



**Victorian
Public Sector
Commission**



Recruiting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff

An essential part to building an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce is to identify how to attract and recruit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander candidates.

Community relationship building is important for recruitment and often your organisation or Government area needs to be known to the local community and regarded positively before members of the community will consider applying for jobs within your organisation. Community relationship building is important for recruitment because:

- the community can act as an effective conduit of information
- news and information is often shared by word of mouth
- your organisation may become more aware of cultural practices which could help to refine your attraction and recruitment strategies
- it can help identify particular barriers to employment, such as past culturally inappropriate action
- it has the capacity to increase networks

It may help you identify potential staff for current jobs and assist in building a future employment pool for your organisation.

Recruitment Pathways

When recruiting, you should follow your organisation's usual recruitment processes with some additional steps to successfully recruit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff. Some recruitment methods across the Victorian public sector include:

- The Victorian government graduate program (formerly VPS GRADS) or organisations' own graduate recruitment program: university graduates with three-year or longer degrees for a 12-month development program to learn about government.
- Cadetship programs: cadets are usually Year 12 or first-year university students. The program combines academic life with structured work experience.
- Traineeship programs: traineeships are a pathway for trainees to work and learn simultaneously. Traineeships use competency-based training focusing on performance rather than knowledge.
- Use of employment or recruitment agencies
- Advertising through a range of ways.

Designing and describing position descriptions

Prior to advertising and recruitment, it is important to think about what a job involves, including the most appropriate skills, attributes, knowledge and experience required. Use plain English and inclusive language and avoid using jargon. To attract a broader range of applicants, you might focus on what the person in the role will be doing and the skills they will need rather than on formal qualifications, particularly where these qualifications are not mandatory requirements of a role. Often qualifications listed as mandatory on position descriptions can be replaced with life experience or professional experience and practical knowledge.

In some cases, Key Selection Criteria (KSC) could assess the potential of applicants to grow into the role. This often results in a broader group of applicants with a range of different skills. You should place value on life experience, practical knowledge and connections to Community as part of the KSC. Offer to clarify the KSC and offer the opportunity to seek assistance with drafting answers.

Advertising

While you should follow your organisation's usual marketing strategies, it is beneficial to follow some extra steps to attract and recruit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff.

Some good advertising channels for attracting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff that can be employed alongside conventional methods are:

- Word of mouth
- Koori Mail
- Social media
- Career Trackers
- Indigenous Employment Australia
- National Indigenous Radio Service

Make all of your organisation's job advertisements attractive to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander candidates by including the following:

- A clear description of the role
- Leave entitlements including cultural leave
- Hours of work and potential for flexible working arrangements
- Innovative approaches such as using new technology
- The statement "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are encouraged to apply for this job"
- Images of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff members working in your organisations (with their consent).

Make sure time frames for applications are long enough for people to hear about the position through word-of-mouth.

Interviewing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff

Like all potential recruits, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people come from different backgrounds and communities and have different ways of doing things. Communication styles will differ and what works for one Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander recruit may not work for another, especially when you are recruiting employees across a range of levels. The following are helpful suggestions for you to consider when interviewing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff:

- Ensure the interview space is welcoming and culturally safe.
- Provide interview questions prior to the interview to reduce anxiety and ensure interviewees have the opportunity to present their best case.
- Engage existing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees in promoting the benefits of a career in your organisation. For example attending Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander job fairs or speaking in a promotional video.

- Provide recruitment information to Aboriginal Community organisations, networks, employment and careers expos and community events.
- Include an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person on the selection panel.
- Include an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander male on the selection panel for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander male candidates and an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander female on the panel for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander female candidates whenever possible.
- Ensure panel members have completed cultural capability training, unconscious bias training and merit-based selection training.
- Provide support to applicants before the interview, e.g. provide clear instructions about access to the building, the selection process and interview format and panel members.
- Be aware that there could be differences in communication styles, e.g. silences might be longer for some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people as they provide an opportunity for deeper thought and it may not be polite for some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to make lots of eye contact.¹
- Be aware that, for some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, self-advocating or “talking yourself up” may not come naturally due to social and cultural norms. Some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander applicants may be inclined to speak more in terms of team or group outcomes rather than personal achievements.

Recruitment of non-Aboriginal and/or non-Torres Strait Islander staff

Recruitment of non-Aboriginal and/or non-Torres Strait Islander staff, carers and volunteers should include a focus on cultural capability. Staff selection must, for example, assess whether applicants understand the historical and contemporary issues that affect Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal Employment Officers and Aboriginal Employment Plans

Aboriginal Employment Officers (AEO) and Aboriginal Employment Plans (AEP) are best practice for recruiting and retaining Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff and ensuring your organisation is culturally competent and safe.

What is an Aboriginal Employment Officer?

An AEO is responsible for:

- Providing ongoing support to new and existing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff
- Developing an AEP and coordinating its implementation
- Providing ongoing support to stakeholders, including managers, as well as establishing and maintaining external relationships.

While some of this work can be done by human resources staff, experience shows that this does not deliver results and does not provide the necessary support to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff or the necessary focus for an AEP.

Tips for engaging an AEO:

- If possible, invest in an ongoing, full time, AEO role
- If your organisation cannot appoint its own AEO, try and share an AEO with another organisation
- If the AEO is appointed from outside the organisation, ensure that have full access to consult and collaborate broadly and effectively

What is an Aboriginal Employment Plan?

An AEP is a comprehensive plan that sets out a series of coordinated and consistent organisational activities to increase the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees.

An AEP will:

- Provide the basis for agreement about activities to be undertaken
- Specify what actions are to be undertaken
- Identify who will be responsible for initiatives, as well as designating overall responsibility
- Highlight implementation timelines
- Provide the basis for benchmarking progress and reporting

Tips for developing an AEP:

- Ensure there is a plan with a clear picture of who, what, how, when, and how much

is being invested

- Set up management structures that provide clear lines for endorsement and accountability
- Include as many people from as many different areas of the organisation as possible during the planning phase.

View an example of the [Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet's plan](#).

Questions for managers and workplaces when recruiting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff:

- Do you have an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander inclusion plan to attract, recruit and retain Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff?
 - Do your recruitment approaches attract Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander applicants and lead to recruitment of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff?
 - Does your area/organisation induction for all new staff, carers and volunteers include:
 - the organisation's support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and social justice?
 - The organisations commitment to cultural capability and cultural awareness or cultural safety content in the training?
 - the organisation's commitment to cultural safety and intolerance of racism and cultural abuse?
 - the organisation's commitment to cultural capability?
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Useful links and other information

[Aboriginal Employment Plan Example 1 – DEWLP](#)

[Aboriginal Workforce Strategy – Koori employment](#)

(1) Source: National Association of Community Legal Centres Recruiting and Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees: A guide for community legal centres 2017.