Strategies to support Indigenous job seekers and their employers

There are a range of strategies that employment service providers can consider to ensure that job placements have the best chance of sticking! The capacity to build relationships with Indigenous job seekers is critical to the success of any strategy.

Below are some approaches identified by providers and employers around the country as successful in engaging Indigenous job seekers and their employers.

Getting your site ready

Culturally appropriate and engaging sites

Create a welcoming and comfortable setting for job seekers by ensuring that the set-up of your site is culturally appropriate to increase engagement.

Think about including local community service materials in visible locations, display posters featuring indigenous people or cultural artwork and make available specific support materials.

Provider suggestion: Facilitate a local cultural awareness program for staff and employers and promote an ethics framework which reflects, acknowledges and respects Indigenous values.

Culturally representative staff

Employing staff members with indigenous backgrounds will increase engagement.

Provider suggestion: Have a dedicated Coordinator to meet all Indigenous job seekers and assists Employment Consultants with referrals.

Indigenous job seekers regularly advise that having Indigenous staff working in the office made a positive difference in their job search. If you aren’t able to engage staff directly – consider how you can work with Indigenous organisations in your area to provide support.

Job-boards

Provide a visible job board in the foyer of your office with a specific section for Indigenous job vacancies to help in their job search.

This demonstrates that there are specific roles available and that your indigenous job seekers are an important focus in your office.

Onsite/ internal social workers

Onsite social workers can make quick referrals to additional support internally and can have a strong impact on the placement of Indigenous job seekers, and can be particularly effective in regional locations.

Getting to know your job seekers

Learning about your job seeker’s background helps build the necessary relationship you need to be able to help them find work. It may take several meetings to get to know your job seeker so give them time to become familiar with your staff and time to be able to share their background.
Find out about your job seeker’s culture

Offer to meet face to face, perhaps somewhere that is culturally welcoming or non-threatening – for example a cafe, park, art gallery or even a sports club. Also consider if there is someone else from your agency who knows the job seeker or someone that the job seeker wishes to bring along to make it easier for you both. Encourage family and friends networks to attend initial meetings, to provide an inbuilt support network.

In preparing your plan with your job seeker find out if there is anything they can’t or won’t do because of personal or cultural reasons. Explore a range of options that you can both work on to develop their pathway to work.

Gender may be a possible cultural issue – if so, you may be able to arrange for gender specific introductory sessions or engage a colleague of the same gender as your job seeker, at least during the initial relationship building phase to help overcome barriers.

Learn about your job seeker’s interests, plans and aspirations

Learn about your job seeker, not just about work but hobbies and sports too. They may have role models or heroes that you can link up with to strengthen their support network and develop confidence and self-esteem. At first your job seeker may be reluctant to tell you their story but as you build trust you may learn more about what they have faced in their life and what issues they are facing right now.

Talk about yourself, be open minded, share common interests and explain your role and how you will work together to achieve results together.

Job Seeker support

Working closely with indigenous community organisations establishes strong connections and results in stronger outcomes. Community connection allows for more tailored support for the job seekers, more effective use of resources, and contributes to the provider’s reputation and connections more broadly within the community. It also allows organisations to ‘fill skills gaps’ where required (e.g. access to Indigenous expertise, or mental health support for example).

It is also important for job seekers to see evidence that you are working for them (for example regular contact, purchase of items through the Employment Fund) Relationships are strengthened if they have access to staff who they have a relationship with (i.e. consistent case management)

Be flexible when working with indigenous job seekers

First appointments can be daunting. Can the job seeker bring along a friend or someone from the local community to help with the first meeting? This can help you quickly learn more about the job seeker.

No turn away policy

Some providers have adopted a ‘no turn away policy’ for indigenous job seekers and keep time available in their appointments diaries to accommodate unscheduled ‘walk-ins’. This is considered especially important when working to re-engage indigenous job seekers. Take into account scheduling of other activities such as health service appointments and court appointments when planning appointments.

Location

Hosting activities, training and appointments in the premises of local groups in the community can increase engagement and build relationships to support jobs seekers.

Providers have reported that co-locating with an Indigenous Community Organisation for appointments has proved to be very successful in helping to increase engagement with their Indigenous job seekers.

Good record keeping is essential

Be an effective listener and note taker so that you can keep comprehensive records of your case work. This reduces the need to repeat information.

Many job seekers may have already had experience with your or other providers and you can find out lots by checking case records and by talking to other case workers. This can give you quick access to your job seeker’s background and help reduce unnecessary repetition of details.

If you move positions or if your site separates ‘job seeker’ and ‘employment placement’ roles make sure that you arrange for strong transfer processes. Many providers have acknowledged that joint meetings or ‘warm handovers’ work best to maintain a strong and positive relationship.

Support and Mentoring

Mentoring works! Mentoring support that goes beyond workplace issues for job seekers can increase engagement and retention. Mentoring can be provided by indigenous staff that may be able to provide mentoring and cultural support outside work also.

Tailoring services to build cultural networks

Tailoring individual and group sessions for indigenous jobseekers increases engagement, and allows for a better use of resources to support sessions.

Provider suggestion: Conduct Indigenous group sessions to develop and strengthen soft skills.
Establishing support networks

Does the job seeker have a good support network including role models, heroes or mentors? Would it help to meet with these people, family and friends or others – such as support workers who have helped them in the past that could assist in preparing a plan of action?

If they don’t have good support network, you can help to expand this by approaching community leaders or role models in areas such as the arts, media, sport, business or politics to enlist their advice and guidance.

Get to know the local community leaders. Make yourself known to them and learn about their work and the issues they are working on in the community. Introduce yourself to others in your job seeker’s community and service providers that have an established working relationship with your job seeker’s community.

Provider suggestion: Engage with the job seeker’s family or pay a home visit to build rapport.

Engaging in cultural and community events

Engaging with cultural and community events – being visible and present in local community and cultural events can assist in ensuring your organisation is a place that job seekers see as welcoming, beyond day to day requirements of job search. It also builds your brand with employers and other community stakeholders.

Collaborate with other service providers

There are a number of community service providers that can provide support for issues that can arise outside the workplace as well. Many job seekers face issues with family and other personal matters. Stay in touch or arrange support from a mentor or other support agency to increase your job seeker’s chance of dealing with ongoing challenges.

In many areas indigenous community services are actively working with individuals and families to address their immediate needs their local community. These agencies may be able to provide additional support to local employers through addressing common misunderstandings.

Work placements and trials

Work for the Dole, Work placements and trials

Find work placements with businesses that have a good cultural fit. Do they have structures to help transition to work such as history of employing indigenous job seekers, existing employees with similar background? Work placements and trials build trust with employers and give job seekers a chance to explore a workplace, while building experience, leading to long term employment.

Wage subsidies

Wage subsidies are an added incentive to take on an indigenous job seeker. They are a valuable resource for small to medium businesses to assist in meeting the costs of bringing on new staff.

Vocational Education and Training Centres

As with many vulnerable job seekers, finding employment may be only a part of their immediate needs so it’s important to identify and support job seekers to improve skills. Vocational Training and Educational Centres can provide specific training for local job vacancies and specific employment opportunities in your area. Eg Cert III in retail to fill specific vacancies with local employer. Engaging with local Vocational Training and Educational Centres to identify and support appropriate job vacancies for job seekers. This process can streamline the support for employers.

Post placement support

Post placement support is essential for any vulnerable job seeker. Consider using a mentor or other role model that you and your job seeker have established a relationship with to help out here too.

Wherever possible this is best received when done face-to-face by a local contact at the job-site, supplemented by phone and email support.
Strategies to support employers to hire Indigenous job seekers

Know your employers and industry

Research key employers and industry

Research businesses that have strong employment record for indigenous people. Establish relationship with these businesses and invest in employer relationships through regular updates and contact. Get to know your local employers. Don’t wait until you have potential job seekers. Develop a relationship up front.

Target employers

All providers indicated that they would often approach ‘repeat’ employers when placing indigenous job seekers. Providers utilising this would build an initial relationship with employers based around strong job/candidate matching, and high levels of customer service. Building strong, trust based relationships with employers at this point allowed them to place more challenging job seekers over the course of a relationship with an employer.

Provider suggestion: Identify employers that have a focus on Indigenous recruitment.

Look at employers who have Indigenous staff or who are actively engaged in their local community. Check to see which employers in your area have an active Reconciliation Action Plan (for more information visit the Reconciliation Australia website at reconciliation.org.au.

Ask employers about their experience with your agency and whether it could be improved. How successful has the employer been with other recruitment methods? Find out the reasons that job seekers missed out on getting jobs previously and pass this advice on to your agency.

Cross cultural awareness training and support

Support your staff to understand cultural differences and show how cultural awareness can help them support job seekers. Providing cultural awareness training and support to employers is valuable in retaining a culturally diverse staff, and also in creating future opportunities for your staff. Also use this cultural understanding when working with employers

Utilise family/friend employment networks

Work with employers who already engage a number of staff from indigenous backgrounds can benefit employers and job seekers. It can create an inbuilt support network in the workplace!

Networking

Engage with employers by tapping into existing networking events and forums and creating new opportunities to build business relationships.

Find out what strategies have worked previously with that employer, their recruitment patterns and processes. For example large building companies commence recruitment programs well ahead of the construction phase.

Provider suggestion: Identify infrastructure projects and employers that support Indigenous recruitment or have Indigenous employment targets, for example, Defence jobs.

Many successful businesses actively develop and implement a workforce recruitment strategy that is reflective of the broader community demographic – for economic reasons as well as community engagement and wellbeing. Assist to develop Workforce recruitment strategy that is reflective of broader community demographic. Use department information from the labour market portal.

Learn about the employer’s industry

Talk with the employer, use what you have found with research through labour market portal and understand employment trends in industry or region, skill and labour shortages may be good sectors to target. Keep informed about new developments in your area through local and national media.

Collaborate

Consider arranging information sessions for interested employers to gain and share insights with agencies or community organisations that work with indigenous job seekers.

Provider suggestion: Offer a single point of contact for employers. Collaborate at provider’s end with other providers and organisations. Manage expectation and do not over promise.

Bring together local Indigenous business and agencies, Council, employers and other employment services providers.

Labour Hire as a transition model

Labour hire has proven to be a successful transition model for employers – especially during the initial phase of employment.

Several providers noted that this option gave employers an element of control/safeguard in terms of the reliability or other issues with job seekers.
Prepare

Tell the employer about your job seeker while being honest and supportive – and discuss what other support may be needed to help the employer and their existing staff.

Consider collaborating on cultural events outside work hours and invite local employers to attend these to help them gain an insight into your job seeker’s community and culture.

Consider taking job seekers on industry visits and workplace walk-throughs, where these are allowed under health and safety requirements, to see for themselves first-hand what the work looks like. Workplace awareness can remove misconceptions or concerns and help prevent inappropriate referrals.

Some employers have made promotional material such as videos for service providers to help familiarise job seekers with the workplace.

Post placement support for employers

Arrange for post placement support in the workplace. Staying in touch has proven to be an effective means of helping new employees and their employers overcome initial workplace issues.

Additional post-placement support for employers taking on indigenous job seekers is valued by employers! Wherever possible this is best received when done face-to-face by a local contact at the job-site, supplemented by phone and email support.

Celebrate Success

Provider suggestion: Celebrate small achievements, i.e. building a ceremony around educational or skills achievements.

Make sure that you celebrate you and your job seekers’ achievements. For example most providers and their departmental contract managers welcome good news stories that showcase individuals’ success stories and highlight best practice in achieving you and your job seekers’ goals.

Some providers showcase success stories within shared spaces at the agency so that these can be shared with other job seekers who may also gain insights and confidence in their own efforts to find and stay in employment.

Include a public display of successful outcomes. For example, a provider displayed ‘stars’ which represent monthly job placements. Another site showcased/profiled job seekers who were successfully placed within shared spaces at the site level. This was done as a strategy to visibly show job seekers that individuals were achieving employment in the region.