, the WA government is well placed to make a significant contribution to the economic and social wellbeing of the state through the employment of Aboriginal people.

Since 2011, the Public Sector Commission's [Aboriginal employment strategy 2011–2015](#) (Strategy) has assisted authorities to focus on long term, sustainable employment opportunities and career pathways for Aboriginal people. The Strategy describes a range of employment initiatives aimed at meeting the WA public sector target of 3.2% by 2015, representing the estimated Aboriginal proportion of the total working age population.<sup>3</sup>

The DEOPE worked closely with the Commission on the development of the Strategy, which identifies a range of initiatives to support the attraction, employment, development and retention of Aboriginal employees.

The DEOPE is also a member of the 'Aboriginal employment strategy governance group', which monitors the implementation and effectiveness of the Strategy.

In October 2013, the governance group agreed the DEOPE would further engage with public sector entities to better understand the extent and nature of challenges being experienced in Aboriginal employment, and ask them what further support would help them to contribute to the WA public sector target of 3.2%.

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<sup>3</sup> WA is a signatory to the Council of Australian Governments' [National partnership agreement on Indigenous economic participation](#). The council has set a national target of 2.6% representation in the public sector (representing the estimated Aboriginal proportion of the total working age population in 2015), and WA has committed to 3.2%. In working to this target, WA is mindful that the Australian Bureau of Statistics has estimated the Aboriginal proportion of the working age population to be 2.8%, based on the 2011 Census of Population and Housing.

## Methodology

In May 2014, the DEOPE commenced an evaluation of Aboriginal employment practices in a sample of five public sector authorities. The objective of the evaluation was to identify some of the successes and challenges experienced in Aboriginal employment, and ongoing support required to improve the outcomes of programs and initiatives deployed in the sector.

The evaluation approach involved the identification of eight key success factors, considered fundamental to the achievement of Aboriginal employment outcomes. The key success factors included leadership, awareness, culture, strategic alignment, recruitment and selection, retention, monitoring, and reporting.

The evaluation considered the extent to which these eight factors were being demonstrated in a sample of five public sector authorities. These authorities included the Department of the Attorney General (DotAG), Department of Training and Workforce Development (DTWD), Legal Aid WA (LAWA), Disability Services Commission (DSC) and Kimberley Training Institute (KTI).

The five sample authorities were selected to participate in the evaluation to allow for a cross section of agency functions, agency sizes and Aboriginal representation rates. Appendix A provides an overview of the five authorities across the selection criteria.

An internally developed desirable controls model was adopted as the primary assessment tool for the evaluation. The desirable controls model identified a total of 43 'desirable controls' across the eight key success factors (see Appendix B).

Each authority was assessed against four of the eight key success factors. Consideration of which four key factors to be assessed was dependent on the type of initiatives and programs 'developed' in each authority (see Table 1).

The following evaluation questions framed the development and implementation of the desirable controls model:

- Is there strong visible leadership and high level sponsorship at executive level?
- Is there strong understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity?
- Does the authority promote an inclusive and welcoming work culture?
- Does the authority have strong alignment between strategic objectives and Aboriginal employment outcomes?
- Does the authority have clear recruitment strategies that support the employment of Aboriginal people?
- Does the authority provide a work environment that is flexible and supports career development opportunities for Aboriginal employees?
- Does the authority regularly review and analyse Aboriginal employment initiatives through a continuous improvement cycle?
- Does the authority collect and use data to report on the alignment of core business with Aboriginal employment?

The maturity of the desirable controls within the sample authorities was considered through:

- obtaining the views of human resource managers, Aboriginal employment officers and workforce planners within the five authorities through face to face meetings
- considering the nature, sophistication and status of relevant strategies referenced in equal employment opportunity management or integrated workforce and diversity plans
- observing the Aboriginal employment agenda in corporate documentation.

The following maturity scale was used to assess the extent to which the full desirable controls were developed across each key factor within the sample authorities:

- Level 1 – not in progress
- Level 2 – being developed
- Level 3 – partially implemented
- Level 4 – fully implemented.

## Key findings

The key success factors chosen to assess in each sample authority represent positive highlights and real challenges experienced in achieving Aboriginal employment outcomes. Each sample authority was assessed against four and not the full eight key success factors and could possibly have effective desirable controls in place against those not chosen.

Table 1 shows the progress of the desirable controls assessed across the key success factors by the chosen sample agencies.

The strongest key success factor implemented across the sampled agencies was 'awareness' at 67%. The key success factor requiring greater implementation to support improved outcomes into the future was 'monitoring' at 10%.

**Table 1 Key success factors chosen by PSC to assess each sample authority**

Success factor (# of desirable controls)	DotAG	DSC	DTWD	KTI	LAWA	%
<b>Leadership (6)</b>	✓				✓	
Fully implemented	5	NA	NA	NA	1	50
In development	1				5	50
<b>Awareness (6)</b>	✓			✓	✓	
Fully implemented	5	NA	NA	4	4	72
In development	1			2	2	28
<b>Culture (5)</b>		✓	✓			
Fully implemented	NA	3	3	NA	NA	60
In development		2	2			40
<b>Strategic alignment (6)</b>	✓	✓			✓	
Fully implemented	3	4	NA	NA	2	50
In development	3	2			4	50
<b>Recruitment and selection (8)</b>		✓	✓	✓		
Fully implemented	NA	2	4	4	NA	42
In development		6	4	4		58
<b>Retention (3)</b>			✓	✓		
Fully implemented	NA	NA	1	2	NA	50
In development			2	1		50
<b>Monitoring (5)</b>	✓	✓				
Fully implemented	2	0	NA	NA	NA	20
In development	3	5				80
<b>Reporting (4)</b>			✓	✓	✓	
Fully implemented	NA	NA	1	2	2	42
In development			3	2	2	58

NA – Key factor not assessed at agency

Many examples of innovative approaches to Aboriginal employment were observed through the evaluation process. Some of the key strategies observed included:

- cultural awareness modules built into selection and recruitment training to improve understanding of Aboriginal cultural issues
- advanced Aboriginal awareness training built into manager and supervisor professional development programs to strengthen cultural competence
- an authority 'champion' at the senior executive level to drive Aboriginal employment outcomes
- the use of local and broader Aboriginal networks to advertise vacancies resulting in opportunities reaching a greater potential pool of applicants.

A number of challenges are faced by authorities in improving Aboriginal employment outcomes. Authorities identified the following key challenges in this area:

- there is a lack of regular sharing of Aboriginal employment 'good practice' and knowledge across authorities
- competition with the mining and resources sector impacts on the retention of Aboriginal expertise.

Through face to face meetings with the authorities and internal assessment of corporate documentation, Aboriginal employment outcomes appeared to be best achieved when supported by:

- senior leadership that is accountable for Aboriginal employment outcomes through measurable key performance indicators
- a robust corporate induction process, covering all aspects of equal employment opportunity and supported by cultural awareness and training, which provides an important platform for cultural understanding and inclusiveness
- a culturally appropriate professional development program that adds value to the retention of Aboriginal employees
- an aligned planning process, that combines both corporate strategic planning and workforce and diversity planning.

## Discussion

The evaluation found a strong commitment at the leadership level to Aboriginal employment outcomes, and a pleasing range of innovative strategies being used across the public sector to increase representation and understanding.

While it is acknowledged each sample authority is at a different stage of maturity, authorities with a greater number and wider range of measurable desirable controls in place appeared to be more likely to achieve better Aboriginal employment outcomes.

Through assessment of the desirable controls across the sample, the evaluation identified the following 'better practice' Aboriginal employment strategies for each success factor.

### Leadership

The executive leadership group plays a critical role in ensuring zero tolerance of discrimination and actively championing a workplace culture that strongly supports the achievement of Aboriginal employment outcomes. Key leadership controls should include:

- having Aboriginal employment as a key workforce priority that is driven from the 'top down'
- close monitoring and reporting of Aboriginal employment outcomes through regular discussion at executive meetings
- inclusion of Aboriginal employment key performance indicators in executive performance reviews where appropriate or where it is a key driver of business outcomes.

### Awareness

A strong understanding and awareness of the importance of cultural diversity in the workplace supports Aboriginal employment and retention. Key awareness controls should include:

- a corporate induction process that fully explains the principles of equal employment opportunity and outlines policies and procedures relating to the prevention of bullying and discrimination in the workplace
- Aboriginal cultural awareness training for all staff
- organisational systems that encourage all staff to improve their understanding and awareness of issues surrounding Aboriginal employment.

### Culture

Effective planning and celebration of significant events provides for a workplace that engages and celebrates cultural diversity. Key culture controls should include:

- where possible Aboriginal artwork is displayed across public areas of the workplace
- fostering a workplace where Aboriginal culture is acknowledged and celebrated
- a calendar of events that enables staff to participate in significant cultural events.

## **Strategic alignment**

Planning systems with a connection between Aboriginal employment strategies and business objectives help to engage communities and other stakeholders. Key strategic alignment controls should include:

- workforce and diversity plans that are aligned with strategic plans and performance reporting
- Aboriginal employment strategies that support specific Aboriginal employment outcomes of broader workforce and diversity plans.

## **Recruitment and selection**

Recruitment and selection processes and practices that are culturally aware support the achievement of Aboriginal employment objectives. Key recruitment and selection controls should:

- use inclusive advertising that encourages Aboriginal applicants to apply for suitable roles
- use local and extended Aboriginal networks to advertise vacancies
- where appropriate apply a recruitment and selection policy that includes Aboriginal representation on selection panels.

## **Retention**

Effective recruitment is supported by active development and retention strategies to ensure Aboriginal employment is sustained. Key retention controls should include:

- a culturally appropriate professional development program that adds value to the retention of Aboriginal staff
- personal leave policies that are supportive of ceremonial and cultural obligations
- sharing Aboriginal skills and expertise across the public sector through improved mobility opportunities.

## **Monitoring and reporting**

Workforce strategies require clear accountability measures, effective monitoring and sound governance practices to ensure the improvement of Aboriginal employment outcomes. Key monitoring and reporting controls should include:

- providing diversity statistics to the corporate executive leadership group on a regular basis
- evaluating Aboriginal employment data for future workforce and diversity planning and reconciliation action plan reporting.

## Conclusion

An evaluation of Aboriginal employment initiatives is important in that it identifies what works well and what might promote the achievement of greater representation of Aboriginal people.

The DEOPE will continue to work with the Centre for Public Sector Excellence (the Centre) in the Public Sector Commission, and via the 'Aboriginal employment strategy governance group', to progress these and other actions.

The Centre is already progressing options for more information sharing across the sector and is exploring further professional development and mobility opportunities for Aboriginal employees.

## Agency responses

The sample of agencies participating in the evaluation allocated key staff during the discussion process. Positive collaboration guided the evaluation process and ongoing discussion provided valuable feedback to the preliminary findings.

The preliminary findings of discussions in each sample agency are summarised.

### Department of the Attorney General

The Department of the Attorney General recognises the importance of directly linking Aboriginal employment initiatives and outcomes into the equal employment opportunity management plan, workforce plan and strategic planning process. This strategic alignment is supported by a "top down" approach which is reviewed and evaluated on a quarterly basis and driven by the executive leadership group. Discussions confirmed this support includes Aboriginal employment key performance indicators being included within the Director General annual performance review process.

The evaluation noted improved mobility arrangements utilising Aboriginal expertise across the public sector as a critical retention strategy to the salary challenges of the mining sector. This challenge was seen as a timely reminder about the importance of linking broader retention strategies with wider professional development opportunities across the sector.

A centralised mobility arrangement function, improved numeracy and literacy screening of entry level applicants, and the development of workshops to assist future entry level applicants become job ready before being placed with an agency, were considered important factors to assist increasing Aboriginal representation.

### Department of Training and Workforce Development

The Department of Training and Workforce Development strongly promotes good management of its workforce and has an extensive professional development program aimed at increasing the skill set of all Aboriginal staff. Development is supported by Aboriginal Workforce Development Centres that are part of the department's core business and are located across highly populated Aboriginal areas within Western Australia.

The development of an Aboriginal Employee Attraction and Retention Toolkit actively promotes information about cultural sensitivity and gives measured support to supervisors and managers across the department. The implementation of the toolkit has been an essential tool to address the challenges of professional development and allow an even distribution of Aboriginal employees across all levels and areas of the department.

An inter-agency Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentoring program in partnership with the Department of Finance, Department of Treasury and Department of Aboriginal Affairs has promoted best practice and addresses the challenges relating to the development and retention of Aboriginal employees.

Improving behaviours, attitudes and policies that are needed for people to work effectively in cross-cultural situations, is seen as a way to improve Aboriginal employment outcomes across the sector. This includes publishing valuable Aboriginal employment training material and promulgating best practice across the public sector.

### **Legal Aid WA**

The ongoing commitment and achievement of the Legal Aid WA Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group is a key process that helps support Aboriginal employment outcomes. The plan has led to the employment of an Indigenous Law Cadet, the secondment of Aboriginal trainees and the creation of an Indigenous Liaison Officer position to provide assistance to Aboriginal clients in the Kimberley region.

The development and implementation of welcome to country and acknowledgement of country protocols, along with localised cultural awareness training and displaying local Aboriginal art work throughout Legal Aid offices, enables Legal Aid to build on areas of cultural appropriateness and support those areas which require further strengthening.

The alignment of the integrated workforce and diversity plan with the corporate strategic plan was recognised as an internal challenge to creating employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. Continuing to work closely with the Public Sector Commission will support future Aboriginal employment initiatives.

The limited number of Aboriginal people graduating with professional legal qualifications is an ongoing challenge to workforce development within the agency.

### **Kimberley Training Institute**

The evaluation highlighted the strong understanding and awareness of Aboriginal employment practices across Kimberley Training Institute. The corporate induction process covers all forms of acceptable workplace behaviour and is supported by EEO-related online training, Aboriginal cultural awareness training and Diversity WA training.

Kimberley Training Institute works closely with local Aboriginal communities to better understand local culture and protocols, and promote a collaborative training partnership across the Kimberley region. The institute has identified the development of an Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy as a key employment initiative to support increasing the skill set of Aboriginal employees.

The use of a capability framework was seen as an important tool to support the strategy and generate positive retention outcomes for all Aboriginal employees in the region.

### **Disability Services Commission**

The Disability Service Commission's (DSC) pilot Aboriginal Vocational Employment Program, which links Aboriginal job seekers with non-government disability sector organisations, provides a framework that will effectively support the recruitment of Aboriginal people.

DSC supports the inclusion of Aboriginal employment targets within the Director General annual performance review process and recognises the importance of linking workforce and diversity plans with core business plans and supporting plans.

Planned downsizing of DSC and the competitive nature for skilled employees from the mining and resources sector are considered the most challenging factors relating to Aboriginal recruitment.

DSC considers exemptions for recruitment activity relating to Aboriginal employment, or all diversity groups, as a policy option to support Aboriginal employment that could extend to FTE and salary cap ceiling exemptions.

## Appendix A – Authorities chosen for the evaluation

	Authority	Commission's employee survey last conducted	Authority size	Authority type	Authority function	Authority's EEO management plan status	Authority's Indigenous Australian employment target	Authority's Indigenous Australian representation rate
1	DSC	2009	Large – 1898	Department and SES organisation	Policy, development and coordination	Workforce and diversity plan 2012-2016	3.2%	1.1%
2	LAWA	2013	Medium – 342	Non-SES organisation	Service	EEO management plan 2013-2015	3.2%	1.5%
3	DTWD	2010	Medium – 521	Department	Service	Workforce and diversity plan 2012-2015	3.2%	3.1%
4	DotAG	2013	Large – 1,745	Department	Service	EEO management plan 2010-2014	4.5%	4.0%
5	KTI	2014	Small – 202	SES organisation	Service	Integrated Plan 2012-2015	11.0%	11.4%