





QTIC would like to acknowledge funding provided by the Queensland Government as part of the Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative to support the revision of the resource.

QTIC gratefully acknowledges the images supplied by Tourism Australia, Tourism Queensland and QTIC's Champions.

Caution:

Take care before viewing this document as it may contain images of and reference to deceased Indigenous people.

# It is recognised that Australian Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are two distinct cultural groups within the Indigenous Australian population.

Increased participation of Indigenous people in mainstream tourism has been well supported by industry, Indigenous leaders and government alike. Despite the potential opportunities and benefits for both Indigenous people and the tourism industry, engagement in the mainstream tourism industry to date is limited.

There are a number of reasons that encumber the engagement of Indigenous people in tourism and hospitality including, but not limited to:

- The concept of tourism and the intricacies of the industry are foreign to Indigenous culture.
- The tourism industry has failed to recognise that Indigenous people require an approach that is different to that used in western society.
- Competition from other industries for wages and staff, such as mining, and the public sector that can offer more money and full-time employment, as opposed to seasonal work.
- Many mainstream tourism businesses are unsure of how to engage Indigenous people in their business. There are difficulties in sourcing information on mentoring support, funding, cultural training, recruitment processes and retention. These difficulties are shared by Indigenous people wanting to be employed or wanting to set up a business.
- Lack of education and relevant training.
- Lack of exposure to the mainstream workforce and the expectation of employers.
- Geographical isolation- in some cases.
- The challenges in balancing family and community obligations with the demands of full-time work.

A coordinated approach by industry, government and the training sector is needed to overcome the many challenges. To address all of the issues raised is beyond the scope of this project; however Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) have embarked on an initiative to assist employers' source information and gain knowledge on Indigenous employment processes.

This guide has been developed to assist tourism businesses wishing to employ, contract or enter a partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (A&TSI) people. Information in the guide draws on the knowledge and experience of tourism employers, Indigenous employees, industry stakeholders, government agencies and Indigenous employment case studies that have been reviewed by QTIC during the last three years. By identifying some of the common characteristics of successful Indigenous employers and partnerships, a set of factors has been developed that have been shown to lead to successful Indigenous employment and business outcomes.

While many of the topics covered in this guide may be relevant to all industries, employers in the tourism industry are presented with unique opportunities and challenges. It should also be noted that information presented in this publication is only a guide and each business and Indigenous employees will be differing in their experiences and expectations. Employment relationships with Indigenous Australians take time to foster but improved employment outcomes will improve social and economic wellbeing for Indigenous populations, while at the same time changing attitudes in the broader community.

In addition to this guide a directory has been developed to assist employers to connect with services and programs that can assist them in their Indigenous employment initiatives. The directory is by no means exhaustive and aims to be updated on an annual basis. If you have information you wish to add please contact QTIC for future inclusion.

# The Benefits of Employing Indigenous Australians

## 1.1 Sustainable labour force

Long term labour and skill shortages in the Tourism Industry mean employers need to think strategically about building the workforce for the future. The Indigenous population in Australia is growing at a faster rate than the non-Indigenous population and has a very different age profile compared with the non-Indigenous community. Approximately fifty six percent of Indigenous Australians are under 25 years of age, compared with approximately thirty three percent of the rest of the population. Many employers see Indigenous employment as a pathway to building a sustainable, local, and dedicated workforce, especially in regional and remote areas.

## 1.2 Utilising the unique skills and knowledge of Indigenous Australians

In choosing to employ Indigenous staff, the unique qualities they bring to the visitor experience can value add to service and product, in turn providing a point of difference from competitors. Visitors actively engage with Indigenous staff and their involvement increases the tourist experiences of an authentic Australian product or service. Demand for an Indigenous experience by visitors appears to be consistent and somewhat resilient to industry fluctuations. Indigenous Australians also have great capacity to make excellent guides as story telling and oral communication is a large part of their culture. Indigenous knowledge and culture can assist tourism operators to manage land and marine resources.

## 1.3 Diversity in the workplace

Positive experiences with Indigenous staff by both patrons and co-workers reduce barriers to stereotyping and assist in understanding the diversity of Australia's Indigenous peoples. Diversity in the workplace can be the key to new ideas and innovation for enterprises.

## 1.4 Closing the Gap

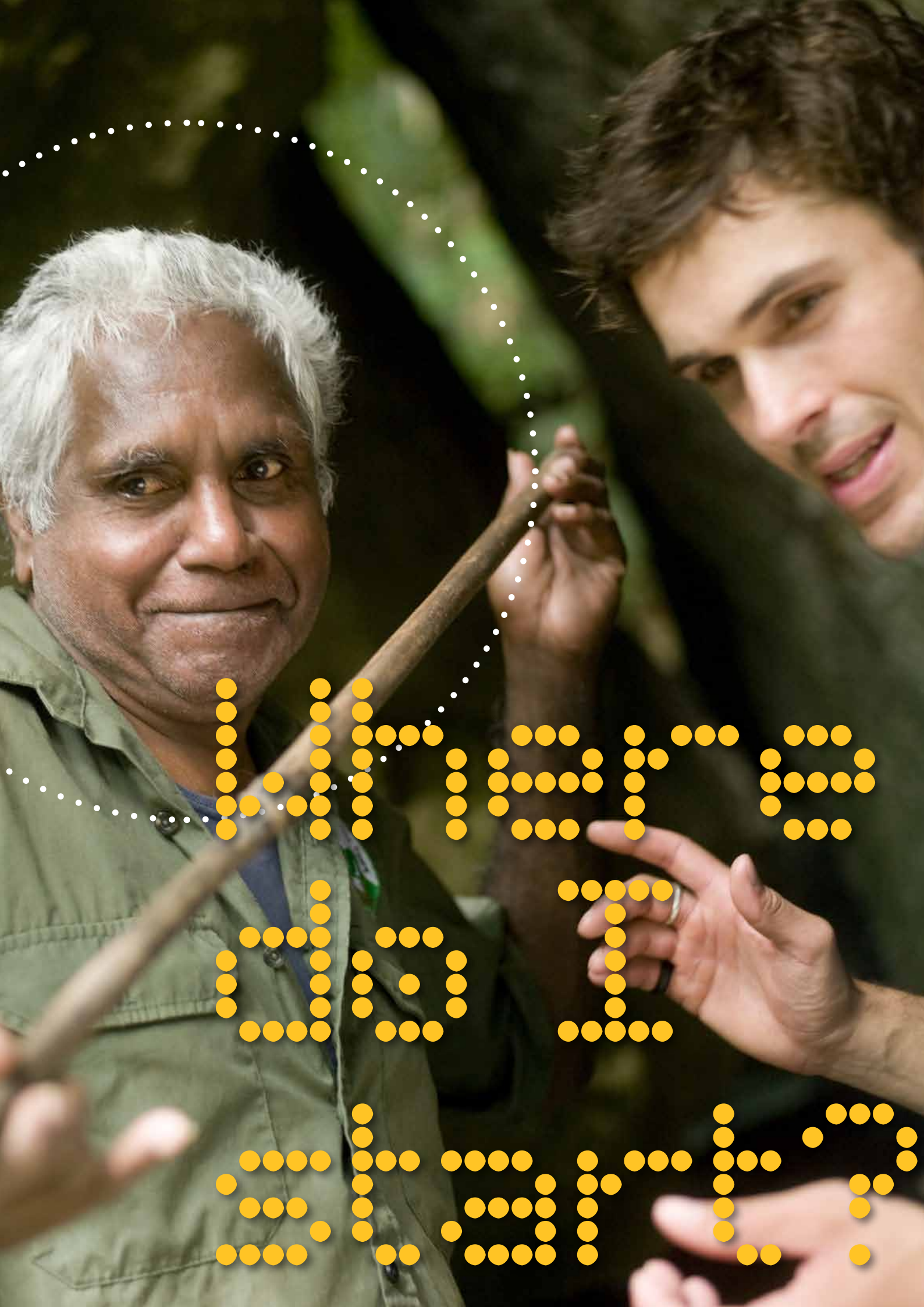
Indigenous Australians face many challenges to their social inclusion. The Australian Government, and State and Territory Governments have committed to Closing the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage across urban, rural and remote areas. Six key target areas have been identified to reduce Indigenous disadvantage, these include: life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational attainment and employment outcomes.

Improving employment outcomes for Indigenous job seekers is a key element in providing economic independence, which can address the long-term disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians. Employers have a critical role to play in supporting this process by employing local people in local jobs.

Employers can also support better education and training outcomes for Indigenous Australians by making links with local communities and involving them in accredited employment based training such as traineeships and apprenticeships.

## 1.5 Developing new markets and networks

Indigenous employees can provide insights into niche market opportunities that may not be obvious to non-Indigenous staff. Indigenous employees are better placed to deliver key messages to Indigenous communities and assist with developing new community networks and relationships.



*Developing and implementing an Indigenous Employment Strategy (IES) is a good place for an employer to start. An Indigenous Employment Strategy focuses on the methods in which a business employs and retains Indigenous people. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to developing a strategy. The diversity of business sizes, industry types, location and the needs of individual employees, will require employers to develop and implement ideas and strategies in a way that works best for them. Before designing your IES, it's important to be clear about the rationale for it and what it aims to achieve e.g. is it to build your employee capacity, retain long term employees or a community condition of a proposed development? Consider consulting key stakeholders (including Indigenous communities) for their input into the development of the plan.*

To assist employers, QTIC have provided a sample IES under section 5 of this document and this resource can be used by employers as a starting template. A list of ideas that you may wish to utilise in your IES has been provided under the following four headings:

- 
- 2.1 Planning to employ Indigenous Staff**
  - 2.2 Recruitment**
  - 2.3 Appointment**
  - 2.4 Retention**
  - 2.5 Management**

This list is by no means exhaustive and nor are you expected to include every idea offered here, but this material will give you some idea of where to start.

# 2.1 Planning to Employ Indigenous Staff

Employing Indigenous Australians can be a very rewarding experience for yourself and your business. Regardless of race, age and abilities building a great team of staff takes effort and understanding from both the employer and employee. Although human resource approaches and methods of the successful employers highlighted in the following case studies differ, some commonalities are exemplified.



- A genuine commitment to valuing Indigenous employees.
- Many of the employers did not arrive at successes overnight and have been persistent and patient in their efforts.
- Treating Indigenous employees in a manner no different to other staff in terms of performance and expectations.
- Providing staff with the opportunity for professional development and greater responsibilities in the work place.
- Recognising cultural differences do not equate to poor work ethics, but require flexibility in management styles to ensure cultural equity.
- Undertaking Indigenous cultural awareness and training prior to employment, for the employer and staff members, will improve communication channels and reduce misunderstandings in the workplace due to cultural differences. It is not about becoming an expert but recognising and appreciating differences and having an understanding of these and accepting them.
- Gain knowledge of circumstances surrounding the settlement history and background of your region. Insights into local Indigenous issues may assist in generating positive relationships between employer and employee.
- Start to build a relationship with your local Indigenous community. You may consider sponsoring an event or sporting team.
- Develop an IES - gain feedback from key stakeholders prior to implementation.
- Research and identify any funding and support available from government bodies. Refer to the online QTIC directory for a quick reference guide.
- Pooling with other employers to promote job opportunities due to the long lead time to develop relationship and trust with Indigenous communities and agencies.

## 2.2 Recruitment

- Writing job advertisements and position descriptions so they have the best chance of attracting interest from Indigenous participants. Promote that you encourage Indigenous applicants e.g.: 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are encouraged to apply'.
  - Talk about the abilities needed to do the job, rather than specifying qualifications and use plain English.
  - Focusing more on face-to-face rather than written communication with potential applicants.
  - Placing emphasis on finding applicants with the right attitude as job skills can be developed through training.
  - Utilise organisations that specialise in Indigenous employment, such as local job network providers, local structured training employment projects service providers - STEP ERS or the nearest Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) organisation. (refer to directory)
  - The National Indigenous Cadetship Project links employers with students at diploma, advanced diploma or undergraduate degree levels at TAFE, Registered Training Organisations or Universities who are seeking work experience and potentially employment.
  - Contact the New Apprentice Centre Hotline 1800 639 629 for an Indigenous apprentice or trainee.
  - Showcasing your business to Indigenous job seekers at Indigenous Employment Expos.
  - Developing a relationship with the Local Traditional Owner group and community elders who can assist you to identify suitable candidates.
  - Use Indigenous media outlets to advertise positions such as Koori Mail, National Indigenous Times, local community radio and events.
  - An effective approach for many employers has been to ask existing Indigenous employees or friends if they know any family or friends who may be interested in the position.
- Despite having substantial abilities, some Indigenous jobseekers may lack industry awareness and confidence. They may not initially understand questions and terminology. Take this into account when interviewing and:
- Create a relaxed environment for interviews.
  - Be open, honest and sincere.
  - Allow sufficient time for responses.
  - Consider providing interview questions to applicants prior to the interview.
  - Recognise that the Indigenous interviewee may not wish to make direct eye contact.
  - Give the option for a support person to attend the interview, and be aware that sometimes the support person may speak on behalf of the applicant.
  - Clearly communicate your expectations regarding the interview process, and the position being offered.
  - Be flexible, interested in the person, and aware of cultural issues.
  - If the interview is to be done by a panel consider having an Indigenous staff member on the selection panel.
  - Ensure selection criteria for positions recognise life experience as a valid alternative to formal qualifications.
  - The use of open ended questions can be effective in finding out information in regard to the applicant's work skills and life experiences, job expectations and career expectations.

## 2.3

## Appointment

Induction is an important opportunity to clearly communicate your expectations and to advise new staff of their responsibilities. It is also time to inspire new staff to work with you. The Indigenous employee's first impressions are important.

Induction should include:

- Be clear on expectations.
- An overview of the organisation, its structure, its vision.
- Occupational health and safety training.
- Wages and conditions of employment.
- Introducing new staff to others in the workplace.
- Identifying mentors and workplace buddies.
- Providing clear directions and guidance.
- Explaining training and employment options available to new staff.
- Encouraging communication if difficulties arise.

Participation in hospitality and other tourism-related services also demands direct and intensive social interaction with tourists which many Indigenous people may not feel comfortable with immediately. Allow time for employees to observe others and build confidence in dealing with the public.

Indigenous staff may not necessarily be familiar with the workplace practices and culture of your business. Give people time to settle in to see how things are done. The human factor is often the key to retaining Indigenous employees and helping them to make their contribution to your business.



## 2.4

## Retention

Strategies for increasing retention include:

- Provision of on-going mentoring and support.
- Flexible work rosters.
- Provision of career development opportunities while addressing the overall personal and professional development of the individual.
- Provision of family support in some cases.
- Addressing potential racism in the workforce.
- Celebrating success and achievement.





## 2.5

# Management – Some cultural differences to consider

### Mentoring

Many Indigenous employees can feel isolated in the workplace and can lack confidence in their abilities. Establishing mentors within the workplace has assisted many organisations to improve the recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees. Mentoring is a partnership that supports development and learning in the workplace by the sharing of experience and knowledge; this often includes helping staff to identify their own learning needs and ways of meeting them through a more experienced person. A list of mentors both volunteer and professional is in the Employers' Directory to Indigenous Employment.

#### Benefits of a mentoring approach:

- The importance of building relationships between mentor and employee based on mutual respect and trust.
- The mentor's capacity to communicate effectively and work across cultures.
- Any cultural factors that may impact on the mentor/employee relationship.
- A mentor does not necessarily need to be a buddy.
- A buddy system also works well for Indigenous workers as they have someone to talk to and who cares about their emotional well being.
- Consider employing more than one Indigenous person.

## Sorry Business - the need for Indigenous staff to attend funerals

Non indigenous personnel may feel frustrated in this situation when work is disrupted. When an Aboriginal person takes a week off for a funeral this can cause resentment. However, for most Aboriginal people, attending funerals and taking part in the mourning business is very important. Attending the funeral of people they know and /or are related to ensures that the spirit of the dead person is put to rest properly. If they do not attend or the funeral is not completed according to culture, the spirit may cause the person problems. Funerals are also important family times. If a person didn't attend a funeral and spend time with the family, he/she may be seen as not valuing family. Take the time to discuss with the worker the support he/she needs to fulfil his/her obligation. An example may be putting a leave plan into place for funerals or cultural days that require an absence from the workplace. Set up flexible work hours and rosters. It might be useful to take time to discuss with non-Indigenous employees the importance of sorry business for Indigenous employees as well.

## Eye contact

Aboriginal people traditionally do not appreciate direct eye contact during conversations. Direct eye contact can be interpreted as being aggressive for Indigenous people. For non-Indigenous people, this is sometimes thought to be rude and often thought to be inattentive. As time goes on – eye contact is becoming less of an issue but it still needs to be considered particularly in remote regions. This is more noticeable when the person is feeling uncomfortable or stressed. Holding the head down looking at the floor during an interview is a classic example of this. Never assume the person is not listening or uninterested.

## Language, Literacy and numeracy issues

If literacy is a problem, offer visual options within the education sessions:

- Handling equipment.
- Use pictorial resources such as videos or photos.

Many Indigenous people will tell you 'they are good with their hands' - so allow people to be 'hands on'.

## Build trust in business and personally

To be successful with Indigenous employment or partnerships trust needs to be developed between both parties. This trust is not only trust and relationship building between individuals but also between businesses going into partnership. Again, a realistic time frame needs to allow building this. The eagerness of business operators can often deliver unintentional but inappropriate actions due to requiring a quick response time or immediate results when dealing with Traditional Owners or business partners. Building solid relationships takes a long time.

## Social Structures

Quite often, many non-Indigenous people are unaware of what is considered acceptable behaviour when in contact with Indigenous people and this can be detrimental to the communication processes used in consultation. Social structures differ from community to community particularly in remote communities, so no one rule for activity will necessarily apply to all.

## Overcoming the challenges associated with employee perceptions of differential treatment of Indigenous co-workers

Co-workers may feel Indigenous employees receive special treatment e.g. additional time off, extra attention or position only granted because employee is Indigenous. Lack of cultural awareness training for staff prior to employing Indigenous people can lead to a lack of understanding with workplace integration. This can be overcome with cross cultural training and open honest dialogue between the employer and staff.

## Employee Burnout

Capable Indigenous people in tourism are often in high demand for role models, mentors, board members and committees often at the detriment of their business by placing additional pressure on their time. Indigenous employees are often taken for granted to be cultural experts on any situation and therefore may feel unacceptable demands are placed on them to fill a multitude of roles.

## Indigenous employees can draw on company/business resources

Employers are often unaware of assistance and support that is available. Funding assistance is available from government and mentoring support can be sourced through employment agencies. (Refer to QTIC's Directory of Indigenous Services and Programmes. [www.qtic.com.au](http://www.qtic.com.au).)

## The Yes Yes Syndrome

Many Indigenous people were raised under a governing system that encouraged them to offer the expected answer of yes to questions. The result was many Indigenous people offered yes responses that did not indicate their actual belief and often declined to give responses that required an explanation. People were also reluctant to explain themselves or their behaviour for any reason. This was considered the easiest way to stay out of trouble. Difficulties still exist for Indigenous people to overcome the habits that were part of this conditioning. For some families this learnt behaviour has continued into the next generations. This can have disastrous outcomes within the areas of understanding and consent. True understanding of the issue needs to be clarified and ensured before assuming that yes means understanding or that no indicates non-interest.

## Do not assume knowledge

Do not assume Indigenous people have knowledge of their culture or history. For various reasons, including separation from communities and families, many Indigenous people have been isolated from their own communities. Because they are Indigenous does not necessarily make them experts in Indigenous issues. Many Indigenous people feel uncomfortable being put in a position of having to talk about themselves.

## Shame

If an Indigenous person said he/she was 'shamed' it generally means embarrassed. An Indigenous worker can often be quite shy and feel 'shamed' if singled out, or laughed at in front of their work mates. The 'singling-out' may be for positive reasons; however, it might leave an Indigenous person feeling shamed because they do not wish to appear better than anyone else – particularly better than any other Indigenous person.



# Indigenous Employment Strategy Template for Small Business

## Planning Stage - Pre employment

Strategy	Actions	Who	When	Measurement
Identify local stakeholders and networks in your region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Indigenous Community Profile</li> <li>Local Training organisation</li> <li>Government employer support</li> <li>Local Indigenous employment agencies</li> </ul>		Prior to developing your IES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compilation of a local community employment profile</li> </ul>
Establish Links with Indigenous community and employment services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek out any government assistance &amp; funding opportunities</li> <li>Meet with local Job service agencies to explain your needs &amp; job expectations</li> <li>Look at ways to create networks with the local Indigenous community</li> </ul>		Prior to employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of relevant contacts made</li> <li>Funding sources identified</li> <li>Relationships formed with community</li> </ul>
Development of your Indigenous Employment Strategy (IES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>List the objectives of your IES</li> <li>Seek input &amp; feedback from stakeholders in the development of your IES</li> <li>Review of recruitment and induction processes to ensure they are culturally appropriate</li> </ul>		Development stage of your IES	
Increase workplace understanding of Indigenous culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake Indigenous Cultural Awareness Training</li> </ul>	Management/ existing staff	Prior to Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completion of training</li> </ul>
Create a workplace that values Indigenous culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledge Indigenous days of importance</li> <li>Acknowledge traditional owners in workplace practices where appropriate e.g. meetings, tours etc</li> <li>Use of local Indigenous art, stories etc in the workplace</li> </ul>		Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased presence of Indigenous culture in the workplace</li> </ul>

## Employment of Indigenous employees

Strategy	Actions	Who	When	Measurement
Design an effective job advertisement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use simple language</li> <li>Talk about necessary skills rather than qualifications</li> <li>Use wording "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are encouraged to apply"</li> </ul>		Prior to advertising position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of Indigenous applicants</li> </ul>
Use appropriate advertising sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use Indigenous media outlets- newspaper, radio and websites.</li> <li>Place adds on community noticeboards</li> <li>Use Word of Mouth - let people in community know you are recruiting staff</li> <li>Utilise local Indigenous employment service provider or employment broker</li> <li>Advertise on uni and TAFE websites</li> </ul>		Recruitment phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The number of applications that reply</li> <li>Feedback from applicants on how they sourced the information</li> </ul>
Use interview process that are culturally suitable for Indigenous applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a relaxed environment for interviews</li> <li>If using a panel for interviews, consider the use of Indigenous person as a panel member</li> <li>Consider providing a list of questions to the applicant prior to interview</li> <li>Clearly communicate your expectations regarding the interview process, and the position being offered</li> <li>Ensure selection criteria for positions recognise life experience in the workplace and the community as a valid alternative to formal qualifications</li> </ul>		Interviewing stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback from applicants on the interview process</li> </ul>
Use the induction phase to communicate clearly work expectations and workplace processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up arrangements or plans to accommodate potential cultural obligations that the employee may encounter in the future</li> <li>Clearly explain workplace culture and processes to employee</li> <li>Establish support systems within the workplace</li> </ul>		Induction phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback from applicants</li> <li>Successful transition of new employees into the workplace</li> </ul>

## Management and Retention of Indigenous employees

Strategy	Actions	Who	When	Measurement
Develop support & mentoring systems for Indigenous employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appoint a culturally supportive mentor for the employee</li> <li>Where possible employ more than one Indigenous employee for internal support</li> </ul>		At the start of employment period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing reviews with employees about employment conditions</li> <li>Employee retention rates</li> </ul>
Ascertain career pathways and training opportunities for employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enable Indigenous employees to develop their own goals and objectives with the business</li> <li>Provide training to support career development especially into management roles</li> </ul>		Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of training records</li> <li>Progress of employee into positions of career ambition</li> </ul>
Create a workplace that values Indigenous culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledge Indigenous days of importance</li> <li>Acknowledge traditional owners in workplace practices where appropriate e.g. meetings, tours etc</li> <li>Use of local Indigenous art, stories etc in the workplace</li> </ul>		Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased presence of Indigenous culture in the workplace</li> </ul>

# List of Contributors to Employer's Guide & Strategy

*The following Queensland Tourism Businesses have contributed their practical experience, wisdom and insight to this document:*

Adventure North  
Australia Zoo  
Big Cat Cruises  
Billabong Sanctuary & Bungalow Bay Koala Village  
Brisbane Airport Corporation  
CaPTA Group  
Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary  
Dedicated Training and Consulting Group  
Daintree Eco Lodge & Spa  
Dreamtime Cultural Centre  
Echo Creek Adventure and Cultural Centre  
Fusion Organics  
Freeman Consulting  
Greyhound Australia  
Indidj-n-arts Gallery  
IPA  
Iron Bark Ridge Conference and Meeting Centre  
Jim Ralph Consulting  
Jupiters Casino  
Kookaburra Tours  
Oz Tours  
Paronella Park  
Reef HQ  
Riverlife Mirrabooka  
Savannah Guides  
Skytrans  
Seaworld  
South Bank Corporation  
South East Queensland Indigenous Chamber of Commerce  
Skyrail  
Sunferries  
Tjapukai  
Tourism Leisure Corporation  
Townsville Enterprises Limited  
Undarra Experiences  
Velocity Creative Pty Ltd  
Tourism Queensland

*The following university and government departments have contributed valuable insights and information towards the development and revision of this information.*

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations  
Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, (Wal Meta Unit)  
Department of Environment and Resource Management  
James Cook University

**Contact:**

Queensland Tourism Industry Council

Level 11, 30 Makerston Street, Brisbane QLD 4000

PO Box 13162, George Street, QLD 4003

Tel: 07 3236 1445

Fax: 07 3236 4552

Email: [info@qtic.com.au](mailto:info@qtic.com.au) Website: [www.qtic.com.au](http://www.qtic.com.au)