



**Victorian
Public Sector
Commission**



Inducting and welcoming Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff

To support culturally safe workplaces, hiring managers and teams are encouraged to attend Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability training prior to new staff members coming on board.

Get in touch with your organisation's Aboriginal and/or Diversity and Inclusion team to find out what Aboriginal Cultural Capability training is available. You can also find providers on the [Kinaway](#) or [Supply Nation](#) business directory.

[Cultural awareness](#) means being aware of, and developing sensitivity to, cultural difference and cultural diversity.

[Cultural safety](#) is an environment that is safe for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, where there's no assault, challenge or denial of their identity and experience.

Read more

[Aboriginal Cultural Capability](#)

Induction

A good induction process is vital for all new employees. It helps new starters feel welcome and comfortable and gives them the information they need to effectively perform their role.

It's also an opportunity for organisations to build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability by including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and social justice as part of their values and vision
- a commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence and ongoing training
- a commitment to cultural safety and intolerance of racism and cultural abuse in their employee code of conduct
- information about intergenerational trauma and lateral violence
- a commitment to creating partnerships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations to enhance their service deliver

Every employee is different, and the induction process should be tailored to best suit them.

General induction tips:

- introduce the new staff member to other staff and management, e.g. through a welcome morning tea
- provide an induction kit with organisational policies and other material
- advise new staff of the available support mechanisms
- provide a clear outline of the job expectations and explain organisational systems and policies

If these don't form part of your usual induction process, plan an initial conversation to:

- let them know you have an open-door policy
- discuss their leave entitlements in relation to cultural obligations and needs (see below)
- discuss what supervision approach they'd prefer
- tell them about mentoring, training and other career development options your organisation makes available for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff

Introductions

Creating opportunities for your new starter to meet their colleagues and connect are important.

Things you can do:

- ask if they'd like to meet other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees and/or be connected to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peer networks
- connect them with a work buddy or an informal mentor. If their buddy/mentor isn't Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, connect the buddy/mentor with resources like the [Aboriginal Cultural Capability Toolkit](#).

Things to avoid:

- Introducing a new starter as 'our new Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employee' (or similar). Many people don't define their employment by their cultural background.

Identity

When getting to know your new starter, it's important not to make insensitive comments or ask inappropriate questions.

Do not:

- Ask what percentage or 'how much' Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander they are. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people generally view being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander as either something you are or aren't.
- Assume they're across the languages and protocols of other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander groups.
- Share their personal story with anyone else if they've decided to share it with you. It's their story to tell.
- Assign Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander-specific work if it doesn't align with their role or interests. It could be inappropriate, especially if you're doing so because they're Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Inclusive language

When speaking about or with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people it's best to use phrases like "Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander", "Koori/Koorie", "First Nations",

or Traditional owner names (such as “Yorta Yorta” or “Wurundjeri”).

Koori/Koorie is a word broadly used by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people from south-eastern Australia to describe themselves. This is different to more specific Traditional Owner names such as Yorta Yorta or Wurundjeri. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people from other parts of Australia may use different words such as Murri, Nyoongar, Palawah, etc to generally describe themselves.

Don’t use acronyms or other phrases like “ATSI” or “Aborigine/s”. These are outdated and can have negative connotations.

There are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander English words and phrases. If they aren’t part of your regular vocabulary, it’s best to avoid using them. It might come across as inauthentic or awkward.

Read more

[Aboriginal Culture and History](#)

Cultural leave

The Victorian Government recognises that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees may have cultural responsibilities requiring their absence from work.

Advise new starters on their leave cultural leave entitlements. They may include but is not limited to:

- attendance at significant community meetings or events
- Sorry Business (bereavement and funerals)

For Victorian public sector employees not employed under the VPS Agreement, we encourage organisations to think flexibly to help employees meet their cultural obligations.

Read more

[Cultural and Ceremonial Leave](#)

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander protocols

Respectful relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

communities will involve an understanding and respect for protocols. Ceremonies and protocols are an important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

These include but are not limited to:

- Welcome to Country
- Acknowledgment of Country and Elders

A Welcome to Country can only be performed by a Traditional Owner from the [Formally Recognised Traditional Owner](#) relevant to that location.

An [Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners](#) can be done by anyone.

Read more

[Aboriginal protocols](#)

[Aboriginal Victoria Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners](#)