



ABORIGINAL ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

FOR THE WESTERN
AUSTRALIAN CIVIL
CONSTRUCTION
INDUSTRY



LANDCORP



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CCF WA and LandCorp acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the land on which the civil construction industry operates across WA. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations who have contributed to and continue to contribute to our State, as we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.

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Georgiou Group, Central Earthmoving, Ertech,
Brierty and Underground Services.

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Contents

Foreword	4
Introduction	6
What is Aboriginal Engagement?	9
Committing To and Promoting Aboriginal Engagement	10
Recruiting and Retaining Aboriginal Employees	13
Culturally Appropriate Human Resource Practices	18
Joint Ventures and Partnership Arrangements	22
Aboriginal Community Engagement	24
Building Strong Relationships	26
Aboriginal Engagement Resources	35
Industry Leaders: Georgiou Group	42
Industry Leaders: Ertech	46
Industry Leaders: Central Earthmoving	48
Industry Leaders: LandCorp	51
Industry Leaders: Brierty	52
Industry Leaders: Underground Services	56

Foreword



Frank Marra
Chief Executive
LandCorp

Civil contractors in Western Australia are increasingly turning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to fill the many and varied roles across the multitude of civil contracting roles which are vital to the continuing growth and development of this vast State.

There is a clear upwards trajectory in both the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers filling these important roles, and also in the number of companies that are enhancing their employee ranks with the active employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers.

By 2013, two thirds of civil contracting companies surveyed by the Civil Contractors Federation WA employed Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. This 66 per cent figure represents a significant improvement, up from 45 per cent in 2011.

The benefits that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers bring to their companies are many, and barriers to Indigenous employment, both perceived and real, are not insurmountable - as

demonstrated by some of WA's industry leaders in this highly informative *Aboriginal Engagement Guide*.

LandCorp is proud to partner with the Civil Contractors Federation WA in the publication of this Guide which includes case studies and practical advice to companies on how best to engage with and benefit from forming employment relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This partnership provides support to the wider industry, seeking to improve Aboriginal economic development through industry-led solutions. The information in this guide reflects the success of this approach, its positive impact on the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and the benefits for the greater civil contracting industry in Western Australia. ■

Introduction



Jeff Miller
Chief Executive Officer
Civil Contractors Federation WA

It is a pleasure to provide this introduction to our first *Aboriginal Engagement Guide*.

The civil construction industry has been a major employer of Aboriginal people across the State and will continue to be so. Our industry can be justifiably proud of its track record of providing sustainable employment opportunities for Aboriginal job-seekers.

We hope this Guide will help open the door to more opportunities, by being a source of effective strategies and practical advice for companies looking to increase their Aboriginal engagement, whether through direct employment, providing subcontracting opportunities, or forming contracting joint ventures.

CCF WA is tremendously grateful to LandCorp, without whose generous support this publication would have not been possible.

LandCorp and CCF WA have worked closely together since 2010 on strategies to address Aboriginal social and economic disadvantage through workforce participation and other opportunities for economic development in civil construction.

In mid-2010, a joint working group comprising LandCorp executives and

CCF WA members was established to develop LandCorp's *Guidelines for Aboriginal Participation within the WA Civil Construction and Landscaping Industries*.

These Guidelines aim to increase the long term employment of and engagement with Aboriginal people in the WA civil construction sector, through building better relationships and working together, recognising, respecting and responding to Aboriginal culture and heritage, creating and encouraging the education and employment of Aboriginal people, and supporting Aboriginal economic development.

While the compliance requirements laid out in the Guidelines have some flexibility, reflecting the reality that Aboriginal employment may not be achievable on all projects, there are some general expectations on all contractors wishing to work with LandCorp, such as:

- Implementing a statement of commitment and/or values establishing Aboriginal employment and development expectations within the induction process for both staff and subcontractors
- Participating in Aboriginal cultural awareness training
- Supporting on-site Aboriginal

monitors as appropriate for site sensitivity

- Participating in surveying to achieve industry benchmarking on Aboriginal employment development outcomes within the industry
- Working with other contractors to create sustainable Aboriginal employment where ever possible.

LandCorp's Guidelines also place more specific requirements depending on project value – recognising that targets set for a large company undertaking a \$10 million project may not be appropriate for a \$500,000 project being delivered by a smaller business.

For example, a contractor delivering a Category 1 (\$7 million-plus) project for LandCorp may be expected to provide an Aboriginal engagement and retention strategy and program and to train 80 per cent of line managers in general Aboriginal cultural awareness training; while a contractor on a Category 4 (up to \$1.5 million project) may be asked to implement an equal employment opportunity statement and ensure at least one person on site has received general Aboriginal cultural awareness training.

CCF WA's collaboration with LandCorp to develop the *Guidelines for Aboriginal Participation* was recognised with the Western Australia Institute of Public Administration (IPAA WA) Achievement Award for Best Practice in Collaboration Between Government and Non-Government Organisations.

Landcorp and CCF WA also worked together on a series of Indigenous Employment Benchmarking Surveys, designed to measure progress in some key indicators.

The surveys showed encouraging year-on-year growth in Aboriginal workforce participation, and a dramatic increase in companies putting in place the strategies for future success. Over the space of the first three surveys, from 2011 to 2013:

- The percentage of companies surveyed with an Aboriginal Employment Strategy grew from 26 per cent to 56 per cent.
- 58 per cent of companies surveyed in 2013 intend to increase their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce in the next 12 months – up from 36 per cent in 2011.
- The percentage of companies with a policy to encourage the use of Aboriginal-owned or controlled suppliers and/or contractors more than tripled, from 17 per cent in 2011 to 54 per cent in 2013.

Interviews conducted for the first Indigenous Employment Benchmarking Survey revealed a common theme – many respondent companies wanted to increase their Aboriginal workforce participation but had encountered a shortage of 'work-ready' candidates for job opportunities.

The Civil Start pre-employment program, funded by LandCorp and coordinated by CCF's training arm, Civil Train, was developed in response to these concerns.

Civil Start provided an entry pathway into civil construction for workers who might otherwise have been unable to break into the industry. The program included training in preparation for work, budgeting, drug and alcohol testing, goal setting and the completion of some units towards a Certificate III in Civil Construction.

The *Aboriginal Engagement Guide* is the latest phase in our collaboration with LandCorp. This guide contains practical advice for companies wishing to employ Aboriginal people and work in partnership with Aboriginal-owned companies.

We hope that this publication contributes to an increase in the long term employment of Aboriginal people in the WA civil construction industry, and helps strengthen existing relationships and cement new ones. ■

What is Aboriginal Engagement?

Aboriginal Engagement is the process of creating mutually supportive and effective relationships with Aboriginal people, their businesses and communities, to identify real and sustainable employment, training, and economic development to the betterment of all parties.

Aboriginal Engagement is complex, and must be undertaken with a long-term view and a focus on building sustainable relationships. A gradual and rewarding process can only be built on mutual trust and respect.

Key components of successful Aboriginal Engagement include:

- Aboriginal workforce participation through direct employment
- Joint ventures/partnerships with Aboriginal-owned companies
- Use of Aboriginal subcontractors and suppliers
- Involvement with the Aboriginal community.

According to the Business Council of Australia's *2014 Indigenous Engagement Survey Report*, companies benefited from Aboriginal Engagement through:

- Increased staff awareness/engagement
- Enhanced corporate culture
- Reputation
- Strengthened relationships with local Aboriginal communities
- A more diverse workforce.

Note: where appropriate, all references to Aboriginal people includes Torres Strait Islanders. However, for brevity only the term Aboriginal will be used in this Guide.

Committing To and Promoting Aboriginal Engagement

An organisation's commitment to Aboriginal Engagement has to be company-wide and driven by the owners/directors and senior management. It is not adequate or sustainable for mid-level managers or individuals, seeking to positively affect a project or workplace, to instigate unplanned engagement strategies with Aboriginal employees.

As with any business opportunity, it is vital that a company's business development team understands the relationship of, and with, Aboriginal clients and stakeholders. Ideally, it would be beneficial business practice to ensure that everyone within a business (or at least 75-80 per cent of employees) had undertaken cultural awareness training prior to Aboriginal employees joining the company.

A business committing to Aboriginal Engagement should consider the development and implementation of some or all of the following documents.

A strong and clear **Aboriginal Engagement Policy** can demonstrate your commitment to Aboriginal Engagement. The policy needs to be no more than one page and may set out your commitment to actively:

- Attract, retain and develop an Aboriginal workforce
- Build and maintain mutually respectful and productive relationships with Aboriginal people and their communities in the areas your business operates
- Productively engage with Aboriginal businesses and suppliers to encourage their participation in your procurement practices and supply chains
- Encourage the participation of other subcontractors working with your business on projects to actively participate in the principles stated above while working on projects under your leadership.

An **Aboriginal Engagement Strategy** is a fundamental document, which provides the foundation to the delivery of Aboriginal Engagement programs and services by your business. In this respect, it performs a similar function to a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and may be a company's first step to implementing a RAP.

The Aboriginal Engagement Strategy should incorporate an **Aboriginal Workforce Strategy**, which details the strategies and programs that the business will engage in to meet its Aboriginal workforce commitments. Regardless of the size of your business or the number of Aboriginal people employed, there is tremendous value in developing an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy.

The Aboriginal Engagement Strategy should also incorporate an **Aboriginal Procurement and Supply Chain Strategy**, outlining how preference will be given to Aboriginal-owned suppliers and to companies that are also active in Aboriginal Engagement.

An **Aboriginal Project Implementation Plan** provides an outline for the business and can be attached to any tendering submission to demonstrate how the business would undertake Aboriginal Engagement practices and processes on the relevant project. The plan then serves as a tool for the Project Manager and other members of the project team to implement effective Aboriginal Engagement. For the client, the plan provides key deliverables that the contractor can report against during the life of the project.

A **Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)** can assist an employer to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for Aboriginal Engagement. An initiative of Reconciliation Australia (reconciliation.org.au), RAPs provide a framework for organisations to realise their vision for reconciliation. The four key elements of a successful RAP are relationships, respect, opportunities and reporting.

An external consultant can assist with the development and implementation of an effective RAP. As with any strategy for Aboriginal Engagement, success begins with commitment from the highest levels of your business. To signal this commitment, the Board, Managing Director or Chief Executive Officer of your business should send out a notification to all employees advising that the business is fully committed to the development of a RAP and will be making changes to its operations to accommodate these new changes. This is also a great opportunity to encourage the workforce to pursue company-wide opportunities to actively and culturally appropriately engage with members of the local Aboriginal community.

A RAP Working Group, comprising key representatives from across your business, should guide development of the RAP. While it is important that each key division of the business be represented, it is equally important that there is a mix of gender and cultural diversity within the working group.

It is important to note that depending on the size of your business, a RAP does not have to be a large document. The key sections of a RAP's development may even be covered in around ten pages.

Employing an Aboriginal Engagement Professional

Many employers may not be skilled in engaging with Aboriginal people and, depending on the size of their business, may consider recruiting or contracting an Aboriginal Engagement professional to assist with laying a sound foundation for the business.

The engagement of such a professional can be a good option to provide

important insight into the most effective way to ensure engagement in everyday business from the beginning. Wisely investing in this part of your business will ensure that you have an Aboriginal Engagement process that best meets the needs of your business and complements and enhances the way you do business.

When engaging an Aboriginal Engagement professional, ensure the person chosen for the role has a proven record of accomplishment and is able to implement effective Aboriginal Engagement processes. In addition, this professional should have extensive networks and knowledge of the construction sector.

The Aboriginal Engagement professional should be positioned within your business so that he or she can be actively involved in business development. This allows the Aboriginal Engagement to monitor the direction of a business and identify possible opportunities to effectively engage Aboriginal communities, businesses and suppliers.

The Aboriginal Engagement professional is also able to contribute to the tender development process right through to submission as well as support the project team on successful award.

Recruiting and Retaining Aboriginal Employees

There are a number of ways to attract and recruit suitable Aboriginal candidates to your workforce, both direct and indirect. Direct engagement is where your business directly sources Aboriginal candidates and employs them to vacant roles in your business. To attract suitable candidates, you should consider:

- Advertising your vacancies on public electronic jobs boards, such as the Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre's recently launched electronic jobs board (dtwd.wa.gov.au/AWDC)
- Engaging with local Jobactive (jobactive.gov.au) providers
- Emailing your vacancy to the nearest Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre (dtwd.wa.gov.au/AWDC)
- Word of mouth through your networks or local Aboriginal community networks
- Developing a relationship with the Vocational, Training & Employment Centres (VTECs) operating across the state
- Advertising in Aboriginal-specific print media such as The Indigenous Times or Koori News
- Contacting The ROADS Foundation (roadsfoundation.com.au) to see how it can best assist you in meeting your entry-level recruitment needs.

Indirect engagement may be achieved by encouraging subcontractors to commit to Aboriginal Engagement on a project, for example by including a requirement for subcontractors to meet an Aboriginal Engagement participation rate, which may be translated to a dollar value. This may be expressed in part as additional workforce participation (wages to Aboriginal employees), engagement of Aboriginal subcontractors or suppliers up to a percentage value of the overall cost of the contract value, or a mixture of both.

For more information on recruitment, the Australian Human Rights Commission's publication *Targeted Recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (available for download at humanrights.gov.au) is a comprehensive guide to implementing targeted recruitment strategies.

Pre-employment training programs

On occasion, Aboriginal candidates may require additional support or direction when entering the workforce. For some, the opportunity your company has provided may be their first real employment opportunity. In Western Australia, the Federal Government provides funding to Vocational, Training &

Employment Centres (VTECs – generationone.org.au/vtec) that can assist your company with identifying the support services necessary to prepare potential candidates for long-term employment. VTECs can provide ‘wrap around’ support for the first 26 weeks of work, at no cost to the employer.

Similarly, The ROADS Foundation (roadsfoundation.com.au) can assist employers to source and prepare potential candidates for traineeships and apprenticeships. Their team supports the trainee throughout the traineeship process by working with the employer and the trainee’s supervisors as well as setting up an effective and supportive mentoring and coaching program. The ROADS Foundation is also well positioned to assist your business source possible funding options.

Preparing your business

Before taking on Aboriginal employees, consider cultural awareness training for your existing staff. Many non-Aboriginal people may not know or have spoken to an Aboriginal person prior to their commencement in the workplace. It is therefore important to provide your workforce with an introduction to the local Aboriginal culture and people and allow your workplace to openly discuss some of the situations that may arise in a workplace setting and how to navigate them effectively.

Encouraging a level of cultural awareness for all employees, particularly those working with Aboriginal employees, will enable greater engagement, retention and development opportunities across the board. Beyond cultural awareness training, employers should also consider cultural competency training for all employees, particularly those in supervisory and management positions. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees should attend training together where possible. This will give everyone a better understanding of cultural differences and similarities and help build strong and productive working relationships.

A list of competent training providers delivering cultural competency training is available from the Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre (dtwd.wa.gov.au/AWDC).

Induction and welcome

Businesses should have fair and realistic expectations of Aboriginal employees and must discuss these expectations with them. Managers and other employees must appreciate that for some Aboriginal employees the job they are beginning is the first they have had, or the first in a substantial period.

A good introduction to a workplace is important and first impressions are critical. Let other employees know when a new person is starting and ensure

they are prepared to make their new colleague welcome. Introduce the new person to their colleagues gradually – introducing too many workmates at once may be confusing and overwhelming.

When welcoming new employees, clearly explain the way your business operates, as this will help avoid misunderstandings later on. Make sure new employees are aware of standard operating procedures relating to working hours (start and finish times), as well as who to contact in the event of a workplace absence due to illness. Managers and those in a position of authority should ensure all new employees have the contact details of a supervisor and/or the company's Aboriginal Engagement professional before finishing work on the first day.

As part of a company induction, talk through policies and procedures relating to matters such as wages and conditions of employment; leave entitlements and processes for applying for leave; occupational health and safety; career pathways; and training and career development opportunities. This information is often included in an induction kit, along with an overview of the business and a description of its structure and vision.

Businesses engaging a cohort of Aboriginal employees should consider running a group induction session to ensure understanding of the workplace culture and employees' rights and responsibilities.

Having and building a strong relationship is key for Aboriginal people. It is the foundation to how interactions are mostly done. Businesses should encourage supervisors to take the time to get to know their Aboriginal employees.

An inclusive workplace environment is important to help Aboriginal employees feel welcome, supported, engaged and respected. Where possible, businesses should consider displaying the Aboriginal flag, paintings by local Aboriginal artists, and posters with Aboriginal themes. They should also consider consulting with employees and elders on the naming of buildings, meeting or conference rooms using the local language of the Aboriginal community.

Mentoring

A workplace 'buddy' or mentor may help raise and resolve any personal or work-related issues that might arise in the workplace, particularly during the first three to six months of a transition into the workforce. Mentors can provide support, including advice to the Aboriginal recruit on matters mostly relating to the operations of the business and assisting them to find their way and navigate the businesses workplace culture.

Effective mentoring may be even more likely to be achieved outside of the workplace rather than within it. By facilitating a mentoring program that works with an employee outside of the workplace, employers can help connect with

an employee's immediate circle of influence and address any concerns they may have in regard to participating in meaningful employment.

Mentoring does not have to be onerous or expensive; to understand a more culturally appropriate way of mentoring that is highly effective, contact the Australian Indigenous Business Alliance Group (aibag.com.au) to discuss your mentoring needs. The Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre (dtwd.wa.gov.au/AWDC) and Aboriginal Business Directory WA (abdwa.com.au) can also help direct you to a range of providers.

Training and development

A Training Plan is important for all new employees and perhaps even more so for Aboriginal employees. Training can address job-related skills, as well as enhancing personal development in areas such as work ethics, communication and presentation.

Scheduled training and development is usually well received by Aboriginal employees as it provides a better indication of what the workplace offers and opportunities for advancement over time. It is part of goal setting and should always be followed with real opportunities to test out the newly acquired skills or experience.

Employers should not be afraid to assign significant responsibility or apply appropriate standards of accountability to Aboriginal employees; however, it is imperative that expectations are realistic and take into account each employee's background and abilities. As with all employees, employers must explain tasks clearly from the outset and provide support to help get the job done.

It is important for employers to create a supportive and engaging workplace, show interest in the work being done and not forget to provide praise for a job well done, as employees appreciate regular positive feedback. As part of this process, businesses should consider ways to celebrate significant individual and team successes in order to boost workplace morale and further incentivise continued engagement and commitment. Hosting a workplace BBQ or social gathering at the end of the month or creating team-building activities on all project sites are positive examples of this.

Mapping and recording personal development opportunities

As part of the on-boarding process, an employer may wish to establish a Personal Development Plan for each employee. This document, which may look like and be the size of a passport, will allow the employee to see what skills are required for a particular profession. For example, it would be recommended that the following be included in addition to a National Police Check.

Labourer:

- White Card
- Current Drivers Licence
- Plant Operation tickets

Mobile Plant Operator:

- White Card
- Current Drivers Licence
- HR/MR Licence
- Working at Heights ticket
- Water Cart Operations
- Skid Steer Operations ticket
- Details of other specific skills required

Training activities may be recorded to enable the employee to have a record of their competencies as they develop signed off by their supervisor. Not only is the Personal Development Plan a record of current skills, it may also may be used to identify training, work experience and future development opportunities over the life of a project or career. It can help ensure the active participation of Aboriginal employees, as through this process they would be better aware of their developmental opportunities and where that may come from, project to project.

Aboriginal Employee Networks

The creation of or participation in an Aboriginal Employee Network is a useful tool, if managed well. Such a network should have clear terms of reference and parameters describing the way issues raised are addressed by an individual and/or the business. It can also provide a platform for Aboriginal employees to provide feedback on how they feel their employer is achieving its Aboriginal Engagement goals and share any improvements to the business that may be considered and implemented.

An Aboriginal Employee Network also enables Aboriginal employees to gather regularly and discuss common issues, such as how they are transitioning into the workplace, provide feedback on the extent of assistance they are given when they are on-boarded to a new workplace and how that makes a difference in their perception of their employer and future opportunities. Such meetings also provide an opportunity to bring in an independent support person who can provide feedback to a company's HR Department on the culture of the business and identify any problems as they arise.

It is important that all matters raised be taken seriously. Negative issues raised should be dealt with proactively within the established parameters, as this will ensure a blame or exclusion culture is not developed and nurtured.

Culturally Appropriate Human Resource Practices

While there are a range of policies and practices governing how a company manages human resources, some may require additional consideration to ensure that the cultural needs of Aboriginal employees are being addressed and met.

Managing leave

It is very important to ensure that all employees have a clear understanding of their leave entitlements and the types of leave available under an Industrial Award or Agreement – including any Cultural or Ceremonial Leave entitlements (paid or unpaid).

As part of the induction process, all newly engaged Aboriginal employees should be made aware of the rules governing the use of leave. This includes the processes involved in applying for leave, as well as taking leave at short notice. Leave should be managed within the context of leave entitlements and any flexible and family friendly working arrangements that may be in place.

Managers/supervisors and HR professionals should take requests for short or emergency leave at face value. There will be occasions when employees need time off work for unavoidable situations such as looking after an unwell child/parent or accompanying family members to medical appointments.

Accept that Aboriginal employees might need to attend more funerals (or 'sorry business') than other members of your workforce. It is important that you create a workplace where the actual reason for leave can be discussed and accommodated, where possible.

Bereavement Leave

Aboriginal life expectancy rates are lower than the Australian average, and many Aboriginal people have large extended families and networks. Attending funerals – and taking part in the mourning process – is a personal, community and cultural obligation.

Be open to discussing and negotiating the amount of leave an employee needs when participating in a cultural or ceremonial event or attending a funeral. The objective should be to reach a balance, which allows an employee to meet both personal obligations and work commitments. If leave entitlements have been exhausted, leave without pay may be an option.

Some Aboriginal families may have devised a roster, enabling attendance

at funerals outside of the immediate family to be shared. Employers should discuss with an employee when this situation arises whether there is such an understanding in the family and whether it is key that the employee attends every funeral as it arises. Where this is the case, the employee will be in the best position to make this call and advise of their personal situation. On some occasions, this may not be possible for the Aboriginal employee and they may need support, as the decision not to attend a funeral may be very stressful.

Ensure that non-Aboriginal employees understand that their Aboriginal colleagues are using standard leave entitlements, or leave without pay, to participate in cultural or ceremonial events or to attend funerals. This will help minimise any future resentment.

Cultural competency training will increase other staff's understanding as to why Aboriginal people are required to participate in cultural and ceremonial events, as well as why Aboriginal people generally have reason to attend more funerals than other members of the Australian community.

Cultural and/or Ceremonial Leave

In locations where Aboriginal employees actively practice cultural lore, employers should consider including Cultural Leave as part of their businesses leave entitlements. Such leave gives employees the ability to separate from the workplace for an agreed time (usually up to three months), taking any paid leave owing and supplementing the remaining hours as leave without pay.

Cultural Leave requirements can vary but may be as straightforward as the requirement of an Aboriginal person to take leave from work to attend and participate in the cultural obligations of their language group. This occurs across WA annually from October to December. By facilitating Cultural Leave and enabling Aboriginal employees to attend ceremonial activities, an employer is acknowledging an employee's cultural obligations and assisting them to meet these obligations without any shame or difficulty.

Case Study – Cultural Leave

A long-term Aboriginal staff member sought leave from the workplace to meet his cultural obligations. A highly regarded machine operator, the employee discussed his leave requirements with his supervisor and they came to an arrangement that, with appropriate notice, he could take 4-6 weeks of leave at any one time to pursue his cultural obligations.

As an urban-based Aboriginal person, his cultural leave was structured so that he could practice his story telling and share his cultural tales. His workplace was extremely flexible and allowed him time off to undertake his cultural obligations.

This employee had been with his employer for several years and this arrangement is ongoing.

The agreement demonstrates trust and understanding between the employer, supervisor and employee in their ability to separate and return, post-leave, to the workplace.

Cultural sensitivity

Being culturally sensitive is about minimising cultural discomfort for Aboriginal employees. Questions about Aboriginal issues that come up in the press or the public arena can be difficult to respond to. Not all Aboriginal people have the same views and values so raising such topics may make the individual embarrassed and withdrawn. Aboriginal people cannot be expected to be experts on all these issues. That is not saying that the Aboriginal employee may not have a view on a situation; it is more about what is appropriate to raise and discuss in the workplace and what is not.

Having said that about public matters, companies should also encourage privacy for the discussion of personal matters. Nobody likes to be overheard when these conversations occur; mostly due to prior reactions and experiences, some Aboriginal people, however, may be particularly sensitive to being 'shamed' when personal matters are discussed in public. Taking aside the Aboriginal employee and discussing the matter with them may be better received.

Significant dates of commemoration

Employers may not be aware that there are a small number of significant dates that most Aboriginal people observe throughout the year and acknowledge.

The most well known are listed below.

Survival Day, January 26 – Celebrated by other Australians as Australia Day, this is also recognised as a national day of celebration in recognition of the survival and resilience of Aboriginal people, nationally.

The Apology, February 13 – A national day of celebration commemorating the formal Apology to Australia's Aboriginal Peoples by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008.

Sorry Day, May 26 – A national day of commemoration to honour the generations of Aboriginal children (the Stolen Generations) taken from their families under forced removal policies that continued into the early 1980s.

National Reconciliation Week, May 27-June 3 – A week of national celebrations to build on the respectful relationships between Aboriginal people

and other Australians.

National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC)
Week, first full week in July – A national week of events to celebrate achievements by Aboriginal peoples and their communities.

Other significant dates in the Aboriginal Calendar include:

- 19 March – National ‘Close the Gap’ Day
- 21 March – National Harmony Day
- 27 May – Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum
- 3 June – Mabo Day
- 9 August – International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples
- 9 August – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day
- 3 September – Indigenous Literacy Day
- 13 September – Anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- 10 December – Human Rights Day

Joint Ventures and Partnership Arrangements

Companies may enter into a joint venture or partnership arrangement because both parties perceive they have something to gain or benefit from the relationship. The partnership is unlikely to succeed unless all parties benefit.

A successful joint venture or partnership arrangement may allow each business to develop faster and reach a wider market. It can also provide opportunities for growth without the need for outside investment, and may help the parties to access new markets and distribution networks due to the point of difference in the marketplace that the arrangement provides.

For the non-Aboriginal business, a joint venture arrangement may provide access to a package of works from a client that has specified an Aboriginal participation requirement. A joint venture with Traditional Owners may facilitate access to a region to perform works. More broadly, the joint venture can develop a stronger appreciation and understanding of local Traditional Owners and their connection to country and culture.

Aboriginal businesses can also benefit from joint ventures and partnerships, through developing their capability and capacity. The joint venture may include opportunities for the Aboriginal party to develop a range of skills, building on their ability to manage a workforce and/or governance structures. It can also provide an opportunity to work on larger scale projects, utilising the capacity and capability of the other party while gaining a stronger understanding and appreciation of the complexity and the challenges involved.

The joint venture may have further long-term benefits for Aboriginal businesses by helping them develop and extend their business networks, through meetings with prospective and current clients and key influential stakeholders.

Effective joint venturing

Joint ventures may operate for the duration of a particular project or may be longer-term. Before entering into any joint venture or partnership agreement, both parties should seek professional advice to minimise risk – while noting that the joint venture structure can offer protection, as venture partners share all risks.

Joint ventures and partnership arrangements are not easy to develop or maintain. Success depends on shared business goals and joint commitment to a project. It can take time to build a strong and trusting relationship between a company and its business partners, taking into account different work cultures and management styles. The parties must clearly communicate ongoing goals

and the status of an opportunity to avoid real or perceived problems. This takes time and effort.

It is important to carefully negotiate the levels of financial commitment, profit and tax sharing arrangements, as well as the management and liability of a project, with all business partners.

The joint venture agreement should recognise and allow for the levels of investment, assets or expertise that the parties bring to the project.

It is important that each partner looks at the proposed venture from the other parties' perspective and understand their motivations, rather than solely focusing on their own company's perspective and expectations.

Equal levels of leadership, direction and support may not be provided by both parties at the beginning of the relationship. If not discussed and explored, this may cause unnecessary friction and/or stress on the relationship.

Having a sound, supportive and mutually respectful agreement is key. The agreement between all parties must recognise:

- The contribution of all parties, including financial, in kind and human resources
- Contributions to be made by all parties as part of any new, emerging or current business opportunities
- Outgoing costs and how these will be managed up front before any profits are shared amongst parties.

Aboriginal Community Engagement

Engaging with local Aboriginal communities can bring myriad benefits to a business. The secret to successful community engagement is building and maintaining genuine and mutually beneficial relationships. A solid foundation built on relationships, honesty and support will provide impressive results.

To inform local Aboriginal communities of an intention to engage, businesses may use some or all of the following:

- Informal catch up or face-to-face meetings
- Newsletters/flyers/posters featuring local Aboriginal people
- Local radio stations, such as Noongar Radio, and newspapers, including Aboriginal-owned print media such as the Koori Mail or The Indigenous Times
- Placing notices on Aboriginal community noticeboards or laminated posters in strategic locations frequented by target audiences – for example, a local Aboriginal medical or community service
- Connecting with local service providers such as the Regional Development Commissions, local government and local Aboriginal community organisations
- Seeking out Aboriginal advisory committees or groups (e.g. local Land and/or Sea Councils) for advice on a culturally appropriate engagement approach.

It is important to put thought into the initial engagement environment; creating an engagement process that is welcoming, comfortable and accessible to participants can make a lot of difference. Choose meeting places that locals have easy access to and feel comfortable congregating at, such as a local community centre, Aboriginal Corporation meeting room or town hall.

Aboriginal people who have lived in a certain region and have done so for several years should be regarded as key stakeholders. It is important to note however that this does not necessarily mean that they are the local Traditional Owners or custodians of the land on which you seek advice.

There are a number of positive ways in which to best engage with Aboriginal communities. In particular, identifying and engaging with community leaders or community champions can assist your entry into further discussion with a local Aboriginal community, and can be especially useful and appropriate when you are seeking to engage with a special interest group or smaller target groups on specific issues. It is of course important to ensure that these leaders/champions are representatives of the community and speak with authority on behalf of the community or organisation you are seeking to engage. This can be achieved by formally approaching the organisation and seeking names of representatives that you are able to approach directly to seek input and advice.

It can also be effective to host an evening community 'get-together' at a local Aboriginal business or community organisation.

It is important to also consider collaborating with other key stakeholders such as Aboriginal community-based organisations, schools, or other community not-for-profits such as PCYCs or community centres, which local Aboriginal people may attend regularly. Check with the local Government or Shire as they may have an Aboriginal advisory body or knowledge of key contacts.

Face-to-face discussions with local Aboriginal people do not have to always be in an office or around a meeting table. Simply sitting 'under a tree' or somewhere far from an office environment, can create a comfortable setting. Do not hesitate to ask community leaders for guidance on how other Aboriginal people may want to be engaged and respond to their suggestions. Always consider the locals' 'comfort zone' and allow them to be comfortable with the pace at which the engagement process unfolds. Provide detailed maps/drawings or pictogram type resources well ahead of a consultation event. This may give people the time and space necessary to absorb and process information and ideas.

It is vital to ensure a positive outcome from every discussion. Ensure too that your organisation delivers on every undertaking, to avoid losing credibility and/or creating community disengagement or disharmony.

An important aspect of any community consultation and engagement is providing the appropriate remuneration for those you engage with, in recognition of their time and effort. It may be necessary to seek external advice on how best to engage with Aboriginal people, by 'buying in' appropriate skills and expertise depending on the purpose and need. The engagement of an Aboriginal Engagement professional can facilitate a desired outcome, particularly if the person has an understanding of the local community and how it operates. This may be particularly relevant in situations that are very sensitive.

As part of their Aboriginal Engagement Strategy, contractors should consider inviting representatives of local Aboriginal community groups and businesses to visit their workplace once a month to speak about their role in the wider community and how it assists Aboriginal people. This process will build a strong understanding and appreciation of the role these organisations play in the local Aboriginal community and may lead to future collaborations or partnerships.

An important part of maintaining a strong and effective working relationship with Aboriginal communities is the opportunity to leave a positive legacy. Some contractors may have achieved this through the delivery of a legacy project addressing a community need such as uniforms and sporting equipment for a local Aboriginal sporting team, or useful items for new mothers registered with a local Aboriginal program. Over time, these outcomes provide a list of actions, which can be included as part of any future tendering submission relating to experiences of engaging with Aboriginal communities.

Building Strong Relationships

Communicating effectively with Aboriginal people

While Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have been communicating for centuries, there is less of an understanding and appreciation of how Aboriginal people communicate and the prevailing communication style is that of the dominant culture, which does not necessarily take into consideration or allow for these cultural differences.

Effective communication is an essential part of all human interaction. It is a two-way process of sending and receiving messages. We all know from our cross-cultural experiences that cultures differ significantly around communication, interpersonal protocols and standards of communication effectiveness. Poor communication has been a fundamental factor in the ongoing miscommunication of important issues for Aboriginal people.

Effective cross-cultural communication skills are critical to the provision of culturally sensitive engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Whilst verbal communication is the most used and convenient way to communicate, non-verbal communication should not be underestimated. Aboriginal people are very aware of non-verbal communication cues, including body language.

The first step in overcoming barriers is to understand the key points below.

Setting the Scene

Purpose and outcome

Be very clear on your purpose and/or motivation for engaging with Aboriginal people. It is important to identify who you are and the reason you want to communicate and what your expected outcome is.

Remember the past

Remember that based on past policies and past experiences, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may have distrust of all systems, particularly government or semi government agencies and employees.

Environment

Flying the Aboriginal flag, installing artwork, signage, examples of inclusiveness such as pictures, information and other visual cues may communicate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that the programs and services are culturally safe, inclusive and welcoming and a place that they can enter without fear.

When meeting with Aboriginal businesses, it is recommended that the initial meeting be hosted at a location that is neutral or at the office/site of the Aboriginal business. This also services a good purpose of knowing where they are situated and what their business has to offer.

Welcome

A smile, a nod or hand wave is welcoming, even without words.

Establishing connections

If you have ever witnessed any two Aboriginal people engaging in a conversation for the first time, you will see a level of information sharing that usually resembles the following:

- Exchange of name and where that person is from
- Kinship connection to Country and community
- Sharing of possible connections or names of people that one person may believe the other person may know
- Why they are where they are now
- What the connection is for.

Therefore, as a non-Aboriginal person, you would be encouraged to participate in interactions similar to this, which would be considered more culturally appropriate and an effective way forward.

Relationships first

Before getting down to business, ask about family, share some personal information about yourself. This approach is key to working with and communicating effectively with an Aboriginal person.

Preparing for consultation

Prior to a meeting or community consultation, prepare for the meeting by being mindful of the following.

Perception of tone of voice and questioning techniques

Try to approach an interaction by speaking in gentle tones. High tones may be perceived at patronising or pointing the blame. Do not speak too fast. Slow down and be clear with your words. It is equally important that you do not use accusatorial questioning as part of your communication style. An example of this is, "So you thought that it was a good idea to take the document to the meeting?" This negative style of questioning will get you off side very quickly with the Aboriginal person you are communicating with.

Language and literacy

Across Western Australia, in some rural and remote localities some Aboriginal people may not use Standard Australian English as their first language. In some

cases it is a second, third or fourth language/dialect. In addition, there is in some communities a level of Aboriginal English. Do not make assumptions about the literacy or level of English proficiency of an Aboriginal business person. Making an assumption may offend prospective Aboriginal business persons and may result in broken trust.

Find out which language is preferred. In more rural and remote communities where English may be limited, arrange to have a suitable family member or interpreter (an Aboriginal Cultural Officer may be able to assist). Check that the interpreter is familiar and confident with translating terminology.

Engaging with the most appropriate person

Take the necessary steps to ensure that you will be speaking to the correct person. This will depend on the information to be provided or sought. Be aware of extended family and kinship structures, particularly in relation to informed consent and who needs to be consulted regarding critical decisions to be made or shared.

Environment and confidentiality

Ensure that you take the necessary steps wherever possible to avoid causing the person to feel shame. Shame refers to: deep feelings of embarrassment; being ridiculed; losing face within a relationship; disempowerment/lack of control; loss of dignity. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it goes far beyond mainstream understanding of shyness and embarrassment. Discussing confidential matters in open, public spaces should be avoided. Be discrete, specifically when having to raise personal/private issues. Maintaining confidentiality is vital in building trust.

Gender

It is important that staff working with Aboriginal people understand that segregated practices such as Men's and Women's Business are still very real and an integral part of cultural practice today. While it is not always practical, some questions should be asked by the same gender. If this is not possible, ask the person if they prefer for someone such as a partner or relative to be present. The same gender appropriateness applies for Men's Business.

Timing

When engaging with some Aboriginal communities, consider allocating extended consultation times or communicating with community members outside of scheduled consultations or community meetings. Be aware that there are inappropriate times for communication such as during Sorry Business (death and funerals) and this takes precedence over most other concerns such as business or opportunities.

Link to community

Seek assistance from your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff where possible to assist you with interpreting or cultural assistance, or for an introduction to link you with someone from the person's community.

Effectively Communicating

Introduction

To make the most of your communication with Aboriginal people, businesses and communities make sure you introduce yourself warmly. Smile and be relaxed in your approach and seek to create a safe and approachable environment.

Demonstrating respect

Wait your turn to speak. Do not mimic or attempt to speak a person's language, e.g. Aboriginal English, unless you are able to, or permitted and advised to. This will depend on the relationship and rapport established between yourself and the client. It is vitally important that you are not seen to be 'big noting' yourself. This means acting as if you know everything there is to know about a community or cultural business. Regardless of how much experience you have, to act in this way is disrespectful and could create more negative experience of the process. Demonstrating humility is a much better approach.

Building rapport

Take the time to build rapport and trust by asking where they are from (e.g. who is their mob).

Listening skills

Ensure that you are actively listening; do not continually interrupt. If there is a silence, watch for body language to gauge when it is appropriate to start speaking. If the Aboriginal person is looking around the room, they may still be listening to you; it may mean that they are more comfortable avoiding eye contact.

Questioning style and techniques

Aboriginal people tend to prefer a less direct approach to communication; therefore, direct questioning is somewhat confronting and offensive. The customary way of seeking information is to establish a two-way exchange, volunteering information of their own and hinting at what they would like to find out. Avoid asking closed questions that require a yes/no response.

While direct questions are used in Aboriginal society to determine background information – for example, where a person is from – detailed or personal information may be best sought through indirect questioning.

Avoid asking Aboriginal people to continually repeat themselves. Paraphrasing is a more sensitive and effective way to ensure that you have clearly understood what is key in the conversation.

Eye contact

In western cultures, for most, failing to maintain appropriate eye contact may be perceived as 'hiding something' or that the person is not to be trusted. However, generally speaking, use of indirect eye contact in Aboriginal culture implies respect. Some (but not all) Aboriginal people will therefore be uncomfortable with direct eye contact. Direct eye contact with anyone other than one's most intimate peers or relations may be seen as a sign of rudeness, disrespect, or even aggression and the appropriate strategy to convey polite respect is to avert or lower one's eyes in conversation.

Across genders, problems that may occur with eye contact, including jealousy, shame and disrespect. Avoid cross-gender eye contact unless the client initiates it and is comfortable.

Personal space

This can be challenging in communicating across any culture. It is important to be conscious about the distance to which you are sitting or standing near a person. Standing or sitting too close to a person that you are unfamiliar with may make that person feel uncomfortable or threatened. It is important that people are mindful of the need to allow space when communicating.

Silence

In Western cultures, silence in the communication process is seen as a gap that must be immediately filled. In more remote Aboriginal society, lengthy periods of silence are the norm and are expected during conversation, particularly during information sharing and information seeking. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples use silence to listen, allow for consensus or to indicate non-commitment. The positive use of silence should never be interpreted as lack of understanding or agreement. There are times when silence needs to be observed and taking your time before verbally responding is a mark of respect.

Touch

Aboriginal people tend to be 'touchy' with each other by nature. However, it is considered inappropriate and/or offensive if you touch someone that you do not know well. Touching very much depends on the context or environment, as well as the existing relationship and rapport with the receiver. Once rapport is built, touch may be comforting and respectful. Sometimes as part of a communication style some people unconsciously like to touch the arm or forearm of the person they are talking to, including the back or shoulder area. Seek permission prior to touching, especially if the person is unknown.

Titles

The terms 'aunty', 'uncle', 'brother' or 'sister' should only be used once rapport is built and approval given. Just because you hear someone else call an older Aboriginal person Uncle or Aunty, does not give you permission to do so. 'Aunty' and 'uncle' are terms of respect for someone older than you (not necessarily someone that is an Elder).

Getting to 'yes'

This is one of the more difficult considerations in communicating. Many Aboriginal people will sometimes have a tendency to agree with someone, regardless of whether they actually agree with or understand what has been said to them. It is customarily used to indicate a readiness for cooperative interaction or resignation to the futility of the situation.

If you are unsure, check their understanding by asking again and rephrasing your question. If they appear agitated, they may be saying 'yes' to end the conversation because they want to leave. This may be because they are uncomfortable or have other priorities. If the Aboriginal person repeatedly says 'yes' immediately after a question, ask them with respect what they understood from the last question.

Making decisions

Ask Aboriginal people you communicate with if they would like information explained to another person. Kinship obligations and responsibilities may apply and therefore a decision requires further consultation with extended family members.

Always allow time for information to be understood. It is considered more important to understand the information and make a decision that will be of benefit to the extended community regardless of the time taken to make that decision.

Be aware that there may be instances where non-Aboriginal people could be asked to leave a meeting room if Aboriginal people need to discuss cultural matters privately in order to make an informed decision.

Sharing information

Avoid jargon

Choose your words so that you avoid medical terminology or jargon. Use plain English and/or diagrams to clarify message and understanding.

Avoid confusion

Be conscious that words mean different things to different people. The same word could have a different meaning depending on the community that you

visit. To minimise the misunderstanding of words, consult with Aboriginal work colleagues or local community members to build your knowledge of locally suitable and generally accepted words.

Clear instructions

It is critical that the person understands your instructions. If the person has a family escort with them, also explain so that they understand the instructions.

Methods of communicating

Use diagrams, models, film, images and metaphors to explain instructions, particularly with people for whom English is not their first language.

Other factors to consider

Appropriate Introductions

Ensure that you introduce yourself appropriately to Elders and community leaders/spokespersons. The same courtesy and manners you apply to dignitaries applies to Elders and Traditional Owners.

Time

Western culture places a lot of emphasis on the concept of time, especially in terms of meeting deadlines. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, the emphasis is on relationships. This cultural difference directly influences planning, decision-making, community/person engagement and communication. For example, government processes tend to focus on getting the job done, following prescribed schedules supported by assertive and direct communication ('let's cut straight to the point'). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are less rigid when it comes to schedules. Establishing and maintaining relationships and more important than time.

Feedback

It is well documented that Aboriginal people are one of the most extensively researched and 'consulted' with. During these processes, cultural and intellectual knowledge is imparted and shared on the basis that the information has been entrusted to the relevant person. Therefore, it is essential and respectful that persons who provided knowledge and information are advised who has the information; what happened to the information; how the information was used; and what was the outcome of providing the information.

When you are aware that you are collecting and using any cultural and intellectual property, adhere to traditional lore and Federal Government law regarding intellectual property.

Cultural protocols

Relationships developed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are guided by community protocols and developed through trust and respect. Therefore, it is critical that you check that you are speaking with the appropriate person.

In terms of sorry business/bereavement, individuals and communities may vary, however, in most cases business is not conducted on the day of a funeral or for a specified period from the incident to the funeral and beyond. It is considered disrespectful to conduct any business during this period; therefore, scheduled meetings may be cancelled at very short notice. Permission to undertake any business during these times should be sought from the local Aboriginal community before any consultation in this area is undertaken. In addition, please consider gender-relevant business when planning conferences, consultation and decision-making processes.

Expectation raising

Do not make promises that you cannot keep. This can only lead to feelings of raised hope or a level of dependency. If promises are made and not kept, relationships and trust may be severely impacted on or destroyed. Beware of expectation raising and ensure that what you offer is real and sustainable.

Seeking advice/raising awareness

Always seek advice if you are unsure what to say or what to do. Be prepared to admit mistakes or limited level of knowledge.

Word of mouth ('Aboriginal Grapevine')

One of the quickest way to get information to Aboriginal people and their community is word of mouth. This well-established informal networking system has the power to influence trust, rapport and respect. Conversely, it may be used to advise community members 'who not to trust' in terms of their dealings. While there are many ways to communicate with Aboriginal people and communities this method is one that should not be undersold or valued. For example, you may let people know that you are coming to town in as few weeks before you get there. Then when you do arrive, do not be surprised to find people coming up to you in the street and asking if you are that person coming to recruit people for jobs etc.

Relationships/contacts/networks

Familiarise yourself with and become aware of community governance structures, i.e. who to consult with; who are the key community representatives; who you should not leave out if you are visiting a community and are going around seeing everyone. While it may sound like too much hard work, it can make your consultation process easier than if you do not take notice of the local politics.

Communicating in the workplace

Building trust, respect and good relationships in the workplace is key. As an employer, recognise a person's individuality. While Aboriginal employees may share a common heritage, Aboriginal people may also differ in values, customs, beliefs and many other aspects of their identity. Therefore, it is important that Aboriginal people are not seen as a group and that any one person's behaviours, reactions and comments do not necessarily define Aboriginal people collectively.

Make time to get to know Aboriginal employees and learn about their families and communities. Not only will this foster a positive working environment, but it will also help employers understand any issues worrying their workers or causing them to take higher levels of unplanned leave.

Whenever possible, make time to engage in regular, brief chats or 'yarns'. Depending on the circumstances, conversation is generally better than written communication.

Have face-to-face conversations where possible, preferably with no barriers such as desks. Avoid interrupting employees while they are speaking, 'talking over the top' of them or disregarding their responses.

It is important that you are not quick to judge. Listen to the situation at hand and engage a respected Aboriginal person and the extent of assistance sought, if required, before issues escalate. It is important to be part of the solution, not the problem.

Maintain consistency in the way people and problems are treated, and allocate reasonable time to work through issues to a mutually beneficial resolution. The time allowed for discussions will vary according to the issue at hand and the individual involved. Take time to broach issues sensitively and do not respond abruptly. Sometimes it works better to discuss issues away from the office or immediate workplace.

Some employees may find it useful to ask an appropriate family member, or other significant person, to sit in on discussions and aid communication. Where possible, employers should facilitate this.

In addition to regular, informal chats with employees, employers should take the time to understand how their workers feel about current office/on site situations, as well as provide feedback on their performance.

These discussions could include highlighting training and development opportunities that might be available. Employers can also discuss options for promotion and progression within the business and, if appropriate, possible career pathways for their employees.

Aboriginal Engagement Resources

Education

Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (aief.com.au): A non-profit business focused on empowering Aboriginal children in financial need to build a future through education and career pathways at Australian schools, universities and companies.

Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (aimementoring.com): Matches university students with Aboriginal high school students for one-on-one mentoring.

Clontarf Foundation (clontarf.org.au): Improves the education, discipline, life skills, self-esteem and employment prospects of young Aboriginal men and by doing so equips them to participate meaningfully in society.

Dare to Lead (daretolead.edu.au): Federally-funded national project with a focus on improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation (pff.com.au): A not-for-profit organisation working in partnership with community, industry and government to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reach their potential.

Indigenous Cadetship Support (www.employment.gov.au/indigenous-cadetship-support-ics): This program aims to improve the job prospects of Aboriginal students. Employers offering work placements and ongoing employment to Aboriginal tertiary students can receive financial help from the Australian Government.

Madalah Limited (madalah.org.au): Provides opportunities for Aboriginal children and young people to undertake an education through full boarding scholarships at some of Australia's best boarding schools and assistance with cadetships in tertiary studies.

Stronger Smarter Institute (strongersmarter.com.au): Changing the tide of low expectations and participation of Aboriginal students in education.

The Inspiration Initiative (theaspirationinitiative.com.au): Delivers a range of education projects from high school to university, which provide Aboriginal students with opportunities and support to realise their potential and succeed at high school, university and beyond.

Employment, Training and Development

Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre (dtwd.wa.gov.au/AWDC): Works in partnership with existing service providers to support Aboriginal job seekers to obtain meaningful and long-lasting employment by providing career guidance, workshops, training information; and making links direct with employers. The Centre also supports employers to attract, recruit and retain Aboriginal employees.

Australian Indigenous Business Alliance Group (aibag.com.au): Assists employers with the attraction, engagement and retention of eligible Aboriginal candidates. Works with Aboriginal jobseekers and their Job Active providers to assist them in finding sustainable employment outcomes with our employer partners.

Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre (ailc.org.au): A not-for-profit company working to increase Aboriginal people's formal knowledge, skills and capacity to help them take effective leadership roles in their communities.

Civil Train (civiltrainwa.com.au): The training arm of CCF WA, Civil Train is WA's market leader in delivering training to the civil construction industry, offering a variety of training solutions including traineeships and short courses.

Construction Training Fund (bcitf.org): Established in 1990 by an Act of Parliament to support the training of eligible people in the building and construction industry, the CTF aims to improve the quality of training and increase the number of skilled workers in the building and construction industry. An additional 30% of the standard grant is available for indenturing Aboriginal apprentices and/or trainees.

Department of Employment (employment.gov.au/employers-0#employing-indigenous-australians): Under the auspice of the Australian Government, there are a number of funding programs and wage subsidies to assist employers in their engagement and employment of Aboriginal people.

Future Footprints Indigenous Career Expo: Organised by the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (ais.wa.edu.au), which aims to support Aboriginal students' engagement in education and to enhance their transition to and from school, to further education, employment or training. Coordinator: 08 9441 1647/0408 259 954

GenerationOne (generationone.org.au): National campaign to engage all Australians in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander education, employment and training.

Jobactive (jobactive.gov.au): Connects job seekers with employers. Delivered by a network of providers in over 1700 locations across Australia. Employers can use a local jobactive provider for tailored recruitment services, at no cost.

Matera Foundation (materafoundation.org.au): A not-for-profit group aiming to provide employment pathways into land management and waste management careers. This scope has changed to a broader industry entry pathway to ensure a greater number of Aboriginal people can be assisted to find meaningful employment by breaking down the barriers that prohibit their advancement.

The ROADS Foundation (roadsfoundation.com.au): A not-for-profit charity that supports people into training and development and advocates for a sustainable civil construction workforce across WA. Its goal is to ensure a revitalised and energetic civil construction workforce with strong training outcomes.

Wirrpanda Foundation (wf.org.au): Committed to leading a social service paradigm shift for Aboriginal people by engaging and empowering Indigenous Australians to make well-informed life choices. The Wirrpanda Foundation is acutely aware that the factors influencing whether people and communities are socially included or excluded are multi-faceted and multi-dimensional.

Partnerships, Business/Economic Development

Aboriginal Business Directory WA (abdwa.com.au): This directory provides details of Aboriginal businesses across Western Australia with an opportunity to promote their products and services to potential buyers from government and private organisations. This is also where you may be able to find suitable cultural awareness trainers and persons who can perform a Welcome to Country.

Independent Directory (director.oric.gov.au): A website that allows skilled individuals to register an interest in being an independent director with an Aboriginal corporation. Aboriginal corporations can also advertise board vacancies. It works by matching candidates with corporations, inviting them to contact each other.

Jawun - Indigenous Corporate Partnerships (jawun.org.au): Channels corporate and philanthropic resources into Aboriginal development.

Local Contracting Alliance (linkedin.com/groups/6754962): Promotes new contracting opportunities for WA-based Aboriginal businesses, primarily in the Resources sector. However, due to early success with the engagement model, the target audience has since grown to include government and finance industry participants. Since its inception, LCA has facilitated many new contracts and relationships by connecting Aboriginal businesses with procurement and contracting people from potential client companies.

Supply Nation (supplynation.org.au): Connects Australian corporate and government organisations with Aboriginal business suppliers.

Yokai Aboriginal Employment Forum (yokai@reconciliationwa.org.au): An Aboriginal Employment Forum that meets six times a year in Perth. The networking meetings now bring together over 140 organisations interested in developing and sharing strategies that enhance Aboriginal workforce participation and retention outcomes.

Community Engagement

Aboriginal Mediation Service (justice.wa.gov.au): Mediation involves facilitating meetings between individuals and or groups to resolve conflict peacefully. This service is available to assist resolve conflicts relating to family, neighbourhood, community, funeral, and workplace or multi-party disputes.

Perth NAIDOC (naidocperth.org): Annual celebration of the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal people across WA.

Wunan (wunan.org.au): Provides education and employment, accommodation and housing and welfare services for Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley.

Information and Research

Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (aiatsis.gov.au): National institution for information and research about the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal people.

Desert Knowledge Australia (desertknowledge.com.au): A national organisation with a long-term vision of harmony, sustainability and prosperity for desert Australia.

Reconciliation Australia (reconciliation.org.au): A national organisation building mutually beneficial relationships between Aboriginals and other Australians.

Reconciliation WA (reconciliationwa.org.au): A not-for-profit organisation providing leadership, advocacy and support to people and organisations driving the movement for reconciliation in Western Australia.

About the Author



Christine Sindely

An Arabunna woman from South Australia, Traditional Owner and business person, Christine Sindely understands first hand the challenges presented to most Aboriginal peoples, their communities and businesses. A multi-award recipient, she has attracted several State and National awards and recognition for her work in Aboriginal Engagement. The founder and owner of Waangara Marra Consulting, she specialises in the effective delivery of Aboriginal Engagement practices and processes across all sectors. Christine's professional life spans over 30 years working in a range of senior roles across federal, state and local government agencies. More recently, she has worked in the mining services and civil construction industries and in the not-for-profit sector.

A Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellow since 2004, Christine demonstrates an enviable depth and breadth of knowledge and experience in Aboriginal Engagement matters and brings an effective approach to Aboriginal Engagement. As an active member on The ROADS Foundation, she brings to its board a strong perspective and passion on how it can collectively make a difference in engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates and communities across Western Australia in the sector.

In addition to her consulting business, as a strong networker and connector of people and businesses, Christine is equally committed to her role as an Associate of the Nous Group, a leading Australian-owned management consulting and leadership development firm, and as the current Chairperson of the Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre's Perth Advisory Group.



Picture courtesy of Georgiou Group.



Industry Leaders

Georgiou Group

Ertech

Central Earthmoving

LandCorp

Brierty

Underground Services

Industry Leaders: Georgiou Group

Georgiou Group has made a public commitment to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in 2016 with the launch of its Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan.

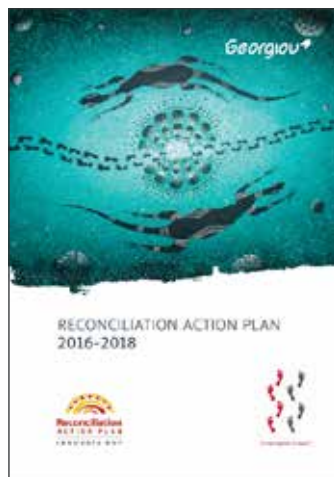
In 2011, Georgiou became the first Australian construction company to have its Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) endorsed by Reconciliation Australia.

Now, in 2016, Georgiou launches its third plan focused on developing and implementing programs for cultural learning and awareness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and supplier diversity.

Georgiou's 2016-2018 RAP demonstrates a step change in the company's commitment to closing the gap between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians by:

- identifying sponsorship initiatives that provide diverse opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- increasing our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment numbers
- expanding our support programs, including school-based training
- providing career development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in corporate and project roles
- providing small business mentoring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander companies.

Georgiou's 2016-2018 Innovate RAP signifies a culmination of six months' work, led by a working group of 20 people representing Georgiou's diverse workforce.



Georgiou Chief Executive Officer John Georgiou said the company had come a long way in its reconciliation journey. “While I’m extremely proud of how far we’ve come, we recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians still have a journey to develop relationships based on mutual understanding and trust,” he said. “Our commitment to building a future with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has never wavered and through our programs and initiatives and by empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, we can achieve our vision ‘to walk together as equals’.”

In March 2016, Georgiou announced a joint venture with National Indigenous contractor Rusca Group, designed to offer opportunities to Aboriginal Australians while also delivering excellence in civil construction.

Mr Georgiou said the joint venture brought together two strong, family companies which had both been in the construction game for over 30 years. “The joint venture will leverage the expertise of both organisations, establishing a strong civil presence that opens up employment opportunities to Indigenous Australians across the country,” he said.

Georgiou Group provides national resources and diverse capabilities across all facets of construction, from building construction to the delivery of public infrastructure and land developments. Rusca Group brings extensive remote civil and contracting expertise with strong Aboriginal employment and training programs.

“Critical to the success of any partnership is to find a company that has values aligned to ours. From our first meeting in early 2015, the synergies between the two companies were quite unique,” Mr Georgiou explained.

“At the core of both of our businesses is a desire to make a difference, both in the communities in which we work and the lives of those who work with us. We are extremely excited about this partnership and the new capabilities and opportunities it will provide.”

Since 2014, Georgiou has also thrown its support behind the education and arts sectors through agreements with Balga Senior High School and the Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company. Through the partnerships, Georgiou has provided substantial donations to the Balga Senior High School Sports Foundation and Yirra Yaakin.

Georgiou’s partnership with Balga SHS has involved the company contributing financial support as well as merchandise and equipment such as drink bottles, uniforms and hats each year to the school. The Balga Senior High School Sports Foundation was established by the school to provide opportunities for students to take part in regular club sports – something the school had identified as important to improving student outcomes.



*In March 2016,
Georgiou announced
a joint venture with
National Indigenous
contractor Rusca Group.*

“The school had seen a clear link between after-school sports programs and other structured activities and more engaged and successful students and were keen to have those in place, but didn’t necessarily have the funding available,” Mr Georgiou said.

“The Balga SHS Sports Foundation plays a very important role in the school, providing support to help students meet their sporting potential and improving attendance and school outcomes. We saw this as a great opportunity to ensure the Foundation had the funding and support in place to continue providing those programs and engaging students.”

The funding provided to the Foundation by Georgiou each year supports aspects such as transport, registration fees, uniforms, equipment and allocation of coaches for a range of sporting programs including netball, football, soccer, rugby and badminton.

In addition to this, Georgiou provides support and guidance for students around employment and tertiary education through a program of mentoring, work experience, workshops and site visits.

Indigenous students selected by the school are also offered two opportunities each term: a visit to key Georgiou sites, providing exposure to the reality of different career paths; and a day in-house with Georgiou providing mentoring, career guidance, assistance with resume writing and advice on tertiary pathways.

Additionally, for the past two years Georgiou has been a proud sponsor of NAIDOC Week with the Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company, one of Australia’s leading Aboriginal performing arts organisations.

Georgiou signed on to become Yirra Yaakin’s NAIDOC Week partner in 2014 and supports the Company’s Yirra Yaarnz series of events and presentations. Through this partnership, Georgiou is assisting Yirra Yaakin in telling its stories through live performance while contributing to the development of a strong Aboriginal arts industry.

The Balga SHS and Yirra Yaakin partnerships are in line with Georgiou’s commitment to its Reconciliation Action Plan, which is driven by initiatives aimed at creating diverse opportunities and building strong, respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. ■

Industry Leaders: Ertech

The Ertech group of companies has a long history of working collaboratively with local Aboriginal people, organisations, and communities in locations across Australia.

Ertech's Indigenous Engagement and Development framework comprises five key elements:

- Leadership - Leading a genuine commitment to the long-term enhancement of prospects for Aboriginal people
- Cultural Awareness - Establishing a work environment that is welcoming, respectful and understanding of Aboriginal people and culture
- Economic Empowerment - Working with Aboriginal businesses to develop capability and enhance economic prospects of Aboriginal owned businesses
- Employment, Training and Skills Development - Assisting Aboriginal people in developing 'work readiness' skills. Providing on-the-job training for semi-skilled labour and providing individuals with the opportunity to undertake formal training and/or apprenticeships
- Community Engagement - Building positive and meaningful relationships with Aboriginal communities.

Founded in 2008, the Ertech Construction Academy is an innovative training institution which aims to provide young people with a pathway into the civil construction industry. The Academy was the brainchild of Ertech Holdings Founder and Chairman, Jim Giumelli, who saw the need for a pathway for youth into the civil construction industry.

In partnership with Polytechnic West, the Academy provides Year 11 and 12 students with the opportunity to achieve a nationally recognised Certificate II in Civil Construction through on-site training while still attending high school and achieving their WA Certificate of Education.

Completion of the Certificate II in Civil Construction enables graduates to complete the industry standard Certificate III in Civil Construction within a shorter period.

The Academy's workplace training covers a broad range of knowledge, including occupational safety and health basics, duty of care responsibilities, installation of underground services and the operation of large mobile earthmoving equipment. Since 2011 the Academy has operated on a live worksite within the Tamala Park recycling facility with the support of the Mindarie Regional Council.

The majority of graduates commence full-time employment with Ertech or

other civil contractors upon completion of their studies. Other students have furthered their knowledge by undertaking apprenticeships or traineeships.

More than 100 students have attended the Academy, with 87 graduates to date.

The success of the training model has led to the development of customised, project-specific programs in Broome and Kununurra.

Ertech and the Academy have been formally recognised with a number of awards including Polytechnic West's Employer Partnership of the Year, the NAB Schools First Award in partnership with Clontarf Aboriginal College (2011), and CCF WA's Indigenous Trainer of the Year Award (2010).

In 2012, Mr Giumelli was acknowledged with a SkillsDMC Chairman's Award recognising his commitment and leadership in youth training. Ertech Construction Academy manager John Willett accepted the award on Mr Giumelli's behalf, acknowledging Mr Giumelli's vision and commitment to creating opportunity for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to enter the civil construction industry, and Ertech's dedication to garnering the resources to make the academy a success.

In 2016 part of the Academy's program has moved to a company-sponsored site in West Swan, where it is envisaged to have a permanent home. ■

Trainees hone their skills on simulators at the Ertech Construction Academy.





Industry Leaders: Central Earthmoving

Central Earthmoving is regionally recognised as taking a leadership role in engaging with Aboriginal people and representatives.

Centrals' skilled, professional and growing Aboriginal workforce makes up 15% of total employees, and between 6% and 44% of work crews on projects.

In addition, the company has formed many partnerships with Aboriginal companies in the Mid West and Goldfields Regions, having established collaborative arrangements with: Wajarri Holdings; TCR Grading; BPH Haulage; BYAC-Yillah Civil & Mining Contractors; and Mid-West Employment and



Pictured left to right: Gary Patterson, Commercial Manager, Central Earthmoving; Dave Bougourd, Project Manager, Yagahong Alliance; Malcolm Kelly, Yugunga-Nya Trainee, Yagahong Alliance; Robyn Kelly, Yugunga-Nya Trainee, Yagahong Alliance; Dennis Johnson, Operator, Yagahong Alliance; Terina Radcliffe, Administration Coordinator, Central Earthmoving.

Economic Development Aboriginal Corporation (MEEDAC). Most recently it has formed Yagahong Alliance, a joint venture between Central Earthmoving and the Yugunga-Nya People, who are the Traditional Owners of the lands surrounding Meekatharra. Yagahong Alliance has commenced a two-year contract at the Degruessa Copper Mine, owned by Sandfire Resources NL and operated on Yugunga-Nya country.

The objective of Yagahong Alliance is to create jobs and opportunities for the Yugunga-Nya People. The Yagahong Alliance Agreement also has specific commitments to the training and development of Yugunga-Nya People, as well as clear milestones which will enable the Yugunga-Nya People to increase their shareholding in the joint venture company as their capacity develops.

In addition to providing personnel, the Yugunga-Nya People will also purchase and supply some key items of equipment to the Yagahong Alliance.

Yugunga-Nya Elder and a Director of Yagahong Alliance, Ron Shay, said the joint venture and consequent contract with Sandfire would ensure the Yugunga-Nya People benefited from the mining activities occurring on their traditional lands.

He said it was in line with land use agreements with mining companies in the area, including Sandfire Resources NL, Doray Minerals and Metals X, which require that these companies endeavour to provide employment and business opportunities for Yugunga-Nya People.

Under the agreements, the mining companies also provide a royalty revenue stream to enable the traditional owners to build a portfolio of assets to benefit their people.

“The Sandfire Resources contract has provided another important step in the Yugunga-Nya People’s journey in terms of the self-determination of their future, and they look forward to demonstrating their abilities and ambitions to other mining companies,” Mr Shay said.

“It has also enabled us to be able to further advance plans to provide housing for our people in Meekatharra with health facilities. This will be the first new housing built in Meekatharra for many years. These achievements have been driven by the Yugunga-Nya People from the resources we have generated from negotiated land use agreements and prudent financial management of those resources – there’s a lot of pride in that.”

Sandfire Resources NL Managing Director Karl Simich said the company had a strong commitment to increasing Aboriginal engagement at the DeGrussa Copper Mine, especially with the site’s traditional owners, the Yugunga-Nya People.

“We are excited to be a part of this arrangement between the Yugunga-Nya People and Central Earthmoving and hope it plays a part in the revitalisation of Meekatharra and in increasing opportunities for the local community,” Mr Simich said.

Central Earthmoving Managing Director Craig Patterson’s leadership, through demonstrated genuine commitment and passion to recruit, train and empower Aboriginal people, has built mutual respect which led to the JV. It has enabled the JV to be able to work collaboratively to win a valuable long-term contract. Mr Patterson continues to create innovative opportunities to ensure inclusion and participation of Aboriginal people within the wider Mid West community and business community – a win-win for the client, Centrals and the local Aboriginal Community.

Mr Patterson said Centrals aspired to develop similar JVs with Aboriginal Groups in the Mid West, Murchison and Goldfields. ■

Industry Leaders: LandCorp

In its role as Western Australia's land development agency, LandCorp is committed to working to address the imbalance in meaningful employment and economic development prospects available to Aboriginal Australians.

LandCorp actively engages with like-minded organisations within the civil contracting industry to improve the participation rates of Aboriginal Australians in the workforce. The results of these efforts are proving positive, with year-on-year increases in both the numbers of Aboriginal Australians employed in civil contracting and also in the number of businesses employing Aboriginal people.

In 2010, when the Department of Indigenous Affairs released WA's plan for *Closing the Gap in Indigenous Life Outcomes in WA*, LandCorp and the Civil Contractors Federation WA (CCF WA) partnered to create and implement guidelines to WA's civil contracting industry with a view to addressing Aboriginal workforce participation in this sector. The results to date are highly encouraging as we progress towards our mutual goal of closing the gap.

The commitment of the CCF WA to this process has been instrumental, and has resulted in both the CCF WA and LandCorp working across industry to improve training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people in WA. Without this dedicated partnership, the opportunity for LandCorp to influence change would have been limited. Fortunately, the State's civil contracting industry has embraced these initiatives leading to a more diverse and inclusive workforce, engaging a greater number of Aboriginal people across the industry.

LandCorp has seen the positive results that numeracy, literacy and work-readiness programs have had in breaking down these barriers. In particular, the Civil Start pre-employment program has delivered practical assistance such as preparation for work, and goal setting training as well as six units towards a Certificate III in Civil Construction that has provided participants with a realistic understanding of expectations they will encounter in the industry.

By delivering the Civil Start program, this collaboration between LandCorp and the CCF WA has provided industry with a pool of work-ready, potential employees where they are most needed.

The civil contracting industry is actively embracing the initiatives of LandCorp and the CCF WA to close the gap. Importantly, their willingness to be adaptable around unique needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, has seen Western Australia's civil contracting industry tapping into and benefitting from a committed local workforce, and in turn, contributing to the creation of a more inclusive and connected society. ■

Industry Leaders: Brierty

Brierty is a leader in Aboriginal Engagement, achieving measurable and sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal people. Through direct employment, career development, business partnerships and development initiatives, Brierty makes a lasting and positive difference to the local Aboriginal communities in which it works. It achieves this by:

- Creating and maintaining a workplace that is culturally safe, sensitive and supportive
- Employing, retaining and developing its Aboriginal workforce across all areas of the company
- Strengthening the cultural capability of its employees
- Providing joint benefits, subcontracting and supply opportunities to local Aboriginal-owned businesses
- Establishing and maintaining effective and positive communications with Traditional Owner and Aboriginal community groups
- Actively leading and promoting Aboriginal engagement.

A multiple winner of CCF WA's Indigenous Engagement Award, Brierty has not rested on its laurels but has continuously challenged itself over the past year.

Brierty strives to assist Aboriginal communities it engages with to achieve their aspirations. It engages in joint ventures and partnership arrangements with



Aboriginal-owned businesses, creating a strong outcome focus for both parties with financial rewards. It listens to the aspirations of employees, joint venture partners and suppliers and works with them to identify solutions that make a difference.

Brierty's commitment was recognised in 2015 with the first Elevate level Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to be endorsed by Reconciliation Australia within the civil and mining industries. In addition to its current Aboriginal Engagement strategies, Brierty has included and committed to the following key additions:

Partnering with Reconciliation WA: Financial and in-kind support to Reconciliation WA (RWA) to the value of \$55,000 each year of the RAP to assist RWA with achieving its broader societal change outcomes through assistance where appropriate. This will include the direct engagement of Brierty employees to participate in Reconciliation activities where appropriate.

Appointment of Aboriginal Engagement Champions: This will entail volunteers from Brierty's workforce who will be responsible for the dissemination of information on the Project site they work on. The Champions will actively promote Aboriginal Engagement on every Project site and workplace. Part of the Champions' roles will be to disseminate of relevant information including: distribution of the RAP; arranging activities on sites for Reconciliation and NAIDOC Weeks; leading discussions about Aboriginal Engagement at least twice a month at pre-start; and acting as a nexus for the Aboriginal Engagement Manager and mentoring and support team.



Establishment of Aboriginal Community-based Projects: Brierty has committed to undertaking a community-based project local to every Project site it is awarded. It will also ensure that possible sponsorship opportunities will be explored and undertaken to ensure a positive legacy at the end of each project. While the new RAP will formalise these commitments, similar activities have already been undertaken or are in progress. For example, while working on the Great Northern Highway Project for Main Roads WA, Brierty provided heavy equipment to help the local Shire and Aboriginal community create a tourism opportunity in Coolgardie.

Aboriginal Economic Development Forums: Brierty will host up to two Aboriginal Economic Development Forums a year. These forums will provide Aboriginal businesses the opportunity to showcase their capability and capacity to Brierty, its clients and key stakeholders.

Transitioning to Site – Mentoring and Support Program: This program, which has been in operation in the last year and has made a positive difference to the retention of Brierty's Aboriginal workforce, is being ramped up.

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country: This RAP will actively encourage all Brierty employees attending and presenting/or hosting public forums either to arrange a Welcome to Country or to formally Acknowledge a Welcome when performed.

Aboriginal Business Register: Brierty's Procurement Team will develop and maintain a comprehensive register of Aboriginal businesses to contact and invite to present at its Aboriginal Economic Development Forums.

Brierty's investment in training assists its Aboriginal workforce to gain the confidence and skills set to seek promotion to more senior positions.



Supervisors Development Program: An existing three-day program dedicated to Aboriginal Engagement will have a more interactive and engaging format. The program helps to ensure that supervisors are aware of the importance of Brierty's Aboriginal Engagement strategies.

Brierty has a demonstrated commitment to attracting, training, and retaining Aboriginal employees. Between 12-16% of Brierty's directly engaged workforce identifies as either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples. They are engaged across a range of positions within the company, including entry level roles such as labourers, trainees, apprentices, site administrators, plant operators, and plant maintenance workers as well as middle management roles such as supervisors, project managers, project engineers and managers.

Mentoring and support is intrinsic to the success of the ongoing employment experience for the employee. Experience has proven that over time the extent of effective mentoring makes a dramatic difference to the retention of Aboriginal employees. Brierty's mentoring and support program is highly innovative as it does not focus on the employee in the workplace but more outside of the workplace, particularly on the negative influences that may deter employees from attending their place of work. In 2014, Brierty's innovation, best practice, dedication and commitment in this area, including the successful implementation of the Transitioning to Site – Mentoring and Support Program, was recognised with an Aboriginal Employment Award presented at the Australian Long Term Unemployment Conference.

Aboriginal employees who complete their three-month probation are earmarked to undertake a Certificate III in Civil Construction traineeship. Brierty's investment in training assists its Aboriginal workforce to gain the confidence and skills set to seek promotion to more senior positions.

Brierty works closely with Aboriginal joint ventures and subcontractors to ensure that they are aware of the company's Aboriginal Engagement Policy. Joint venturers and subcontractors are encouraged to strongly consider the direct engagement of Aboriginal candidates into their workforce. On occasion, Brierty's Aboriginal Engagement Manager has also assisted subcontractors source suitable candidates and provided advice on retention measures. Brierty's total Aboriginal Workforce participation rate is over 18% when indirect engagement is included.

In the 2015 RAP impact report to Reconciliation Australia, Brierty reported 10% of its total expenditure being procured through Aboriginal businesses and subcontractors – well exceeding Brierty's RAP targets and demonstrating that the company lives and breathes its RAP outcomes and it is not a reflection of targets being met through obligation or ticking a box. ■

Industry Leaders: Underground Services

Underground Services, along with its parent company CFC Group, is passionate about providing opportunities to Aboriginal communities through direct employment, career development and the formation of strategic business and NFP partnerships and initiatives. Through providing these opportunities the organisation aims to effect positive change in the lives of our Aboriginal workforce, building both capacity and capability in the communities in which we work.

The company has developed a series of partnerships and initiatives that support the transition of young Aboriginal people from school into the work force. These include:

- A relationship with Clontarf and the Swan community to engage young people about the business while they are at school
- The Frank Cardaci Traineeship program, aimed at identifying and supporting young people once they start work for the Group
- Mentoring systems and targeted training to support personal and career development.

Throughout this process the business is aware of the need to remain sensitive to the cultural needs and concerns of local Aboriginal communities. Where possible, we commit to continual improvement in the company's knowledge of the Aboriginal culture and issues whilst providing a supportive and culturally sensitive working environment.

In 2011, Underground Services initiated a Youth & Indigenous Employment Program, in which it would employ disadvantaged Aboriginal young people and provide them with the opportunity of employment. The Program was endorsed from the CEO level down through management and onto site. It was not initiated as an employment strategy to compete for work, rather it was done because of the positive effects we believed it would have on the local community.

Underground Services put strategies in place to ensure it had a culturally-sensitive recruitment and on-boarding process. To ensure the workplace was suitable and culturally sensitive for new Aboriginal employees, Cross Cultural Awareness and Youth Awareness training was delivered to employees, supervisors and management teams.

Underground Services also ensured a Buddy system was adopted on site to allow new Aboriginal employee to be placed into a supportive work environment; this was a temporary measure for the first few weeks depending on the individual's transition to the workplace. The Buddy would be an



*Part of a team, Aboriginal employee
Graham McHenry at work on a
Underground Services Project.*

experienced person whose skillset ensured they were an ideal mentor.

A mentoring program was established and all Aboriginal employees were contacted or visited by the Mentor on a regular basis to ensure they were enjoying and performing in their new job. Once the Aboriginal young people were on site they participated in in-house life skills training courses covering topics such as time management, alcohol and drug awareness, social media, career planning and financial management.

Underground Services provides the opportunity for Aboriginal employees to complete training such as a Certificate III in Civil Construction (Plant Operations) and Certificate IV in Civil Construction Supervision. Several Aboriginal employees have completed these courses successfully.

Each apprenticeship/traineeship is fully sponsored: no financial commitment is required from candidates, there is no reduction in pay for the duration of the traineeship, and all trainees are given sufficient time and resources to successfully complete their qualifications.

Since 2011, Underground Services has employed more than 50 Aboriginal employees across Western Australia in a variety of roles. Many of these employees have moved into roles in the mining industry. In that time the company's Aboriginal employment rate has grown from zero to five per cent.

Underground Services' structured Training and Development System helps define and facilitate positive career journeys for all employees. The Partnership Agreement with CCF WA allows approved Underground Services Trainer/Assessors to deliver national units of competency and Plant Operator tickets which contribute towards Traineeship qualifications. Since 2008, Underground

Services has had more than 135 employees undertake a traineeship. This year alone, sixteen new trainees and apprentices have been registered and nine others completed their qualifications, including the trade certification of one Heavy Duty Mechanic.

Building Partnerships

Recently, the CFC Group entered into partnership programs with Pilbara-owned company Kurtarra and with AACT, which operates in the Wheatbelt.

The Kurtarra joint venture aims to create training opportunities and support sustainable employment in the Pilbara region primarily for Palyku and local Indigenous peoples.

Developing specialised skills for the selected candidates enables Kurtarra to generate further opportunities for growth in the competitive resources sector and ensures its workforce is suitably trained and qualified in the fields of machinery operation, directional drilling, pipe laying, cable hauling and general civil construction works.

AACT, a 100 per cent indigenously owned company with strong links to the Ballardong (Wheatbelt) and Bibbulmun (Noongar) tribal areas, has been operating for 20 years. The AACT joint venture aims to maximise longer term employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians in the Wheatbelt, creating a lasting legacy for the area. The AACT/USA joint venture is committed to Indigenous engagement, working with traditional owner groups to offer employment and guidance, and providing opportunities through procurement and subcontracting for local businesses in the Wheatbelt region.

Underground Services respects and acknowledges the relationship that Indigenous people have to their traditional country and acknowledges their entitlement to have this properly considered in its ongoing activities. As such, the company looks first to the local communities and/or engages indigenous mining contracting companies for all projects located in regional areas. ■

Underground Services' Nathaniel McGuire, winner of the CCF WA Indigenous Trainee of the Year Award in 2015.



