

**Indigenous Perspectives on Effective Engagement
Between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Communities and the Private Sector:**

A FRAMEWORK FOR ORGANISATIONAL ACTION

INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES

- Appoint Indigenous people in internal roles with an Indigenous focus.
- Draw engagement capability from your existing Indigenous workforce (e.g. Indigenous Employment Ambassadors program).
- Grow your Indigenous talent pool by building the capacity of your existing Indigenous employees and investing in skills development in communities.
- Create culturally sound sourcing approaches when seeking Indigenous talent:
 - Don't assume existing recruitment approaches will deliver you the best Indigenous talent pool. Different approaches are needed.
 - Engage Indigenous service providers to gain insight about culturally relevant recruitment and employment processes.
 - Recognise prior experience and value the specific skills and experiences an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person will bring to the job.
- Create a team of internal experts and points of liaison. Don't rely on one person to engage with community, particularly if your company is large and has a dispersed workforce.
- Assess your internal expertise around effective engagement. If lacking internal expertise then, in the short term, access external expertise to get you heading in the right direction.
- Choose Indigenous-owned and run businesses to get your external advice and assistance.
- As internal expertise and capability develops over time, your company can reduce its reliance on external expertise.
- Don't be too reliant on external expertise to develop relationships – while invaluable for providing expert advice, the bottom line is companies can't outsource relationships.
- When consulting with a particular community, consider appointing a local community member in an engagement role.

COMMUNITY CONSCIOUS

- Understand which community or communities your company needs to engage with and do not make assumptions about that community.
- Understand that a 'community' boundary/fence line usually extends further than the lines on a local council map.
- Remember Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities live everywhere.
- Recognise differences and diversity, in and between, urban, regional and rural communities.
- Avoid community politics, an Aboriginal advisor (internal or external) could help navigate any community politics encountered
- Spend time understanding and learning how to navigate community politics.
- Expect differing opinions within community.
- Engage through multiple avenues (e.g. schools, networks, Land Councils, Medical Services).

STRATEGIC

- Clarify why your company is seeking to engage – what are the business drivers?
- Recognise project-based motivations to engage can lead to short-term 'quick hit' engagement, which Indigenous Australians are less likely to experience as effective.
- Clarify your company's community engagement objectives. What is your company trying to achieve? e.g. generate employment outcomes, support Indigenous business development, sponsor community activities, invest in the future etc.
- Consider setting broad community engagement objectives – rather than engaging to generate employment outcomes in your company, consider generating employment indirectly through contracting Indigenous suppliers and/or engaging for capacity building (company and community).
- Ensure your company has determined what it is trying to achieve in consultation with community.
- Invest appropriately in strategic frameworks such as RAPs and assign responsibility for making objectives of the plan happen.
- Develop engagement objectives and strategies which include an Indigenous perspective, and make them available to community for transparency.

TWO-WAY CAPACITY BUILDING

- View Indigenous community engagement and the resultant capacity building as a two-way partnership rather than one way community service.
- Recognise that Australia is home to one of the oldest continuing intellectual cultures in the world.
- Value and invest in Indigenous cultural knowledge and advice about community engagement and employment.
- When setting up engagement and employment initiatives, specify upfront that these aim to create two-way learning opportunities.
- Don't just throw money at the community – look to establish a partnership with outcomes that are meaningful to both parties.
- Provide mentoring for employees – two-way.
- Structure roles to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to work in community.
- Develop secondment programs that are appropriate and beneficial for the community.

CLEAR AND AUTHENTIC

- Conduct a reflective exercise before going into communities – what is your Indigenous brand/reputation in community? What would you like it to be?
- Develop an authentic brand.
 - Be clear and honest about why your company wants to engage with community.
 - Do not over promise the benefits to the community arising from their engagement in a project.
 - Don't promise what you can't deliver. Follow through – do what you say you'll do. If you don't know the answer, just say so.
 - If you can't deliver what was promised, be upfront about it, explain why you can't and work together to set a new direction.
 - Don't engage with community with your mind already made up about what needs to happen and how that will happen.
- Recognise it can take years to rebuild trust.
- Recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people often default to particular brands and so companies need to raise awareness of their brand.
- Recognise your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees can be your biggest brand communicator.
- Consider working with a third party to help build your brand and trust in this.

TAKING TIME

- Don't just 'Fly In Fly Out' – make a long-term commitment to community.
- Plan for engagement beyond the life of a given project.
- Recognise the importance of having a long-term vision for engaging with communities (e.g. investing in education, acknowledging that your biggest Indigenous talent pool is currently in the school system).
- Set realistic timeframes that recognise and allow for relationships to develop slowly.
- Do not expect an instant response or affiliation.
- Announce your visit before going to community.
- Visit community with no immediate agenda beyond developing respectful relationships.
- Visit regularly (e.g. monthly), with permission from key members of the community.
- Take time to listen to what the community has to say.
- Persist with engaging, 'don't give up on your first go'.
- Communicate in a range of ways (e.g. visiting community, phone, email etc.).

CULTURALLY SAFE

- Consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and community leaders to establish how culturally safe and inclusive your organisation is for Indigenous employees and community members.
- Don't 'shoot the messenger' when it comes to Indigenous community members or employees giving frank honest feedback about the cultural inclusiveness of your organisational culture.
- Recognise that research shows many non-Indigenous Australians have very low knowledge of, and understanding about Indigenous history and culture, and can be fearful of going into community in case they say or do the wrong thing.
- Educate business leaders, middle managers and supervisors about engaging in a culturally safe and inclusive manner.
- Develop and disseminate guidelines on culturally appropriate/safe engagement.
- Ask about cultural protocols and follow them when visiting community.
- Involve business leaders in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement to raise internal profile and awareness, and also role model inclusive engagement and behavior.
- Foster an organisational culture in which employees feel safe to disclose their Indigenous identity.
- Raise cultural awareness to ensure non-Indigenous employees do not make inappropriate assumptions or assertions about identity.
- Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is visible in the workplace (e.g. Welcome to Country, NAIDOC Week events, artwork, subscribe to Koori Mail or National Indigenous Times, use Indigenous suppliers).
- Create internal networks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, which are also connected to community, to create culturally safe work environment and facilitate culturally appropriate engagement.
- Consider having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors located in community who support Indigenous employees and assist with community engagement.
- Ensure Indigenous staff employees don't get burnout from being the 'go to' person in the organisation for all things Indigenous.

THE RIGHT METRICS

- Use a broad set of metrics to measure the effectiveness of your company's Indigenous community engagement, taking into account metrics used by the RA RAP Impact Measurement framework.
- Ensure employment targets measure sustainable careers not just short-term appointments.
- If an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee goes on to work for their community, count this as a success.
- Monitor your progress against a broad set of indicators longitudinally, and at regular intervals.
- Recognise the power dynamics at play when consulting with community.
- Be prepared to hear messages which are welcome, as well as those that may be uncomfortable.

