Engaging Indigenous Communities

ENGAGING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES LEARNER GUIDE

Table of Contents

About this manual….

This manual has been written as an accompanying resource for *Engaging Indigenous Communities* workshops. The manual was written specifically for small Registered Training Organisations who are members of the Community Colleges Australia network.
The development of this manual involved various stages of consultation and research which was conducted by CCA initially, and then continued by the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre.

During the consultation phases, it became quite evident that the CCA membership had varying levels of knowledge and understanding in relation to engaging and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities. Therefore, the information presented in this manual begins at a basic level, targeting staff who have not yet commenced engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but wish to. It then gradually works towards more strategic methodologies including integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture into existing programs and services, as well as developing strategic plans such as Reconciliation Action Plans.

In acknowledgement that different communities have different histories, protocols and ways of working across Australia, the information provided has attempted to be as general as possible, with tools on "how to" gain more localised and contextual information.

Acknowledgement to Country

The Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre would like to acknowledge and pay their respects to the traditional custodians of the land and country that this course is taking place. We acknowledge their wisdom and learning of our Elders both past and present.
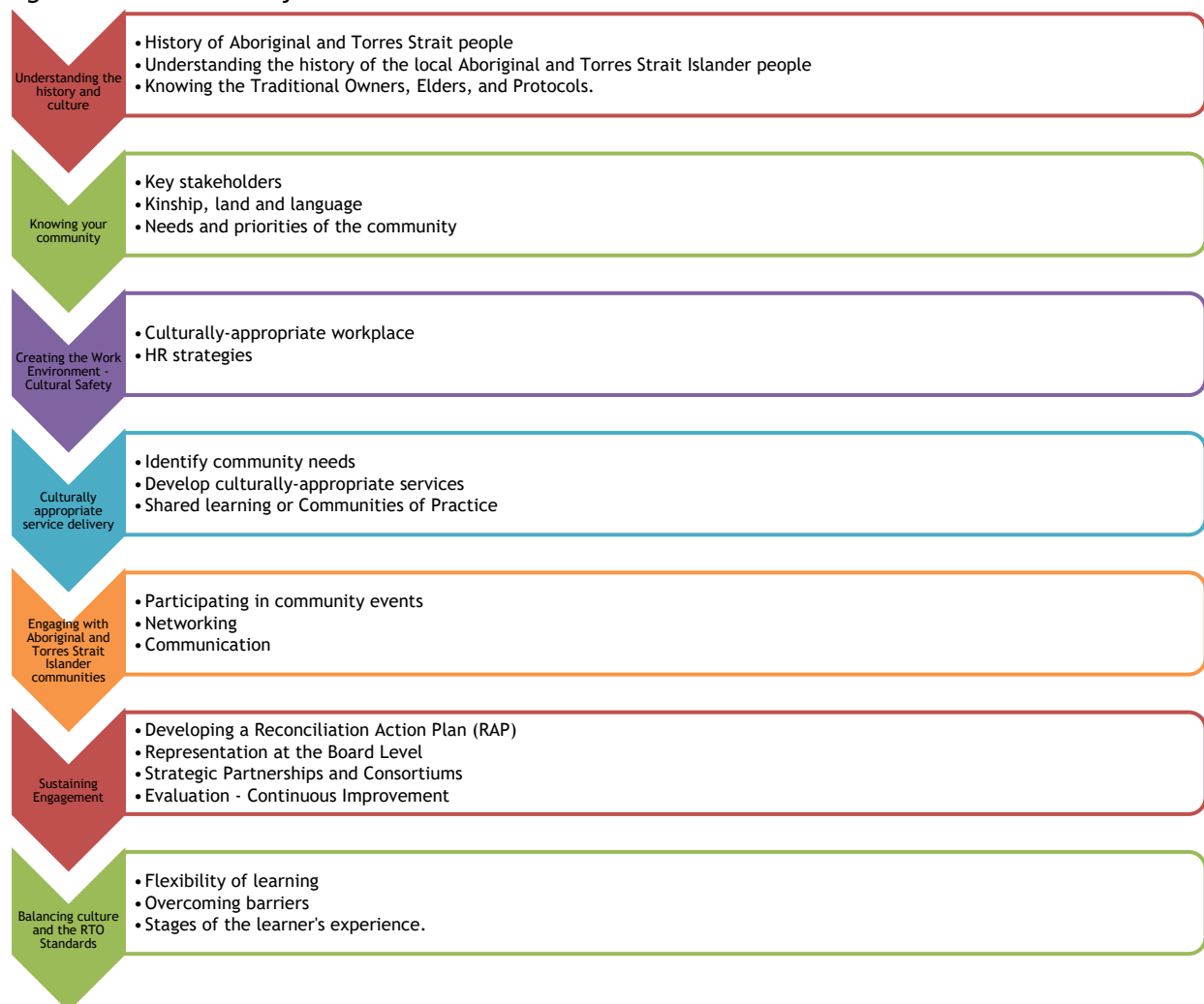

1.0 Introduction

The following manual is a "how to" guide for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) who are members of the Community Colleges Australia (CCA) network, to deliver culturally safe non-accredited and accredited training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (and their communities), through effective and sustainable engagement methods.

The manual provides information and strategies on how to build your engagement techniques and enhance relationships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community through a step-by-step process. The process begins with building basic knowledge on the history and cultural aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but then builds upon this to provide examples and strategies of how to build engagement through HR interventions and participating in community events – through to the develop of strategic plans such as Reconciliation Action Plans.

To ensure the practicality of the document, tools are provided to support each section which may include tips, checklists or extra readings.

The following diagram illustrates the overview of the manual within a staged process.

Figure 1.1. Overview of Manual

Understanding the history and culture	• History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people • Understanding the history of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people • Knowing the Traditional Owners, Elders, and Protocols.
Knowing your community	• Key stakeholders • Kinship, land and language • Needs and priorities of the community
Creating the Work Environment - Cultural Safety	• Culturally-appropriate workplace • HR strategies
Culturally appropriate service delivery	• Identify community needs • Develop culturally-appropriate services • Shared learning or Communities of Practice
Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities	• Participating in community events • Networking • Communication
Sustaining Engagement	• Developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) • Representation at the Board Level • Strategic Partnerships and Consortiums • Evaluation - Continuous Improvement
Balancing culture and the RTO Standards	• Flexibility of learning • Overcoming barriers • Stages of the learner's experience.

2.0 Understanding your community

Before engaging in any meaningful way with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, one must first ensure that they have an understanding of the current issues and cultural practices of that community. This includes:

- Who the traditional owners are – what is the name of the peoples;
- Having a good understanding of the history of the community – in broad terms and more localised – and how government practices and interventions of the past (and existing) impact on that community;
- What the appropriate protocols are in communicating and engaging with the community are; and
- Who the Elders are and when and how to engage them in a culturally appropriate manner and with respect.

2.1 Traditional Owners

Knowing who the traditional owners are on the country in which you operate is the very first and most important step in understanding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. There are many ways in finding this out – either through online research or the local Aboriginal Land Council office.

Identifying the traditional owners provides the first step in also determining: the Elders; history of colonisation and more modern impact of government on the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the community; protocols for engagement; leaders of the community; and other significant information which is presented in this manual.

One way of acknowledging the Traditional Owners, recognising their status as the first custodians of the country and acknowledging their connect to country – is through the delivery of a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country. These are only usually performed before major events or meetings (as opposed to day-to-day business).

Welcome to Country
Aboriginal people have been welcoming visitors onto their country for thousands of years, as part of their custom. A *Welcome to Country* is a ceremony which is held by the Traditional Owner/s and can be in the form of a speech, smoking ceremony, dance or singing.

Where you are organising a major event or ceremony, engaging an Elder to deliver a *Welcome to Country* is a respectful engagement practice. More and more organisations, government agencies and Corporations are performing these, in respect of the Aboriginal peoples of this country, their connection to country and in the spirit of Reconciliation.

The following can assist with organising a *Welcome to Country* for your event:

- Check with the practice done in the past – check if the organisation has a particular Elder that they engage with;

- If you and/or the organisation needs to find an appropriate person to engage for performing a Welcome to Country, contacting the following should assist with identifying the most appropriate person to perform this duty:
    o Local Aboriginal Land Council
    o Local State Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agency
    o Local office for federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agency
    o Main Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation in the community.

Acknowledgement to Country

In the event that you cannot engage an appropriate person to perform a *Welcome to Country*, an *Acknowledgement to Country* can still be performed. Traditionally, Aboriginal people would also seek permission to enter another peoples' country (this is sometimes as they are travelling through, when they "speak to the ancestors" of that country).

An Acknowledgement should be performed before any other business takes place. This way you are acknowledging, but also recognising and respecting the traditional custodians of the country you are meeting on.

As with locating an appropriate elder to perform a *Welcome to Country*, you will need to ensure you have the correct information before performing one:

- Does your organisation already have a policy on an Acknowledgement (or a generic speech which all employees must follow)?
- Contact the following to confirm who the Traditional Owners/custodians are and how to pronounce their name:
    o Local Aboriginal Land Council
    o Local State Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agency
    o Local office for federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agency
    o Main Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation in the community.

Most importantly, if you cannot pronounce the name of the peoples, refer to the custodian group as "the Traditional Owners" or "Traditional Custodians".

General example of an Acknowledgement to Country:

Before I begin, I would firstly like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this country, the (name of group/clan/tribe/nation) people and pay respects to their Elders past and present.

If you are unsure or cannot pronounce the name of the Traditional Owners:

Before I begin, I would firstly like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this country and pay respects to their Elders past and present.

*Please note: The terms Traditional Owners and Traditional Custodians have been used interchangeably as both terms are utilised by Aboriginal peoples across Australia. Please check your local information to seek clarification on which terminology is preferred - Traditional Owners or Traditional Custodians.

2.2   Elders

Elders play an important role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. An Elder for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is someone who has gained recognition as the true custodian of cultural knowledge, lore, customs and practices and who is the authority to share this knowledge and beliefs. More importantly, they play an important role in strengthening the traditional community values and keeping them alive.

The position of an Elder is not automatically attained through age. There are many different traditions that have been practiced across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia, but one common aspect remains. Elders earn their position – it is not automatic. Further, consistent with the traditional structures of Aboriginal society, Elders in Aboriginal communities are a group – there is no one hierarchal "leader" or "Elder". The structure of the groups of Elders are very important in more regional and urban settings, where representation of all main Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people isn't as simple as referring to a traditional cultural structure. That is, due to the different peoples' that need to be represented – traditional owners, historical Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (those who may have been removed from traditional lands and placed elsewhere), and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (who have chosen to live somewhere that is not their traditional country).

Keeping Elders involved can include some of the following:

- Always consult with Elders on community issues and receive their advice and input prior to any decision making
- Always allow for some matters to be discussed in traditional language
- Provide an interpreter for Elders when they are communicating
- Ensure there are opportunities for Elders to come to decisions in their own way
- Be respectful towards Elders at all times
- Keep communication and involvement with Elders regular – ensure they are updated on community issues and decisions made by the organisation, and why they were made
- Don't interrupt when Elders are speaking
- When Elders attend community events or meetings, always recognise and thank them for coming at the start of the meeting.
- Ensure that they role Elders play with your organisation is documented and staff are informed.

Some ways of extending engagement of Elders into the organisation:
- Governance structure could include a representative of the local Elders group or Council
- Decision making process of the organisation includes consultation with Elders
- Include policies and procedures which document the role of Elders within the organisation.

2.3   Protocols

There are over 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clans or groups in Australia. Each of these groups vary in their dialect, traditional practices and customs. When planning to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it is important to understand that there are protocols which provide rules around communication, consultation, leadership and decision making which is distinct to each of these communities. The protocols will vary depending upon the location – remote, regional and urban communities as they are very different in the ways they operate and how they are engaged by external stakeholders. Protocols also vary in terms of the peoples that you are approaching. For example, Torres Strait Islanders have very different cultural practices around decision making than most Aboriginal cultures, and Aboriginal practices vary across Australia – as they are all not homogenous cultures.

Ensuring that you get it right in terms of adhering to protocols from the beginning is paramount to your success in working with Aboriginal communities. A general principle is to go to the "leaders" of the community or a peak Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisation which is operating in the community. If you are not aware of who the organisations or leaders are, firstly contact the local office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander government agency for your State or Territory – they will be aware of the protocols, the key contact people and may also be able to provide you with other information which is useful with working in that community.

For example, in New South Wales, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs have offices located in various urban and regional centres. In Queensland, the relevant Department is Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships.

Protocols are important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for two main reasons: it respects and adheres to cultural practices; and protects the people of that community by reducing the level of fatigue caused by various government and non-government services engaging and consulting with community for a variety of reasons. It also allows the leaders of the community to provide guidance and advice as to how service providers can engage with community, who the key contact persons are for that particular issue or industry, and if there are any burning issues or priorities that may have an impact on how you do your business in the community.

Protocols usually will inform you of some of the following:

- Who the Elders of the community are
- Who the leaders of the community are
- Key contact point within community
- What you need to do before entering a community (more prevalent within remote or regional areas)
- Other cultural considerations such as language, appropriate dress, visiting times (some communities shut down for cultural practices or are inaccessible due to weather during periods of the year)
- Key stakeholders

- Coordination meetings of services which may occur to ensure there is strategic approaches to service delivery – increasing efficiency and effectiveness of services.

The important thing to remember is that the impact of colonisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially in a local context, will have led to certain protocols. These protocols need to be adhered to, to ensure that services run smoothly and the community benefits from those.

2.4   History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

It is important to become aware of and develop a deep understanding of the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the impact it has had on the modern-day cultures and practices. In most literature on the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the following phases are usually presented:

- Pre-colonisation – before 1788
- Colonisation – 1788 to 1800
- 1900 – World War II
- 1945 – 1967
- 1967 – 1990
- 1990 – 2000
- 2001 – Today.

Following is a summary of key and significant dates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia:

1. **From about 1400: Early contact**
   Trade with Indonesia, European sailors make contact

2. **From 1788: Colonisation**
   Killings, incarceration, forced removal from land, wars, disease, restriction of movement, early attempts at forced assimilation

3. **The 1800s**
   Australia rapidly settled, at least 75% of Indigenous people do not survive colonisation
   1835 - John Batman tries to make a treaty with Aboriginal people for Port Phillip Bay by 'buying' 243,000 hectares with 20 pairs of blankets, 30 tomahawks and other various articles and an annual tribute
   In 1836/37, the British House of Commons said Aborigines have a 'plain right and sacred right' to their land

4. **1900 – World War II**
   Increase in native population
   By 1911, the NSW Aborigines Board model adopted by all states
   Stolen Generations - establishment of Aboriginal missions
   1925 - Formation of Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association

5. **1945 – 1967**

   1948 - The Commonwealth Citizenship and Nationality Act

   1962 - Amended Commonwealth Electoral Act gives federal voting rights to all Aboriginal people

   1965 – The Freedom Ride

6. **1967 – 1990**

   1967 - Over 90% of voters say that A&TSI people should be counted in the population census

   1971 – The Aboriginal flag first flown

   1972 - Establishment of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs; Racial Discrimination Act

   1976 - Commonwealth Land Rights Act passed, following a walk off from cattle station in 1962

   1978 - The Aborigines Progressive Association declares a Day of Mourning and holds the first Aborigines conference

   1985 – Uluru handed back to the Traditional Owners

   1988 - The Barunga Statement, calling for Indigenous rights

   1989 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act

   1990 – ATSIC commences operations

7. **1990 – 2000**

   1991 - The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report

   1992 – The Torres Strait Islander flag is designed

   1992 - Paul Keating's historical address at Redfern

   1992 - Passing of the Native Title Act

   1993 - The High Court overturned the notion of terra nullius (that the Australian land belonged to no one when Europeans arrived in 1788)

   1995 – Australian Government officially recognises the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags

   1997 - Publication of the Bringing Them Home report

   1998 – The first National Sorry Day

   2000 - More than a million Australians walked across bridges in support of reconciliation

8. **2001 – Today**

   2001 - Reconciliation Australia set up as independent, not-for-profit organisation

   2001 - First Indigenous woman is elected to a state parliament in Australia

   2002 - Inquiry into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission – abolished in 2005

   2006 - Launch of the Reconciliation Action Plan program.

   2007 - Dramatic intervention into the Northern Territory Aboriginal communities in response to the findings of a report about sexual abuse. Passing of the Northern Territory Emergency Response Act

   2008 - Formal Apology to the Stolen Generations

   2010 - The National Congress of Australia's Peoples is established

   2013 - The Australian Parliament passes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act 2013

   2016 – Launch of the Redfern Statement

   2017 – Uluru Statement from the Heart

For more information, please refer to the **Appendix** – *Reading One: An Aboriginal timeline: From first contact to present day*.

2.5   History of your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Once you have informed yourself of the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from a "helicopter" viewpoint, you will still need to inform yourself of the local history of the community of which you are wanting to engage in.

The history of the colonisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people vary across Australia, including:
- The impact of the loss of culture, language and practices
- Stolen generation – some areas were affected more directly than others, with some people still trying to locate their family members
- Genocides committed in the area
- The level of government intervention from colonisation to present day
- General treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during colonisation, missionary days to present day.

Some information on the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the community may be accessible through public forums such as the local and/or State library, the local Aboriginal Land Council, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AAIATSIS), and other A&TSI agencies or organisations.

2.6.1 Sample - Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

General example of an Acknowledgement to Country:

Before I begin, I would firstly like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this country, the (name of group/clan/tribe/nation) people and pay respects to their Elders past and present.

If you are unsure or cannot pronounce the name of the Traditional Owners:

Before I begin, I would firstly like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this country and pay respects to their Elders past and present.

Acknowledgement to Country - Sample

The Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre would like to acknowledge and pay their respects to the traditional custodians of the land and country that this course is taking place. We acknowledge their wisdom and learning of our Elders both past and present.

Acknowledgement to Country – Sample for email footer

The Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre acknowledges the traditional owners of the country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their Elders - past, present and future.

*Please note: The terms Traditional Owners and Traditional Custodians have been used interchangeably as both terms are utilised by Aboriginal peoples across Australia. Please check your local information to seek clarification on which terminology is preferred - Traditional Owners or Traditional Custodians.

2.6.2 Protocols – Checklist

Elders of the community
Leaders of the community
Key contact point/s within the community
Any specific tasks or contacts you need to do prior to entering a community
eg. You may need to contact an organisation/leader and identify an
appropriate time to enter the community
Cultural considerations – language, appropriate dress, visiting times, any
cultural events happening or planned
Key stakeholders
Any interagency meetings that you should attend to introduce yourself

Cultural information – history
Where to find cultural information on the community such as the history of
the local area in relation to the impact of colonisation on the current
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
Stolen generation – impact on the community
Genocides committed in the area
Level of government intervention from colonisation to present day (will
provide a good foundation as to how you need to consider your future
engagement for example, their time, consultation processes)

*All communities will be different in the above points, especially the historical
impact on community. However, informing yourself will guide you as to the best
way to contact, communicate and engage with community.*

2.7   Extra readings and resources

The most useful website to access more information on the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history is that of the **Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)**: https://aiatsis.gov.au

Available also on the AIATSIS website is the "map of Indigenous Australia", which also provides the cultural boundaries of the different peoples in Australia.

https://www.datsip.qld.gov.au/resources/datsima/people-communities/protocols-aboriginal/aboriginal-protocols-for-consultation.pdf

https://www.datsip.qld.gov.au/resources/datsima/people-communities/protocols-torres/tsi-protocols-for-consultation.pdf

https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-affairs/communicating-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-audiences

https://atsieb.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Protocols-for-working-with-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-peoples.pdf

3.0   Knowing your community

Once you have informed yourself of who the Traditional Owners are, their Elders, their history, protocols for engaging and communicating with the local community, a deeper level of knowledge is required to assist with ensuring successful future engagement with that community. This information includes:
- The key stakeholders;
- The cultural context of kinship, land and language; and
- Community scope on needs and priorities of the community.

3.1   Identifying the key stakeholders

In any community there are a number of stakeholders which are viewed as primary leaders, organisations and service providers. As the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can be quite complex, their stakeholders will vary and be diverse in nature which will spread across various industries and service types. This is a reflection of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture – the worldview is one which is holistic, all this matter and impact upon each other. Therefore, to be able to work and engage effectively within community, a holistic approach is key to success.

In your communication through the appropriate protocols, you may have been provided some key stakeholders to contact as a primary stakeholder. You may also be able to be invited to an Interagency meeting, which in some communities are established to assist with the coordination and streamlining of services to reduce duplication and increase effectiveness of service delivery. These meetings are also a good starting point for

introducing yourself as a service provider to the stakeholders – to clarify your purpose, aim and roles and responsibilities in relation to providing services to the community.

Once key stakeholders have been identified, conduct service visits to action the following:
- Introduce yourself and your position;
- Provide information on your primary roles and responsibilities in terms of service delivery;
- Seek information on the key stakeholder, their roles, responsibilities and scope of service delivery;
- Agreed methods and timing of communication with the stakeholder (ie. There may be a need to meet monthly if they are a relevant service to your business);
- Priorities, needs and issues pertaining to the community in the view of the key stakeholder; and
- Potential partnership activities with the key stakeholder (if applicable).

Conducting service visits will then give you information on the scoping of the community in terms of needs, priorities, issues, gaps in service delivery, capacity of services, existing service coordination and potential partnerships with relevant stakeholders.

3.2   Cultural context of kinship, land and language

Family and Kinship
Family and Kinship in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are very different in structure, significance, obligations and responsibilities to that of the European family structure. These family structures bonds and ties the family together, which presents obligations and responsibilities which extend beyond the European nuclear family construct – to the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society.

The forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families over the generations, commonly known as the "Stolen Generation", has further impacted on these structures, with some families still today trying to find their lost loved ones and some still in the process of healing. It is important to understand the impact that Stolen Generation has had, and continues to have, on Aboriginal people and their communities. The intergenerational trauma of the removal of children, children being raised in (at times) hostile environments and without the modelling of child rearing practices have led to many social problems experienced today. It is the lack of recognition by the Australian leaders and to some extent, the Australian public which further hurts the A&TSI people today.

One of the main points of difference between the two cultures is the relationships within the nuclear and extended family for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. "Family" is a broader term and extends beyond the "blood relatives" to include closely knit families within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. For example: an individual's parents' siblings are considered "parents" and what would constitute "first cousins" in European families are considered "cousins". Grandparents' siblings are also grandparents as so on.

When working with learners, it is not necessary to know all family relationships off by heart, however, it provides a good understanding of how to engage learners into the learning environment in a productive and meaningful way. Once providers are working at a continual and deep level of engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it becomes clearer as to the family connections, powerbrokers within these families and the influential family members are. This information will become vital to appropriately targeting and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners into programs – especially where there is difficulty with engaging and supporting them.

Land and Culture

Land and connection to country is almost the cornerstone or foundation to the Aboriginal culture. The *Dreaming* or *Spirituality* centres around connection to country. It is important to understand the history of colonisation of the country in which you operate and how their dispossession of land from its' people has impacted on their cultural practices and general well-being today. It was mentioned previously that the worldview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is holistic. This begins with the *Dreaming*. This particular subject can at times be highly political and sensitive and avoiding entering into debates regarding these matters is highly advisable.

For conducting training and learning activities however, it may be a potential way of further engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. Innovative programs have included the provision of some training elements to be conducted "on country", to provide a more appropriate and comfortable learning environment.

Language

One very important point to note with regards to language is that there a many hundreds of different dialects amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There is no one "Aboriginal dialect or language". Therefore, as part of your stakeholder engagement and getting to understand your community, you will need to identify what and how many languages are spoken. This will have a significant impact on how you deliver your courses. You will need to determine if materials for marketing, enrolments, courseware and assessments need to be adjusted to suit the needs of the community. You may also require a translator from within the community to provide support to the trainer and learners in the classroom. All of this information should be sought during your initial scoping phase.

3.3 Identifying the needs and priorities of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in your community.

During the initial contact with community, you will be able to quickly identify what the main needs and priorities of the community are. This is important in considering your planned approach to working with other stakeholders and engaging the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Consideration around what the priorities are presently in the community will assist with the long-term establishment of relationship in the community. If you attempt to engage with community whilst they are dealing with a major and very sensitive issue, they are less likely to engage with you at a meaningful level, if at all.

When identifying needs and priorities consider the following:
- Current service delivery system – is it at capacity?
- Gaps in service delivery – are there any which fits within our scope?
- How can we assist the community in dealing with the current issues and priorities?

It may be that your organisation can assist – but may require further resources through either sourcing funding from elsewhere or strategic partnerships with other organisations.

3.4.1 Stakeholder checklist – Service visits

Before conducting a stakeholder service visit, ensure that you have identified the contact persons and visiting protocols for the following:

Traditional Owners

Aboriginal Land Council
- o   Protocols
- o   Elders

Local Elders group

Local Aboriginal Justice Group (if applicable)

State Department (responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy)

Federal Department (responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations

Educational services (such as schools, TAFEs, Universities)

Health Services (Aboriginal Medical Services; State Health services)

Social Services (ie. DV services, counselling, childcare services)

Any networking group or integrated services committees

3.4.2 Community scoping checklist

Community – Cultural Landscape

Kinship – what are the main kinship systems in place (relevant to your service delivery)
Land – who are the traditional owners/Elders
Level of and impact of loss of culture and land
History of colonisation
Language spoken – is there a need for interpreters?
What are the protocols?
Specific cultural considerations (dress, language, visiting times, cultural practices which may impact on

Community – Service Delivery

Key stakeholders
Current service delivery system – mapping of services
Gaps in services (relevant to your service)
Network meetings/committees
Potential for joint activities
Community needs
Social trends
Referral pathways
Capacity – staffing; roles and responsibility; boundaries

4.0   Building cultural awareness and capability of the organisation

Information on the cultural landscape of the community from the previous two stages (ie. Histories, impact, elders, protocols, cultural practices and key stakeholders), focusing on building the foundation internally for the organisation to enhance the cultural capability and effective engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in which you operate.

Internal capacity building can include the following activities:
- Develop the physical space which reflects respect and acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture;
- Integrate cultural awareness and capability within the HR strategies and activities; and
- Provide an organisational culture which respects and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities.

Some of these activities will be simple and easy to do, whilst others may take time and effort to ensure that they are ingrained within the internal operations of your organisation. Smaller Registered Training Organisations (RTO's) will need to determine what level of work they can commit to depending upon their staffing numbers and capacity. Having a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is a good start in assisting organisations with identifying the stages of building cultural capability of an organisation. RAPs are discussed later in this manual (*see Section 7.1 Build on learnings – develop a RAP*).

4.1   Providing a culturally-appropriate space at work

There are some simple activities that you can action within your physical workspace which provides a good foundation for acknowledging and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their culture:

- Display the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags either in front of your building or in the foyer/waiting room of the office;
- Display A&TSI artwork around the office where clients and staff can appreciate them;
- Have an *Acknowledgement to Traditional Owners* on the signature block for all staff to use on emails; and
- Use A&TSI artwork and photos of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people where possible on publications produced by your organisation.

There are many other ways in which you can provide a culturally friendly physical environment – the above is just a few.

4.2   HR Strategies

Building the cultural capability within the workplace can be streamlined through the various HRM activities already conducted by the organisation.

Attraction and Recruitment
One of the approaches in developing a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander awareness and capability is to attract and recruit staff that have knowledge, skills and abilities in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and focusing recruitment strategies to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the organisation as staff members.

This could include including one or more of the following in your marketing or advertising of positions vacant:

- Statements which encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons to apply;
- Having selection criteria of the position which includes the knowledge, skills and ability to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities;
- Where the position is focused on working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – have this clearly stated in the job title (eg. A&TSI Education Support Officer or Indigenous Education Support Officer);
- Clearly state that there is a requirement to work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities;
- Target advertising where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people frequently access information (such as radio, online job search websites, specific organisations, flyers in targeted areas in the community, promoting at interagency meetings, distributing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations); and
- Where appropriate, have specific positions that are focused on working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people deemed "Identified" (the applicant must be of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent or "Specified" (the applicant must have a demonstrated experience in successfully working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities).

See 4.3 for examples of statements which you can display as a guide when advertising.

Selection

When interviewing for vacant positions, where possible, have an A&TSI community stakeholder as part of your interview panel (where your policies and procedures allow) to assist with screening the knowledge, skills and abilities of potential candidates on their ability to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. This also provides the organisation's recruitment processes with credibility and integrity within the broader community, as it is valuing the need for such knowledge to be present in staff and the recruitment of an appropriate person into the organisation.

Induction

Induction is one of the most important practices within an organisation. It is at this stage when staff members are provided with information on their duties, roles, responsibilities, and relevance within the organisation. Ensuring that staff members are inducted efficiently and effectively is vital to their job satisfaction, and also their performance within the organisation, as well as externally with stakeholders. Performance of staff members in the broader community reflects upon the organisation and its credibility and reputation. Both reputation and credibility are important factors to successfully engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities.

It is at this stage also where the organisation has the opportunity to ensure that the staff members are aware of the organisation's commitment to working appropriately with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, which reinforces the development and/or strengthening of an organisational environment which values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Part of this stage could also include:

- Cultural awareness training;
- Completing readings on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history – both broadly and locally;
- Providing staff members with a list of key stakeholders, protocols and "how to's" with regards to working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community;
- Where possible, linking staff with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentor; and
- If your organisation has one, introduction to the "elder in residence" or any significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, who is the "go to" person for the organisation (in relation to cultural issues).

Professional Development and Training

As part of the professional development and training of staff, seek out strategies or opportunities which could further develop non-Indigenous staff in strengthening their cultural capability, and where you have A&TSI staff members, identify pathways which will further their career progression, building capacity of the organisation and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Following is a table summarising some strategies which can be focused upon in relation to specific HR strategies that can be implemented to assist with developing and strengthening the cultural capability of the organisation.

Table summarising HR Strategies which could assist with building cultural capability of the organisation:

HRM Element	Strategy
Attraction and Recruitment	• Including statements on the advertisement which encourages A&TSI people to apply; • Reference A&TSI or Indigenous in job title where appropriate; • Targeting multimedia platforms which are frequented by A&TSI people; • Have selection criteria which requires a demonstrated knowledge, skills and abilities in successfully working with A&TSI people.
Selection	• Have an A&TSI person from the community as part of the interview panel; • Ensure that the ability to work with A&TSI people is clearly articulated and part of the interview questions;
Induction	• Embed cultural awareness and training into the induction process for all staff; • Where possible, have an A&TSI mentor available for the new staff member; and • Introduce the new staff member to a significant A&TSI person affiliated with the organisation (eg. Elder in Residence).
Professional Development and Training	• Actively seek and encourage professional development opportunities for staff in further strengthening their cultural capability in working with A&TSI people; and • Actively seek and encourage professional development opportunities for A&TSI staff members, to assist with career progression.

4.2.1 Cultural awareness training and development

As identified above, cultural awareness training should be made available to all staff upon the induction process as a foundation to providing a solid foundation for building the cultural capability of the staff member and therefore, organisation.

Cultural awareness training should include the following:

• Readings of general history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people;
• Readings of the local history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people;
• Cultural competency training (face to face) with a reputable training provider; and
• Establishing a mutual-mentoring relationship with an A&TSI person.

It is important that staff undertake the suggested reading of the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, the impact on their respective communities (from a broad perspective, as well as researching local histories), before cultural competency training. This provides the staff member with a better understanding of the issues experience in the past and its impact on the present day before undertaking further training. This maximises the value and information flow which will occur during the workshop, as staff members have already researched and been informed of the background of the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

If possible, source a local provider to conduct the cultural awareness training. If there is not one in your community, source an appropriate training program which is general enough to apply to the main elements of the cultural requirements.

An important note here, is although online training is great with flexibility and access to information, in the case of cultural competency training, it is not sufficient in educating and raising awareness around cultural issues and practices. However, online training in this subject will provide a good educational foundation for further education and development in this area.

Most non-Indigenous people, once they have been provided with new information on the history and modern issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, will have many questions and thirst for more knowledge. Ensuring that there is this opportunity is paramount for the continual development of cultural competency within individuals, and then their subsequent engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but should only be considered as a component of a much more diverse and engaging program.

Having an A&TSI mentor

As mentioned previously, it is an optimal strategy to engage an A&TSI mentor to work with staff members. A mentor can further sustain knowledge and skills developed by staff through continual contact with staff members, and further be a "safe" person to seek clarification on matters or issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities.

A mentor can be formal (with a position description and paid for their time with the organisation) or informal, through agreement to work collaboratively with the organisation.

For smaller RTOs, it is not always possible to hire a mentor due to financial constraints. There are some ways of approaching mentoring within the community:
- Building collaborative partnerships with other organisations, to include mutually beneficial mentoring relationships;
- Buddy-system internally where A&TSI and non-A&TSI staff are paired in a peer-mentoring relationship; or
- Seek funding to support mentoring initiatives.

4.2.2 Indigenous employment strategies

Some organisations have developed and implemented an **Indigenous Employment Strategy** as part of their progression towards building the cultural capability of the organisation and increasing the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their organisation – from staff, to clients to community.

An **Indigenous Employment Strategy** looks at all aspects of the HRM functions (as we have previously) and develops a clear strategy and career pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. For smaller RTOs, it does not necessarily need to be a significantly large focus – but within the means and scope of the organisation. For example, a targeted approach may be to hire an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainee, with a developmental plan to identify and provide support around them to further develop and continue to develop their skills and career pathway in the community.

Developing a RAP can assist you with further identifying strategies and activities which lead to or support and Indigenous Employment Strategy.

Following is a diagram of an example of an Indigenous Employment Strategy – suited for a small RTO.

4.3.1   Cultural Capability - Self-Reflection and Assessment

This self-reflection tool is designed to help you reflect on your personal and professional knowledge and practices as they relate to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

It is not a test and there is no right or wrong answer.

Please review the questions and statements and respond as indicated or place a mark on the line indicating your level of knowledge, experience and comfort.

1. No knowledge or experience
2. Some knowledge and or experience
3. General knowledge and / or experience
4. Strong knowledge and experience
5. Highly developed knowledge and very experienced

INDIVIDUAL SELF ASSESSMENT AND REFLECTION TOOL

How would you describe your knowledge and experience of A&TSI history?

1   2   3   4   5

How would you describe your knowledge of the factors which have led to the gap in life expectancy for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people?

1   2   3   4   5

How would you assess your knowledge of the demographic information of A&TSI peoples in the area you work in?

1   2   3   4   5

What do you know about the traditional owners of the area that you work in?

1   2   3   4   5

Are you aware of the A&TSI organisations that operate in the area that you work?

1   2   3   4   5

How would you describe your awareness of the barriers that might affect A&TSI peoples accessing your service?

1   2   3   4   5

4.3.2   Helpful Hints – Key Considerations for building cultural competence

Creating a culturally safe environment

> Create physical spaces which are culturally safe such as the waiting area, common staffing areas to display cultural art/artefacts and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags.
>
> Have marketing materials for the organisation include A&TSI people or artwork when running a promotional campaign.
>
> Ask A&TSI clients or service users what they would like in the office which would make them feel more comfortable.
>
> Conduct compulsory cultural awareness and cultural competency training for all staff (upon induction and then annual refresher courses).

HR techniques

> What are the local A&TSI organisations using to attract A&TSI staff?
>
> Use job search portals such as www.atsijobs.com.au.
>
> Where possible, utilise A&TSI recruitment agencies.
>
> Include A&TSI professionals in the development of screening tools as well as participation on the interview and selection panel.
>
> Develop a career pathway through identifying barriers and developing support services which aim to eliminate the barriers.
>
> Develop an internal mentoring or buddy system to assist appointees with dealing with barriers as soon as possible as well as professional development opportunities which aim to retain staff.

Talk about it – share good news with the Community

> Celebrate your successes and promote these – recent recruits; promotions; training programs successfully delivered – use the media which is frequented by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
>
> Host celebrations in the community in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

4.3.3 Indigenous Employment Strategy – Sample

The following is a sample only, with small Registered Training Organisations in mind.

Overarching key priorities are:
  Work environment
  Attracting and Recruiting A&TSI staff
  Retaining A&TSI staff

Priority	Activities
Work Environment	• Induction process for all new staff will include a Cultural Awareness training program. • All staff are to attend annual Cultural Competency training. • Create physical spaces which recognises and respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture (ie. Displaying the flags, cultural artworks).
Attracting and Recruiting A&TSI staff	• Develop a clear career pathway for the organisation commencing with a traineeship program (or if a small organisation, a traineeship position – with support services to assist with retaining a trainee). • Job entry level positions to be replaced with traineeship. • For small RTO's, consider referrals from a job-ready program to a traineeship position. • For other positions within the organisation, utilise media and job advertising strategies which are frequented by the local A&TSI community. • Work with A&TSI employment/recruitment companies. • Establish a marketing campaign which highlights your organisation as an "employer of choice" for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (consider using images and language which is culturally appropriate).
Retaining A&TSI staff	• Identify barriers to retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and develop strategies and activities which aim to eliminate these barriers. • Include strategies and activities within the broader HRM policies and procedures to ensure all activities are coordinated.

INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY – GUIDING TEMPLATE

#	Indigenous Employment Strategy - Checklist
1. Employment Preparation and Pathway Development	
1.1	Understanding the capacity of the talent pool
	• What are the barriers to employment?
	• Is there a need for further support prior to employment such as a job ready program?
1.2	Develop a pathway
	• Map out the positions within the organisation, including qualifications/skills from entry level to the highest position.
	• Identify the barriers to each position experienced by A&TSI people.
	• Identify some strategies/activities which eliminate the barriers.
	• Develop a clear pathway from entry level positions.
1.3	Identify partnerships
	• Develop partnerships with other organisations which will assist with dealing with or eliminating barriers. For example, a social health service which provides extra support such as counselling or financial management.
2. Recruitment and Support Services	
2.1	Localised attraction processes
	• Identify the most appropriate ways of marketing and attracting potential A&TSI staff to the organisation.
	• Utilise A&TSI networks and A&TSI organisations/recruitment companies where possible.
	• Marketing to be culturally appropriate.
2.2	Recruitment processes
	• Ensure recruitment processes are fair but culturally safe. For example, the screening and interview processes have been developed within a culturally competent framework.
	• Identify and remove cultural biases from the recruitment processes.
	• Consider strategies such as including an A&TSI person on the interview panel.

2.3	Organisational buy-in
	• Ensure that the leadership of the organisation has bought into the process and drives the commitment to A&TSI employment activities.

3. Human Resources
3.1	Leading the strategy
	• Leadership of the organisation to drive the Indigenous Employment Strategy and related activities.
	• Identify any blockages from a policy point of view and amend/develop policies which supports the strategy and related activities.

3.2	Human Resource Management
	• Ensure that any activities from the strategy have been aligned with the HR policies and procedures.
	• Ensure that the activities are coordinated with the HR functions of the organisation.
	• HR functions include: attraction, recruitment, selection, professional development and training.

3.3	Diversity Management
	• Ensure that the culture of the organisation facilitates and supports diversity of staff.
	• Ensure that the policies, procedures and operations of the organisation supports culturally diverse teams.

4. Sustainable capacity building – Social investment
4.1	• Ensure that the strategy is not focused on short term gains, but includes short, medium- and long-term gains for sustainable capacity building of the community.

4.2	Identify partnerships within the community which will assist with identifying potential employees such as recruitment agencies and schools.

4.4   Extra readings and resources

Example Indigenous Employment Checklist – Indigenous Business Australia
https://www.iba.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Template-Commercial-Capability-Toolkit-Indigenous-Employment-Checklist.pdf

Working Together – West Kimberley: Connecting Business and young Aboriginal people in the workplace – Aboriginal Employment Strategy Template.
https://broomechamber.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Aboriginal-Employment-Strategy-Template-MAR-2017.pdf

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2016-2020 – Southern Cross University.
https://www.scu.edu.au/media/scueduau/about/documents/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Employment-Strategy-2017-2020.pdf

5.0   Embedding culture into service delivery

The Australian Public Service Commission developed a framework of cultural capability which has been adapted and used at differing levels of government agencies and non-government organisations. The framework refers to cultural capability as a process of ongoing and continuously learning – across three domains: Knowing, Doing, Being. Each of these domains has a functional area of capability and can easily be used as a guide to embed this into your daily practices as well as higher level policy and procedure development and implementation.

Table summarising Cultural Capability Framework

Domain	Function
Knowing	- Gain knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander culture, customs, histories and place-based circumstances; - Understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' current and past interactions with government.
Doing	- Take action in a culturally appropriate way; - Perform role and business in a culturally skilled manner.
Being	- Demonstrate authentic respect for culture in all interactions; - Be aware of personal values or biases and their impact on others; - Have integrity and sensitivity in decision-making.
Knowing, Doing, Being	- Continually build your capability across all three domains; - Cultural capability is a process of continuous learning.

In Section 5.4, a template is provided with suggested activities aligned to the above framework.

To embed culture further into your organisation, once you have a good understanding of the history, who the stakeholders are, the current cultural practices and you begin to build strong foundations internally on supporting a culturally appropriate organisation – embedding culture within your services can take place. This includes:

- Identifying the needs and issues of the community – and how it relates to your organisations;
- The development of processes and implementation of culturally appropriate service delivery; and
- Enhancing learnings to facilitate and encourage innovation and sharing of learnings through initiatives such as "communities of practice".

5.1   Identifying the needs of community

Further to the discussion in *Section 3.3*, identification of the needs in community can occur at a deeper level here. The internal capability of the organisation (from a cultural perspective) has been developed, determining how your organisation operates within the service delivery system and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community can occur.

Needs and issues will be identified not only by your own organisation, but that of stakeholders and the broader community. Community engagement activities such as annual forums, focus groups or think tanks are positive and productive methods of seeking direct feedback from the community as to what and how to deliver services which fit the needs of the community.

It is important to remember however, that care needs to be taken in ensuring that you communicate clearly the boundaries of what your service can and cannot provide, the aims and goals of your organisation and to manage any expectations from community. To continue building credibility, managing expectations is vitally important. It's best to say "sorry, can't do that" than "yeah, sure we can do that" and then not deliver.

5.2   Developing culturally-appropriate services

Development of culturally-appropriate services can occur over a number of functions and processes:

- Ensuring decision-making is inclusive of the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities;
- Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members in the development of programs, delivery of programs and seeking feedback on programs;
- Ensuring that programs are developed to suit the needs and priorities of the community, as well as meeting requirements of employers and industry as a whole; and
- Working in collaborative ways with other stakeholders within the community to maximise the support and delivery of programs which is engaging of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

## 5.3   Participating in communities of practice or sharing learnings

As culture is not static, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are continually changing in terms of needs, issues and even political influences, services within the VET sector must juggle these continuing changes with the changing needs of employers and industry.

As many RTOs can be quite small (in terms of other large providers such as TAFEs) and are usually characteristic of providing niche training, establishing and/or participating in "communities of practice" or sharing learnings is a non-evasive and constructive way of continually developing new ways of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

How to create a Community of Practice
If creating a community of practice is something your organisation believes is an appropriate and constructive method in further developing skills and abilities to improve engaging with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, following is a guide on how to establish one.

- Be clear about the purpose of the group;
- Identify your stakeholders – who are some of the other RTOs (or like organisations) that could be involved;
- Develop a *Terms of Reference* or *Charter* which clearly states the purpose, frequency of meeting, venue, convenor, facilitator etc.
- Hold an introductory meeting for all members – clarifying the purpose, frequency and aim of the group;
- Ensure that there is a facilitator and convenor;
- Use online platforms (including social media) to keep in touch with the group; and
- Identify sharing of support, resources to deal with issues and focus on continual improvement.
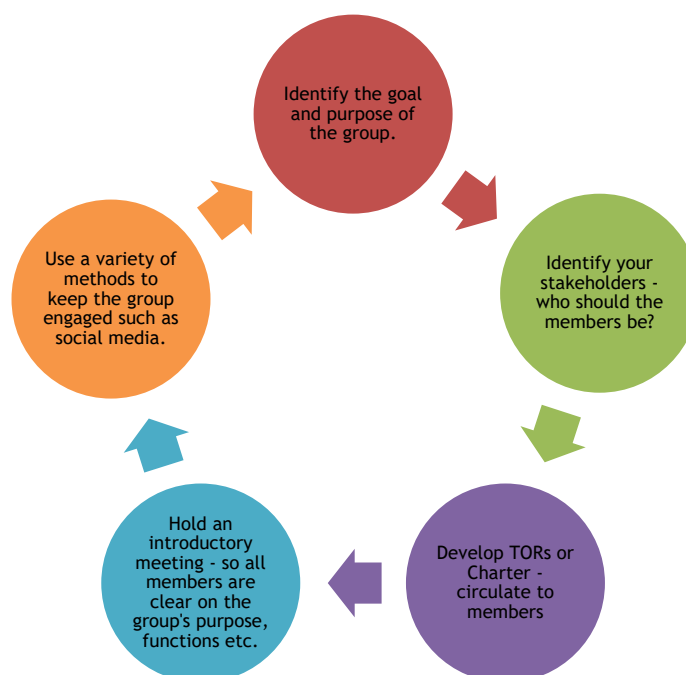
5.4.1 Cultural Capability Activities

Engage in cultural events, celebrations, and commemorations
- o Host NAIDOC events
- o Celebrate Recognition Day
- o Actively encourage staff to participate in community events

Undertaking cultural competency and awareness training for all staff

Raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, their practices and beliefs

Understands the societal and kinship systems of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

Embeds practicing cultural protocols within all aspects of the business

Creates a physical environment which celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

Values diversity and engages culture within the work environment

Engage an "Elder in Residence" as part of your business

Implement policies and procedures which support diversity and meet any specific cultural requirements (ie. In some communities, organisations have "cultural leave" as part of their leave policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to attend cultural events ie. Sorry business.

For more detailed ideas on activities:
https://www.datsip.qld.gov.au/resources/datsima/involved/cultural-capability-training-strategy.pdf

5.4.2 Community Scoping – do's and don'ts

Do....

Be prepared before meeting with stakeholders and community members – have all the information you need

Adhere to any communication or contact protocols

Be clear about your roles and responsibilities in your position

Be clear about the boundaries of your organisation – what you can and cannot deliver – manage expectations

Do your homework first – protocols, community organisations, key contact people, any political issues

Seek input from the stakeholders around their boundaries, their roles and responsibilities, the current capacity of the service and what their limitations are

Practice active listening

Develop a rapport with the stakeholders

Don't...

Make assumptions on service delivery issues of an organisation

Make promises you cannot deliver

Engage in any political or community conflict

Fail to follow up from meetings or not provide feedback from any consultation done

Show disinterest in conversation

Raise expectations regarding service delivery

Try to imitate the "language" or accent

Communicate in a patronising way

5.4.3 Template – Terms of Reference – Community of Practice

Terms of Reference – (Group name)

Purpose
    Identify the collective group (membership, industry)
    The purpose of the community of practice eg. To facilitate further learnings and innovative practices in enhancing the learners' experience for A&TSI people participating in the VET sector, specifically in the (name) region.

Membership/Participants
    Member organisations
    The relevant positions from the organisation (if relevant)
    How to become a member – what is the criteria for joining

Role of the Community of Practice
    To share learnings
    To facilitate innovation and best practice
    To build capacity of the industry in A&TSI engagement

Ethics/Principles
    Valuing improvement of service delivery to A&TSI people participating in the VET sector
    Follow principles or values such as: transparency; respect; accountability
    Responsibilities of members including lead members or "coordinators"
    Respect for the cultural values held by the (name) Aboriginal peoples of the region
    Open communication principles

Objectives
To be agreed to and tailored to the needs of the group and community but could include:
    To provide leadership in the VET sector of the (name) region to improve access for, and delivery to, A&TSI students
    To develop, strengthen and promote appropriate consultation and engagement processes with A&TSI people in the (name) region
    Strategic partnerships among VET organisations to develop and implement best practice processes and delivery, identify innovative

Meetings
    Frequency
    Information on how invitations are distributed and to who
    Agenda of meetings – what and how to provide input
    Facilitation, convening and chairing of meetings
    Documentation, recording and distribution of meeting notes/minutes
    Sharing of information outside of meetings

5.5   Extra readings and resources

http://www.cdacnetwork.org/contentAsset/raw-data/e078cf31-4852-4721-9f2a-06ab08edc241/attachedFile4
https://education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/management/networktermsreftemp.pdf

6.0   Practicing Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

To put into practice engaging with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community happens at a number of levels. These include:

- Having a presence at community events;
- Networking within the community; and
- Ensuring that your communication is appropriate and effective.

This is not an exhaustive list, but have been specifically chosen for this manual, given the nature of the VET sector.

6.1   Starting at the beginning – participation in key community events

The practice of engaging A&TSI communities can start from small commitments which have minimal impact on the daily activities (which is significant for busy, small RTOs) to hosting major celebrations on behalf of or in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Simple beginnings could include:
- Allowing staff to participate in community events such as NAIDOC week;
- Having reference to significant A&TSI related celebratory weeks, such as NAIDOC, Recognition Day, Reconciliation Day in organisational emails, as well as displaying posters etc. in the office;
- Sponsoring major A&TSI events (such as contributing sausages for the sports carnival).

Once your organisation begins to have a visible presence at these significant events, the engagement with the community has already begun.

6.2   Networking

Networking assists with developing professional and personal relationships that can impact on your organisation, business or community. Networking goes beyond putting your best foot forward at formal and informal meetings and connecting with the right people. It is about sharing your skills and knowledge. Networking is about the universal principle of giving

and receiving; whatever your strengths or weaknesses are, you can always improve your networking skills.

Effective networking can maximise your existing relationships, develop new relationships and expand your circle of influence. Networking circumvents making connections. This occurs through a range of opportunities such as: networking events, networking social media links, formal and informal networking opportunities like business meetings, community and industry forums and conferences. Developing and maintaining your networks can help you build lasting, powerful relationships, both in and out of your organisation.

Contacts made through networking can be extremely valuable for numerous reasons:
- Quickly identifying community trends and needs (or issues);
- How to market your training to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities more effectively;
- Identify collaborative and innovative ways of working with other organisations to meet a common goal;
- Raise the profile of your organisation and market your products more widely;
- Build and strengthen relationships in the community; and
- Sharing of success stories of clients and the organisation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders – and networking

One of the things that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders do very well is networking. It's a skill and ability that is embedded in the cultural practices, which make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders very effective. Who people are, where they are from, which organisation they represent and how effective they are in their jobs are all information that is shared amongst the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander networks.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are highly mobile and therefore, their networks stretch beyond the direct community and can extend across the country. As relationships are very important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, networking is also an integral part of daily life.

When first meeting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is common to be asked where you are from. Identity and heritage are very important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Also, given that the networks can extend into many other geographical locations, asking this question provides an opportunity to start to build a relationship from the very start – it is a way of making a connection in determining whether there are any potential mutual friends or family.

Tips for Networking

Be prepared

If you are hosting the networking event, ensure you are prepared and have all the necessary resources ready (i.e. name badges, business cards, catering etc.). If you get nervous meeting new people, try rehearsing what you're going to say beforehand

Set yourself a target
Please keep in mind that a networking event is not a social thing- you are there to achieve something. Think about the number of people you want to talk to, what information you want to give, or what information you want to receive.

Don't have a set agenda
Remember you are there to develop relationships and build some networks- you're not there to do business.

Be a good guest
Don't be complacent or stand in the corner of the room. Make sure you are working the room and making an effort to move around to as many people as you can. Remember to be friendly and open when speaking to your guests, and always maintain positive body language.

Talk and listen
A networking event not only involves talking to other people to gain information, it is also important to make sure that you are listening to the other person as well.

Give referrals
Referring to the above tip, if you feel that you can refer them to another person that may be of interest of beneficial to them, please do so.

Time management
Being aware of the time is also very crucial when networking. You don't want to be spending all of the event with the one person. Manage your time effectively.

Write everything down
Keep a pen and paper in your pocket to write down anything of importance to you.

Follow up
Most importantly- follow up with your new contacts as soon as possible.

https://www.michaelpage.com.au/advice/career-advice/career-progression/10-networking-tips-will-work-anyone

6.3 Key learnings – communicating appropriately with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

As identified earlier with networking, communication is very important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially when developing and maintaining a relationship. It is also vital to ensure that your communication is culturally appropriate and considered – as building relationships, trust and rapport with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is paramount to your success in working in community.

For the purposes of this manual, the generic explanation of verbal, non-verbal communication and barriers to communication will not be highlighted. The focus will however be on the following key points:

- Cultural considerations in communicating effectively
- Verbal communication – use of language
- Non-verbal communication – importance to culture
- Committing "faux pars" - what not to do

Cultural Considerations
At the beginning of this manual, it was identified that it was important to develop knowledge and understanding on the history, including local history, of the impact of colonisation on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in which you operate. Trust of outsiders or external agencies is not a given because of these histories and therefore, ensuring that you take the time to build a relationship is a key aspect in communication.

Verbal Communication
Before communicating with the community, you would have researched the language used in the community, how many etc. Seek advice on the best way to verbally communicate with community members. For example, in some communities you may require an interpreter (sometimes only for certain groups or individuals, and sometimes for certain tasks where accuracy of language is important).

The following are guides in how to appropriately communicate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- Use clear, simple language – free of jargon and acronyms;
- Do not speak down or patronise people while having a conversation;
- Be aware of "common" words which may have double meaning;
- Be an active listener – and ensure that your body language is matching your interest in the conversation;
- Wait for your turn to speak;
- Use an interpreter when appropriate or required;
- Don't enter discussions considered as gossiping or community politics;
- Be sincere in your approach;
- Do not make assumptions;
- Be honest and open but clear if you cannot provide information

Non-verbal Communication

Body language and non-verbal communication are very important when working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. There are a number of different gestures, hand signals etc. that are used in place of verbal communication – all of which differ across the hundreds of communities in Australia. As with any other form of language, it is important to learn and understand them, particularly if there are certain gestures that have double meaning (ie. If it has a positive or neutral meaning in western culture but a negative meaning in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture).

Committing "faux pars" – what not to do

During your scoping phase, seek as much information as possible about appropriate communication techniques, especially in relation to what NOT to do. It is good practice to engage a mentor or someone in the community who you can refer to when seeking advice as well around communication "rules" within the community. Some of the more general ones are:

- Making promises that may not be deliverable;
- Raising expectations in the community regarding service delivery;
- Patronising and speaking over others;
- Trying to talk "language" or imitating an accent;
- Inventing an answer instead of stating that you don't know but will try and find out;
- Showing disinterest in the conversation;
- Participating in gossip or community gossip;
- Not observing cultural protocols (ie. Gender communication rules or eye contact where relevant).

6.4   Extra readings and resources

https://www.google.com/search?q=communication+with+aboriginal+and+torres+strait+islanders&rlz=1C5CHFA_enAU837AU839&oq=communication+with+aboriginal+and+torres+strait&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l5.12189j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#

https://www.google.com/search?q=communication+with+aboriginal+and+torres+strait+islanders&rlz=1C5CHFA_enAU837AU839&oq=communication+with+aboriginal+and+torres+strait&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l5.12189j0j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#

https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/Communicating-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Audiences.docx

7.0 Sustainable engagement that works

So far we have identified many processes and strategies in how to build the foundations of an internally and externally culturally-appropriate service and organisation. However, there are strategies and activities which can be developed and implemented to further sustain the good engagement work done to date. These include:

- Developing, monitoring and implementing a RAP;
- Having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation at the board level;

- Developing and strengthening strategic partnerships and consortiums; and
- Evaluating program delivery within a Continuous Improvement framework.

7.1   Build on learnings – develop a RAP

One way of assisting your organisation in building the cultural capability of the organisation, which provides a "guide" of some of the initiatives identified in this document is through the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). These are accessed through Reconciliation Australia, and is a progressive approach to developing, strengthening and then leading cultural capability in your organisation. These RAPs are categorised from basic through to leading: Reflect, Innovate, Stretch or Elevate.

In summary, a RAP is a strategic document which supports the business plan of the organisation and can include practical actions which aim to contribute to organisation's reconciliation internally and externally to A&TSI communities in which it operates

There are five dimensions of reconciliation:
- Race relationships – overcoming racism through building positive two-way relationships between A&TSI and non-A&TSI people;
- Equality and equity – focus on Closing the Gap – participating in activities which focus on Closing the Gap;
- Institutional Integrity – creating a wider range of opportunities for A&TSI peoples;
- Unity – a process for recognition of A&TSI people in our constitution is achieved through valuing and recognising A&TSI cultures and rights.
- Historical acceptance – accepting the wrongs which have occurred in the past through education and understanding.

Type	Details
Reflect	- Establishes the steps needed to prepare the organisation for reconciliation initiatives for successive RAPs. - Focus on scoping and developing relationships with A&TSI stakeholders – leads to ensuring sustainable RAPs in the future.
Innovate	- Actions are included which work towards organisation's specific vision for reconciliation. - Includes aspirations and innovative actions – developing and strengthening relationships with A&TSI people. - Piloting strategies which empower A&TSI peoples.
Stretch	- Once strategies are developed, strong and ingrained within the internal and external operations of the organisation. - Work towards measurable targets and goals. - Embeds strategies and initiatives as "business as usual."
Elevate	- Organisations which have successfully embedded effective RAP initiatives in the organisation through the Stretch RAPs. - Strong strategic relationship with Reconciliation Australia and actively champion initiatives to empower A&TSI peoples.

*See Section 7.5 for an example of a RAP

7.2   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation at the board level

One of the key political priorities for A&TSI people of today is self-empowerment and self-determination. Part of this involves the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have representation at a decision-making level, strategic level – especially in relation to service delivery to their peoples.

One very simple and achievable ways of commencing this process is to include a position within your Board structure to have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative. Some sophisticated Board structures would already have a Board matrix which outlines the skills, knowledge and ability of the Board members and/or positions. This could be expanded to include representation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

In other organisations, you may seek to hold a position on the board (or create one) which is for the representation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community – which is recruited to through an appropriate process (EOI processes ensures transparency and accountability).

Having this representation not only allows for the cultural aspect to be included in strategic decision making and policy development, but also further strengthens the relationships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and gives further creditability to the organisation.

7.3   Strategic partnerships and consortiums

Operating in the VET sector, especially within SMEs, brings with it the challenges of limited resources in terms of funds and human resources. The development of strategic partnerships and consortiums allows for furthering deeper relationships with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, as well as ensuring that where there are gaps in service delivery – it can be overcome through partnering with other more appropriate services. Some of these partnerships could:

- Identify innovative projects and programs which meet the emerging or current needs of the clientele;
- Seek funding from government and philanthropic organisations to invest in programs which meet the gaps in service delivery;
- Create more streamlined and effective approaches to achieving outcomes; and
- Identifying needs earlier as trends are more easily recognised through sharing of information.

7.4 Evaluating – programs, service delivery and partnerships

To ensure that your organisation's efforts towards meeting the community needs in a culturally-appropriate manner, continual monitoring and evaluation of the strategies and activities to date should occur. Evaluations should be conducted on:

- HR practices
- Program delivery (including courseware and processes)
- Program development (ie. Has it met the need identified)
- Partnerships and consortiums – are they working and meeting the intended outcomes.

Table summarising some ways of evaluating in a culturally appropriate manner:

Activities	Evaluation tools
HR practices	- Retention, turnover and absenteeism rates 360 degree feedback - Feedback from applicants, community and staff on marketing and recruitment - Feedback from panel members on interview process and questions - Feedback from staff on HR practices such as training, remuneration, induction - Exit interviews
Program delivery	- Surveys (can be online) - Feedback forms - Interagency minutes - Focus groups with participants - Community forums
Program development	- Interagency minutes - Surveys - Feedback from partners, stakeholders and community - Community Forums - Industry engagement – on employers' needs
Partnerships and consortiums	- Feedback from stakeholders - Feedback from relevant parties - Feedback from participants in the program (under partnership) - Reporting against deliverables - Minutes of interagency meetings - Feedback from relevant staff on the deliverables, working relationship.

Reconciliation Action Plan Template

Organisation name:
Reconciliation Action Plan for the Years *[#]*

Our vision for reconciliation
Link the organisation's vision, mission statement and objectives to path to reconciliation. Focus of the organisation's path to reconciliation. How the organisation will contribute to reconciliation. Overview of any activities specific to reconciliation and the RAP of the organisation.
Our business What is your core business? How many people does your organisation employ? How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff does your organisation currently employ? What is your organisation's geographic reach (is your organisation state-focused or national)?
Our RAP Describe how you developed your RAP: Why you developed a RAP? Who champions your RAP internally? Who was involved in your RAP Working Group? Outline your RAP journey – how did you get here. Optional: Case studies or staff profiles which reflect the positive progress your organisation has made.

Relationships			
Outline why building strong relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians are important to your organisation and its core business activities.			
Focus area: *eg. Scoping and initiating relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stakeholders.*			
Action	**Responsibility**	**Timeline**	**Target**
1. Establishment of a RAP Working Group and Terms of Reference which outlines the processes for monitoring the development and implementation of actions and tracking progress.			• # meetings are held each year. • Membership is reviewed by (date) each year. • RAP targets are embedded into business reporting cycles.
2. Celebrate National Reconciliation Week by providing opportunities for all employees to build relationships with the local community.			• Host at least one external event each year in partnership with our stakeholders. • All staff are encouraged to participate in at least one event during National Reconciliation Week.
3. Identify A&TSI organisations for potential partnerships and establish relationships.			• Identify # of A&TSI organisations and commence developing working relationships. • Identify and plan potential collaborative activities which support the activities of the Reconciliation Action Plan.
4. Identify an A&TSI organisation which could provide cross-cultural awareness and capability training.			• Cross-cultural training and activities is planned and implemented for staff.

5. Increase promotion of and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events; circulate information to the networks.			• Promotion of # Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events. • Participation in # Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events.

Respect

Outline why respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culture, land, history is important to your organisation and its core business activities.

Focus area: *(Optional)*

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Target
1. **Cultural awareness training and development for staff** e.g. Engage employees in cultural learning to increase understanding and appreciation of different cultural backgrounds in order to lay the foundation for other RAP actions to be achieved.			e.g. • Commit to a target number of staff members who will participate in cultural awareness training. • Commit to the % of staff members to access this training annually.
2. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols** Embed adherence to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols through the development of policies and procedures for respectful activities. *e.g. Employees encouraged to use established protocols around Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country.*			• Conduct an Acknowledgement of Country at all community events. • Develop a list of key contacts for organising a Welcome to Country protocol. • Arrange a traditional owner to give a Welcome to Country address at significant community events. • Make sure the protocol encourages senior leaders to personally reply to a Welcome to Country. • Continually update a list to inform all staff as to the contact details and protocols for community, their elders and significant leaders.

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Target
3. **Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff** Support A&TSI staff to learn, engage and maintain their own cultural connections.			• Staff to attend and participate in their own cultural activities, as well as attending NAIDOC week events and cultural community events.
4. **Respect Elders and cultural protocols** Develop and maintain relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders within the local community.			• Identify ways of embedding engagement of Elders in a meaningful way into your business.

Opportunities

Tell us why opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations and communities are important to your organisation and its core business activities.

Focus area: *Support A&TSI employment and economic opportunities through increasing access for potential employees and A&TSI business owners.*

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Target
1. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment** Increase the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees within your organisation.			• Identify a career pathway for A&TSI people wanting to join the organisation. • Develop an A&TSI Employment Strategy based on the career pathway identified. • Develop recruitment strategies which Commit to a target number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait employees.

			• Professional development for existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity Increase opportunities for businesses owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to supply their goods and services to your organisations.			• Commit to a procurement target for the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. • Develop a relationship with Supply Nation as a source of identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.
3. Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in VET courses Increase opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate in VET courses delivered by your organisation.			• Identify and develop partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to deliver courses which meet the needs of the community (and eliminate existing barriers). • Identity and develop partnerships with organisations and sponsors to guarantee positions on courses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.

Tracking progress and reporting			
Action	**Responsibility**	**Timeline**	**Target**
1. Report achievements, challenges and learnings on the Reconciliation Action Plan on an ongoing basis.			• Report to Reconciliation Australia as required
2. Ensure RAP Working Group appropriately and continuously monitors and reports against the RAP deliverables.			• Consider report card reporting or "good news" releases to the community on targets met and successful activities completed under the RAP.

Contact details
Include contact details (job title, phone and email) for public enquires about your RAP.

7.6   Extra readings and resources

https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C5CHFA_enAU837AU839&ei=ABXCXb_DGs_yrAGqyYWIAw&q=reconciliation+action+plan+template&oq=reconciliation+action&gs_l=psy-ab.1.2.0l10.22224.23036..25834...0.2..0.327.1357.0j4j0j2......0....1..gws-wiz.......0i71j0i67.LrFLcLM2odk#

https://www.reconciliation.org.au/

https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C5CHFA_enAU837AU839&ei=ABXCXb_DGs_yrAGqyYWIAw&q=reconciliation+action+plan+template&oq=reconciliation+action&gs_l=psy-ab.1.2.0l10.22224.23036..25834...0.2..0.327.1357.0j4j0j2......0....1..gws-wiz.......0i71j0i67.LrFLcLM2odk#

8.0   Balancing cultural appropriate service delivery with the RTO Standards

Working within the VET sector, RTO's are faced with the ever-increasing tighter regulations and requirements as per the RTO standards (2015). At times, the contradiction between strict adhere to our courseware, delivery, assessment and related activities and that of ensuring that we are flexible and focus on the "students experience" can provide a significant challenge. Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners can be challenging in itself but becomes quite the balancing act when working within the Standards (2015).

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, flexibility and focussing on their "experience" will require ensuring that there is cultural competency and capability of the service provided, resources available and engagement from enrolment through to completion. In addition to this, it is well documented that there are significant barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people engaging in the VET sector and successfully completing qualifications.

8.1   Flexibility of learning

Regardless of the industry, most service providers successfully working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities do so in a flexible and adaptive manner. The RTO industry is no different, and further to this, it is also a requirement under the Standards (2015).

The following table summarises the flexible approaches to delivering training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

Approach	Activities
Courseware	• Indigenise the content with A&TSI examples, references, pictures etc. • Identify the use of case studies, examples which are A&TSI referenced to make the assessments more relevant. • Have A&TSI professionals included in the validation of your courseware and assessments.
Engagement	• Develop individual profiles to ensure enough information is gathered to assist with appropriately engaging clients. • Provide a service delivery model which focuses on relationship building or rapport just as much as the educational component. • Develop a community engagement strategy which includes engaging students from the community. • Target key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and stakeholders to market and promote opportunities.
Delivery	• Use learning activities which are engaging, fun and resonates with the community. • Use case studies and examples with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander references. • Have support persons that are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
Retention	• Keep contact with the learner regular. • Offer support throughout the learner's journey. • Identify barriers quickly and wrap appropriate support around the learner. • Ensure the learner's pathway is discussed to assist with identifying the next goal in their journey. • Where practical, keep the same contact person to ensure that the rapport is maintained.

8.2 Overcoming barriers

There are many barriers that are characteristic when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Within the VET sector, these barriers are reflected in the low enrolment, even lower retention and completion rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in comparison to their non-A&TSI counterparts. Further, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students participating in higher certificate levels is significantly lower again in comparison to non-A&TSI students. These barriers range from low educational levels through to external social issues, including:
• Low LLN levels;
• Overcrowding of housing;
• Competing family obligations;
• Family and domestic violence;
• Alcohol and drug issues;
• Access to internet (especially for remote locations); and
• Access to reliable transport.

It is important to identify these issues at the very beginning of the students' journey, where possible. Conducting an appropriate screening process can assist with identifying issues such as LLN levels, special needs for learning, any other issues the learner identifies as having an impact on their ability to complete the course.

LLN levels
Low LLN levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been well documented for some time as a barrier in participating in VET qualifications. Some of the strategies which can be implemented to work with low LLN levels are:
- Adjustment to learning styles and materials to suit low LLN levels;
- Learning materials could include a variety of learning types including videos, audio, observations etc.;
- Providing information and support to seek assistance through other programs which aim to develop LLN;
- Providing extra support to the student in the classroom; and
- Having other supports available during their study period including "study buddy", mentor, or tutorials.

Social and/or external issues
There may also be external factors which impact on students' ability to fully participate and complete a course. Identification in the enrolment process is optimal – which allows you to work with the student to identify a suitable study pattern and method which will assist with their engagement in the course, and hopefully completion. However, where this is not the case, having a person who has started building a relationship with them from the start of the experience (enrolment) through to completion, will increase the likelihood of the student disclosing such issues and working on strategies to overcome these as a barrier.

Further to this, focusing on soft skill development – including building resilience – should be included in the delivery of the course. This is a sustainable skill and will have long term positive effects on the student and their family.

8.3   All Stages of the Learner's Experience – from Marketing to Retention and completion.

Marketing and recruitment
Access to appropriate training in the VET sector is one barrier to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in a course or workshop. Ensuring that courses and workshops are targeted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is the first step in enabling this access. This includes having culturally appropriate and engaging flyers, as well as using multi-media which is well accessed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a start to marketing your course offerings.

Enrolment

The enrolment phase provides you the opportunity for screening students to assist with determining if there are any barriers with each individual learner, and if so, to which degree.

Such information could include:
- LLN level
- Learning style (do they prefer auditory or visual)
- Current levels of knowledge, skills and ability required for the course/qualification
- Any issues which may prevent the student from attending
- Medical issues
- Special needs for learning.

Some information may not be provided during the screening process (such as competing family obligations or alcohol or drug issues), however, building a rapport from the enrolment phase is important in the learner disclosing this sooner rather than later.

Developing individual profiles on students will assist with documenting, monitoring and tracking the student's participation and progress. Such monitoring allows for the support person and/or trainer to contact the student to discuss their progress and see if they require help or assistance. It is important to note here that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not commonly known for actively seeking assistance. Sometimes you need to adjust your case management style to monitor and support through initiating contact and prompting conversations around support requirements.

Support and progression

Once the individual profiles are completed, tailored special support can be developed to meet the needs identified. As identified before, overcoming these barriers can be achieved through providing assistance to assist individual students to build resistance to outside influences and barriers.

Training and Assessment

Where the most impact can occur on flexibility and cultural appropriateness is the actual deliver of the training and subsequent assessment. This includes the mode of training, trainer, any support persons, training materials and the assessments.

Face to face delivery is very much aligned with the preferences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as it is consistent with many aspect of their culture. Face to face delivery allows for personal contact, development of relationships and networks – all of which are important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Online learning however is also an option and where there are no issues with accessing the internet, online learning materials can be moulded into a culturally appropriate way and allow for flexibility in materials and delivery – tailoring it to the individual student's needs. For example, having video clips of A&TSI people delivering powerpoint via learning portal, or speaking on a video clip, using You Tube videos that have A&TSI content.

Having support throughout the delivery of the training, as well as through undertaking assessments is a positive and proven successful strategy. Extra support can come in many forms:

- Have mentors within community accessible as part of the course program;
- Have support or study groups available for students;
- Implement a buddy system into the program;
- Have an A&TSI staff member as a support person throughout the learner's journey;
- Allowing for learners to provide feedback on an ongoing basis to allow the flexibility in their experience to continue, where appropriate;
- Providing regular and constructive feedback to the learner during the course; and
- Ensuring that the learner is aware of the Complaints and appeals policy of the organisation.

Completion
Such an important part of the VET sector is the actual completion of the qualification, and more importantly, that the qualification is provided to the learner in an appropriate timeframe.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities are very much focused on family and kinship. Celebrating the completion of a qualification is a significant achievement for some learners and allowing them to celebrate with their family and at times, community, is a very important aspect of the learner's experience.

An "End of Course Celebration" or graduation ceremony, can be part of how you engage with the community. Discussions with learners and key stakeholders will provide you with some innovative ways of celebrating these successes.

Activities such as posting completion congratulations on social media or through the local newsletters and community announcements is a positive news story which will help build your engagement with the community as well as the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Prior to the completion, ensure that the student has also been provided with information on further opportunities of study or referrals to potential employment opportunities. Learning is a lifelong journey and once learners have completed a qualification, it is equally important to facilitate the thirst for continual study, where it is appropriate.

Additional: Elements in the delivery of your training you could consider:
- Provide introductory courses or workshops initially as a pathway to further delivery
- Soft skills and hard skills throughout the program
- Have fun in the program
- Building relationships is a very important aspect in the training
- Seek feedback continuously throughout the program on the course content
- Ensure that where possible, there is at least one person (whether it is the trainer or support person) that continues with them throughout their learning journey. This person should start building a relationship from the enrolment through to completion stage.

- Seek funding programs to ensure that you are able to provide the extra support for students.
- Where possible, employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and trainers.

Table summarising the stages of the Learner's experience, potential barrier and suggested methods of intervention:

Learner's Experience – Learning Stage	Barrier/s	Methods of intervention
Marketing and recruitment	Limited access to A&TSI community marketing channels.	Multi-media Use media highly frequented by A&TSI people Create distribution lists of A&TSI organisations Develop culturally appropriate advertisements ie. Flyers etc.
Enrolment	Limited information is provided at enrolment which could present with barriers later.	Create individual profile template which attempts to gather ample information. Contact with learner to be initiated with staff member who will be the constant during the learning journey. Adopt a case management approach. Have referral pathways ready for LLN barriers or social issues.
Support and Progression	Support requirements are not met. Drop off rate increases.	Follow case management approach. Attempt to employ A&TSI staff as support persons or trainers. Ensure regular contact occurs with students. Contact to occur through various methods.
Training and Assessment	Support requirements are not met. Drop off rate increases. Face-to-face delivery preferred but not always possible.	Ensure support is provided in culturally appropriate manner. Have culturally appropriate materials and methods of delivery. Where possible, engage A&TSI trainers and support staff.
Completion	Low completion rate. Lack of engagement from learners to complete.	Create an event which celebrates with the community. Media releases on successful completions across multimedia platforms.

8.4.1 Learner Profile Checklist

Demographical information (basic)
Aboriginal
Torres Strait Islander
Other
Language spoke at home
Employment status

Education:

LLN level
Highest educational achievement
Learning style – do you prefer visual or auditory
Employment status
Learning difficulties
Support requirement
Why do you want to do this course?

Social (these questions are best to occur either face to face or on the phone rather than on a form):

Would there be anything which may impact on your ability to attend classes?
Would there be anything which may impact on your ability to complete assessments?
Are there any standing commitments you have which may impact on your ability to focus on study?
Do you currently have any family commitments which may impact on your ability to undertake studies?
What activities are you involved in?
Further questioning on employment status – how long in the current position for example.

8.4.2 Case Management Tips

One method of providing a culturally appropriate service in the VET sector to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is to deliver the service within a case management framework. This way,

Where possible, allocate a dedicated person to manage the same learner

Build a rapport with the learner

Identify barriers to undertaking study quickly, to ensure assistance can occur in a timely manner

Keep in regular contact with the learner

Have information on other services available if referrals may be required to assist the learner with overcoming barriers

Ensure flexibility in contact methods – face to face, phone, emails etc.

Seek continual feedback on the training methods and courseware to ensure it is meeting the learner's needs

Implement a study buddy or mentor support initiative
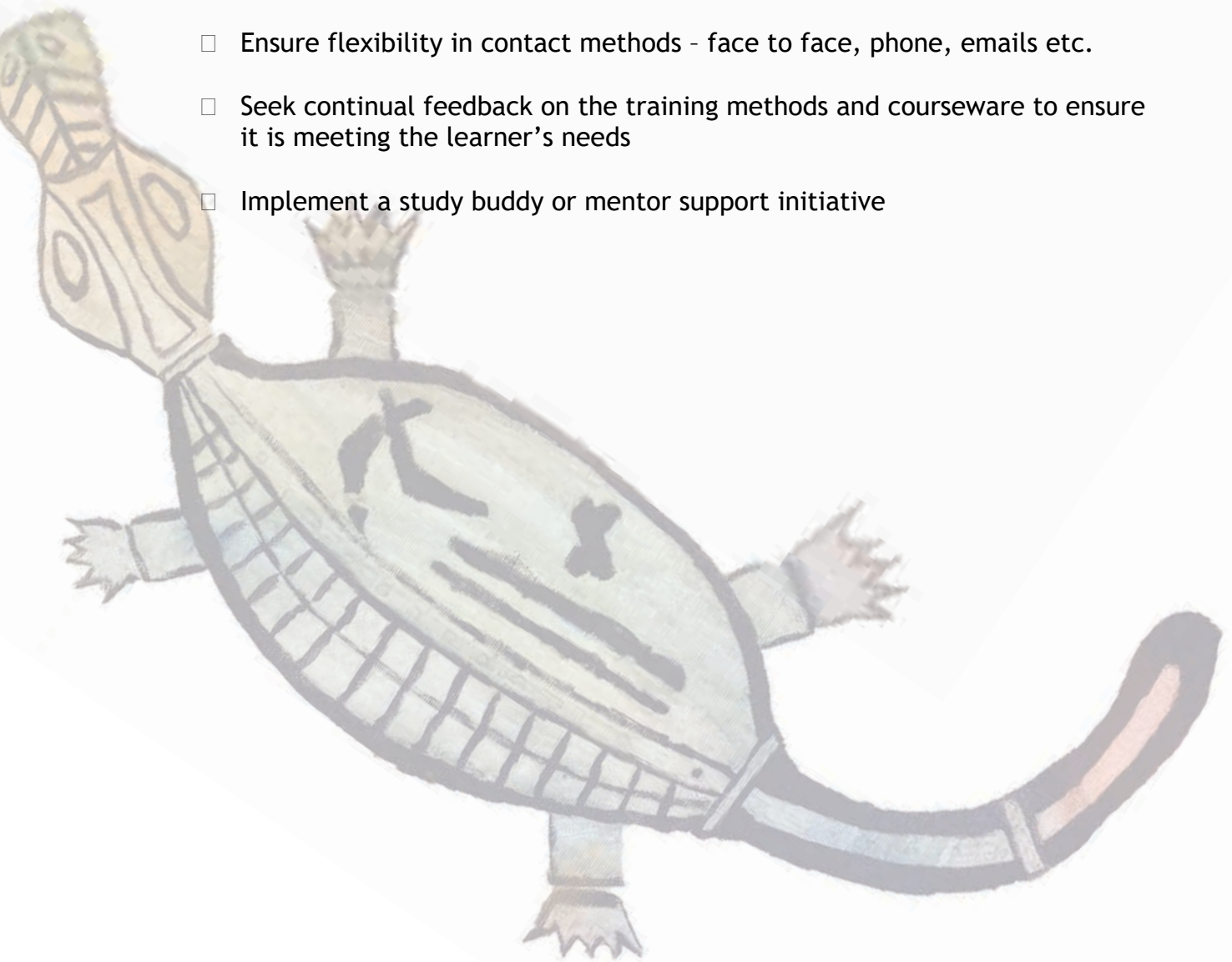
8.4.3 Tips - Training and assessment materials checklist

Ensure appropriate support is provided in a culturally appropriate manner – where possible, engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff as support persons

Where possible, engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainers to deliver the training

Implement support activities and initiatives such as study buddies and mentors

Ensure regular and reliable contact with student

Engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals in reviewing learning materials and resources

Engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals in your validation activities

Where possible, develop resources targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners as the primary audience

Use case studies and examples in your learning resources which are based around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, organisations, communities or people

Additional tips:

Develop and provide a pathway through introductory courses or workshops

Ensure training includes soft skills throughout the program

Have fun

Focus on building relationships and value it as an important aspect of the program

Continually seek feedback on course delivery and material

Actively seek funding to provide extra support for students

Actively seek to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff

9.0 Closing comments

The aim of this manual was to provide the membership of CCA with key learnings, information and tools to appropriately deliver and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities. To ensure that the manual was useful to a broad audience with diverse levels of current engagement and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the manual is comprehensive.

Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities is a complex and diverse field. It varies depending upon the community in which you operate, the impact of colonisation on the community, the social trends and issues, the protocols and cultural practices, and the level of services being delivered in the community. This manual is a starting point to enhance the understanding of how to appropriately engage within a culturally safe context – with the end goal being increasing meaningful engagement and educational outcomes.

We hope that the useful tips and templates will provide a starting point or enhance your existing processes, policies, frameworks and initiatives to deliver culturally appropriate training in your community.

APPENDIX

Reading One: An Aboriginal timeline: From first contact to present day
Before contact
A&TSI peoples have occupied Australia for at least 60,000 years. There is evidence that Australia may have been inhabited for much longer.

While there was significant contact and trade between the diverse peoples who inhabited this continent, there was no contact, no exchange of culture or knowledge between A&TSI Australians and the rest of the world.

Aboriginal peoples are the oldest surviving culture in the world, having established ways of managing their land and society that were sustainable and ensured good health.

It is not known how many A&TSI people lived in Australia before 1788 – estimates vary between 300,000 and one million.

By 1900, the numbers had dwindled to under 75,000 – at least six out of every seven A&TSI people were killed or died from introduced disease.

Early contact
About 600 years ago, the outside world started to make contact with some Aboriginal skin-groups. People from what is now known as Indonesia, established trade relations with people of the north. Later when European sailors made contact, some of it was positive for Aboriginal peoples including sharing technologies. Other aspects of this early contact had a negative impact, in particular the introduction of diseases.

In 1768, Captain Cook was issued with orders from the British Empire that if he discovered the great southern land he was to 'with consent of the natives, take possession of convenient situations in the name of the King … or if (he was to) find the land uninhabited take possession for His Majesty.'

Colonisation – The first 30 years
January 26th 1788 marks the beginning of permanent European settlement of this land. The early years were devastating for the people who live around Sydney Cove. Killings, incarceration, forced removal from land, wars, disease, restriction of movement and early attempts at forced assimilation all occurred in these early years. However, right from the beginning, some settlers believed there was a better way and worked to develop respectful relationships with Aboriginal People.

The 1800s
With the British presence in Australia established, settlement spread quickly across the continent. While in many areas, good relations existed between settlers and Aboriginal people, this century was devastating for the A&TSI peoples. In 1788, between 300,000 and one million A&TSI people populated the Australian continent. By 1990, this number had fallen to around 70,000. At least three out of four A&TSI people did not survive colonisation. Between 10,000 and 20,000 lost their lives in the battles to protect their country (along with around 2,000 settlers).

Others died from introduced diseases and the loss of food and water supplies. Of those who survived, many were either incarcerated or forced into unpaid labour and subject to other inhumane systems

of control. This was despite the fact that many explorers, farmers and pastoralists were dependant on A&TSI people for their survival and success. In 1835, John Batman tried to make a treaty with Aboriginal people for Port Phillip Bay by 'buying' 243,000 hectares with 20 pairs of blankets, 30 tomahawks and other various articles and an annual tribute; but Governor Bourke did not recognise the treaty.

In 1836/37, a select Committee of the British House of Commons says that Aborigines have a 'plain right and sacred right' to their land.

1900 – World War II
By the early 1900s, armed resistance from A&TSI people waned and poisonings and massacres decrease. Slowly, the population began to increase. In this period legislation was introduced that described the relationship as one of 'protection'. The establishment of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board in 1883 became a model, and such laws were taken up in all states by 1911, giving government's total control over the lives of A&TSI people, dictating where they could live and be employed. It also made all children of Aboriginal people wards of the state, meaning they could be removed without permission. Between the two World Wars, policies became based on a belief that the Aboriginal race was weaker and would die out. It was determined that children with non-A&TSI ancestry, so called 'half castes', should be taken from their families and raised in white institutions. This approach led to the forced removal of children – what is now known as the 'Stolen Generations' - and continued for three to four generations.

During this time, Aboriginal missions were established by a number of churches, with mixed results. In April 1925, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association was formed and held the first of four highly successful conferences in Sydney. This mobilised support from a growing number of non-A&TSI organisations, including philanthropic, humanitarian and church groups. On 26th January 1938, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association declares a Day of Mourning.

1945 - 1967
The common assumption, even from well-meaning non-Aboriginal people, that the Aboriginal race would die out was proved wrong. They survived and along with non-A&TSI supporters across the country, A&TSI people managed to consolidate their human rights efforts. In 1948, the Commonwealth Citizenship and Nationality Act, for the first time, gave the category of Australian Citizenship to all Australians, including Aboriginal peoples. In 1962, the Commonwealth Electoral Act was amended to give the vote to all Aboriginal people at a federal level. Also in 1962, Vincent Lingiari led a walk-off from the cattle station at Wave Hill in the Northern Territory, in protest of inadequate wages and conditions. The protest eventually led to the Commonwealth Land Rights Act of 1976.

1967 – 1990
After a decade-long campaign by A&TSI and non-A&TSI people working side by side to move the nation forward, a referendum held in May 1967 was the most successful this nation has ever seen. More than 90 per cent of Australian voters said YES to A&TSI people being counted in the national census of the population.

In 1972, the Whitlam government established the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and commits to a policy of self-determination. Three years later, the Australian Senate unanimously endorsed a resolution put up by Aboriginal Senator Neville Bonner, acknowledging prior ownership of this country by A&TSI peoples. Federal Parliament also passed the Racial Discrimination Act. In 1984, nine

members of an extended family still living a semi nomadic life in the Gibson Desert were found and brought into communities.

In 1988, at the Barunga Festival, PM Bob Hawke was presented with two paintings and text calling for A&TSI rights. This was known as the Barunga Statement – the Prime Minister responded by saying there would be a treaty within the life of the current parliament.

1990 – 2000

In 1991, the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was handed down, recommending a formal process of reconciliation. The work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation during the 90's, stimulated heightened awareness among non-A&TSI people. But the legacy of the past, which was exacerbated by continuing policy failure, meant that the lives of A&TSI people continued to be marred by poor health, unemployment, imprisonment, homelessness, substance abuse and family violence.

Prime Minister Paul Keating's historical address at Redfern in 1992, was one of the most significant events in the reconciliation of A&TSI and non-A&TSI Australians. The speech was given to a largely Aboriginal gathering at Sydney's Redfern Park, to commemorate the Year of the World's A&TSI People. The speech was powerful and asked non-A&TSI Australians to think about how they would feel if the past injustices inflicted on A&TSI Australians, had been inflicted on them instead. Prime Minister Keating asked the people of Australia to feel compassion and empathy.

Only months after the speech was given, the High Court of Australia passed down the judgement in the Mabo case, which recognised that Native Title did in fact exist and that Australia had not been terra nullius at the time of European settlement.

In 1993, the notion of terra nullius (that the Australian land belonged to no one when Europeans arrived in 1788) was overturned by the High Court. As a result, the Federal Parliament passed the Native Title Act. In 1996, Aboriginal, pastoral and environmental groups on Cape York signed the landmark agreement on land use.

In 1997, the *Bringing Them Home* report was launched, demonstrating in stark detail, the suffering of the Stolen Generations. In 2000, more than a million Australians walked across bridges to show support for reconciliation. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation wound up, presenting a set of recommendations for the government.

2001 – Today

2001 – Reconciliation Australia was set up as an independent, not-for-profit organisation to encourage and support the nation in taking the next steps in the reconciliation movement.

2001 - The first A&TSI woman is elected to State Parliament in Western Australia. A&TSI peoples and culture are highly featured in the Centenary of Federation and the Yeperenye Festival, just outside of Alice Springs, hosts the largest gathering of A&TSI people in Australian history.

2002 - The Howard government calls for an inquiry into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). This was followed in 2004, by the abolition of ATSIC, the 'main-streaming' of A&TSI services and the establishment of the National A&TSI Council.

2006- Former Prime Minister John Howard and Professor Mick Dodson, of Reconciliation Australia, launched the Reconciliation Action Plan program.

2007– The 27th May marked the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum and honoured surviving campaigners and also raised the profile of reconciliation as an important issue in contemporary Australia. The anniversary celebrated the vision of equality which attracted a 90% 'yes' vote by the people of Australia four decades earlier.

June 2007- Prime Minister John Howard and A&TSI Affairs Minister Mal Brough announced a dramatic intervention into the Northern Territory Aboriginal communities, in response to the findings of a report about sexual abuse.

August 2007 – Six weeks after the announcement in response to what the government deemed a 'national emergency', the Northern Territory Emergency Response Act was passed. This gave the government power to acquire Aboriginal land and communities for up to 5 years. It also suspended the Racial Discrimination Act, introduced quarantined welfare repayments, and removed the permit system for accessing Aboriginal Land.

1. Acquire Aboriginal land and communities for up to five years
2. Hold back 50% of all welfare payments, so as to control how money was being spent by A&TSI people
3. Ban all alcohol

2008 – Aboriginal elder from Ngaanyatjarr dies in the back of a prison van while being escorted 320km to prison. Mr Ward was not offered any water, or a break during this trip despite travelling in 42 degree heat in Western Australia.

13th February 2008 – Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologises to the 'Stolen Generation'.

3rd April 2009 – Australia finally supports the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of A&TSI Peoples after the Howard government initially rejected the declaration in 2007.

20th March 2010 – Charles 'Chicka' Dixon dies aged 81. Dixon was highly involved in the fight for A&TSI rights through the 60's and 70's through both the Aboriginal Tent Embassy and the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. He also played a major role in establishing Australia's first Aboriginal legal and medical services.

28th August 2010 – The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial and Discrimination delivers a report damming Australia for failing to meet international commitments on eliminating discrimination.

2011 – The Australian Government extends key Northern Territory Emergency Response measures through the introduction of new legislations.

8th May 2011 – Legendary Aboriginal boxer Lionel Rose dies aged 62. Rose was the first Aboriginal boxer to win a boxing world title.

26th January 2012 – The Aboriginal Tent Embassy Canberra celebrated its 40th anniversary with supporters travelling from as far as Western Australia to join in the celebrations.

12th December 2012 – SBS begins broadcasting National A&TSI Television (NITV), nationally available on free-to-air for the first time.

30th March 2013 – Marrawarri people from Culgoa River in the north of NSW declare their sovereignty under the name Murrawarri Republic. The Murrawarri Republic have not been recognised by the Australian Government, but continue to fight for their rights to self-determination.

2013 – Ex sporting legend Nova Paris becomes the first Aboriginal woman to enter federal parliament becoming the Senator for the Northern Territory.

12th August 2013 – Euahlayi Nation on the border in the upper western NSW and lower QLD border, declare its independence from Australia, forming the Euahlayi Republic.

25th January 2014 – Adam Goodes becomes Australian of the Year, rewarded for his leadership and advocacy both on and off the field against racism.

27th – 28th November 2014 – Traditional owners, leaders, elders and community members from across Australia gather for the Freedom Summit. The summit was held at Mparntwe (Alice Springs) with those in attendance declaring their sovereign power and authority of their nations for the people.

December 2014 – Northern Territory Government makes amendments to the Police Administration Act allowing them to make 'paperless arrests' detaining and holding a person for up to 4 hours or longer if a person is intoxicated, without the need for a warrant.

19th March 2015 – Thousands of people rally in cities and towns across Australia to protest against the closure of around 150 remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia. The support continues over the coming months and is backed by other countries such as Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, and China showing their support.

Pat Anderson, co-chair of the Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Protection of the *Little Children are Sacred* report, expressed a uniform view that the intervention was not supported and did not adhere to any of the recommendations laid out in the report; "There is no relationship between the federal response and our recommendations. We feel betrayed and disappointed and hurt and angry and pretty pissed off at the same time."
The long-standing permit system enacted as part of the 1976 Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) was scrapped.

2008 - On 13th February 2008, the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, made a formal apology to the Stolen Generations in the House of Representatives.

"We apologise for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry."

Further Information
Ann Curthoys *Freedom Ride*: *A Freedom Rider Remembers*

Overview

Written by one of the passengers, this book recounts the story of Australia's historic Freedom Ride – the 1965 bus journey of 29 Sydney University students to fight racism. First-person accounts from fellow riders illustrate the challenges along the ride, including confrontations, intense street debates, and physical violence. Included are interviews from local residents, both black and white, who met the bus and struggled with the consequences. Pages from the author's diary are included.

History of the Torres Strait Islands 1879 – A regional view

Papua New Guinea and Australia joined by land
More than 8,000 years ago, sea levels were about 100 metres lower than today. Since much of the Torres Strait was covered by only 20 metres of water, people at that time could easily walk between Cape York and southern New Guinea.

The rocky coast of Cape York would not have looked much different from what it does today, but the Papua New Guinea coast in the northern Torres Strait would have been a few kilometres inland, as much of the present coast has recently been formed from sediments laid down by river deltas.

The land bridge accounts for the fact that today some animal and bird species live in both Papua New Guinea and North Queensland: the spotted Cuscus and Southern Cassowary, for example. On the other hand, domestic pigs, which are today common in Papua New Guinea, did not cross into Australia. This probably means pigs, whose origins lie in Eurasia, had not yet reached Papua New Guinea by the time the land bridge had submerged by the rising sea 8000 years ago.

How long have people been living in the Torres Strait Islands?
In the last 25 years, archaeologists working in the Torres Strait have found evidence of human settlement dating back 2,500 years. There is no reason to think that much earlier evidence could not be found in the future. In fact the only limit is that if the ancestors of modern islanders made camps near the shoreline at a time of lower sea level, anything they left there would have been submerged when the sea level rose to where it is today.

This means likely places to find older archaeological remains are on the hills of larger islands of western Torres Strait and on the volcanic islands of eastern Torres Strait.

What's in a name?
The Torres Strait is named after a Spanish captain, Torres, who sailed through the strait in 1606 on his way to Manila in the Philippines. Although he wrote a letter to the king of Spain describing his voyage, it seems this was kept a secret from mapmakers until 1762 when the archives at Manila were opened to others. Incidentally, Torres's crew captured six boys and six girls from Mailu, near Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, and three Torres Strait girls from one of the central islands, and took them to Manila, supposedly to be baptised. What happened to the twelve Mailuans and the three Kulkalaig, as they would have been called in Manila, is unknown.

Torres Strait in the 1800s

Voyages by British explorers Cook, Bligh, Flinders and others, charted the channels through the Torres Strait in the late 1700s – early 1800s.

From 1800 to 1850, perhaps several hundred sailing ships travelled from Brisbane and Sydney through the Torres Strait on to ports in India and Asia. Only a very few of these ships stopped in the Torres Strait to take on water, to trade with islanders, or to carry out repairs.
Quite a number were also wrecked on the numerous reefs; indeed, the Torres Strait has been called a 'sieve for ships'!

At the western entrance to the Torres Strait on Booby Island, a 'post office' in the form of a few supplies, a log book and a place where letters could be left or picked up was the only port of call for most ships. Nevertheless, enough ships did stop to trade with islanders, that iron knives, ship's biscuits, trade tobacco and bottles were well known to them by the mid – 1800s.

In 1844, a cutter called the America was wrecked in Endeavour Strait and all on board drowned except a Scottish woman, Barbara Thompson. Mrs Thompson was saved by the Kaurareg with whom she lived on Muralug (Prince of Wales) Island for five years, being known by them as Giom.

In 1849, she was discovered at Cape York by the crew of a British naval survey ship, HMS Rattlesnake, and returned to Sydney. Oswald Brierly, the ship's artist, wrote an account of her life with the Kaurareg.

According to Mrs Thompson, the island with the friendliest relations with passing ships in the southern Torres Strait was Naghir, where she said ships often anchored overnight while the crew went ashore. In 1849, the Naghir people had made up a dance about white men that they performed for the Kaurareg wearing shirts obtained in trade from the sailors, reddened cheeks and false wooden noses – presumably shaped to look like the sailors' noses.

Pearl shelling comes to the Torres Strait

By 1850, trading vessels with largely Pacific Islander crews were working all over the southwest Pacific, buying and selling any goods and exploiting any resources that would fetch a profit at a mainland port. Earlier, many of the ships had been whalers and in the 1830s and 1840s, sandalwood cutters exhausted stands of this fragrant wood in the central Pacific. But in 1834, a trade monopoly held by British East India Company was broken and advantaged Sydney-based traders working in the western Pacific, because they were now freer to supply the Chinese market with products in demand there, like beche-de-mer from the seas closer to the Great Barrier Reef and the Torres Strait.

From 1864 to 1869, about half-a-dozen beche-de-mer boats were working in the northern part of the Torres Strait, based at Tudu, Poruma (Coconut) and Erub (Darnley). The profit from these ventures was not particularly good, until in 1869 when Tudu islanders showed 'Tongutapu Joe' a Pacific Islander working for Captain William Banner, a rich patch of pearl shell on the Warrior Reefs. There was immediate rush by the Pacific Islander-crewed boats to the Torres Strait to dive for the new commodity, which brought much higher profits.

First Warrior Reef was worked out, then Moa Pass, the passage between Friday and Muralung (Prince of Wales) Islands, then Endeavour Strait. Only three years later, some 500 Pacific Islanders were

working in the Torres Strait on pearling boats. These men, many from the Loyalty Islands of New Caledonia – Lifu, Mare and Ouvea – and from Vanuatu and Rotumah, were the first speakers of a new language: Beach-la-mar, or Pacific Pidgin English. Torres Strait Islander participation began immediately and men from Mabuiag, Tudu and other places in the central and eastern parts of the Torres Strait were the first to get involved.

By 1870, Marus, the chief of Ugar (Stephen) had been to Sydney twice and others from Tudu had also been south with boat owners. These kinds of men were now described as being able to 'speak a little English' – in fact, they were beginning to turn the Beach-La-Mar they heard on the pearling boats into the beginning of today's Torres Strait Creole (Beach-la-Mar, for its part, evolved into Bislama in Vanuatu, but was overwhelmed by French in New Caledonia).

The Coming of the Light

The London Missionary Society had been busy in the Southwest Pacific since the 1840's and later turned its thoughts to converting the people of New Guinea to Christianity.

Rather than immediately establishing itself on mainland New Guinea, it was decided to first establish bases in Torres Strait.

Rev. Samuel MacFarlane wrote '…on leaving Lifu, we sailed directly for Darnley ... and anchored there… on Saturday evening, 1st July 1871.'

Torres Strait Islanders celebrate this day as 'The Coming of Light'- an annual holiday in the Torres Strait.

Queensland Annexes Torres Strait

The colonial powers were also casting eyes on New Guinea; Russian and Italian warships paid visits in 1870s, but the 'Great Game' in this part of the world was really being played by Britain, who acquired Fiji by cession in 1875 and Germany, who had commercial interests but did not yet rule, in Samoa.

Decisions were made far away from the Torres Strait about the future of the region and although Queensland made repeated moves to annex the islands of the Torres Strait, the final decision always rested with London.

In 1872, Letters Patent were sent from the Colonial Secretary in Britain and Queensland annexed the islands up to sixty miles from the coast of Cape York.

The administrative centre was moved from Somerset (established in 1864) on Cape York, to Thursday Island, although not until 1877. In 1879, the majority of the remaining islands in Torres Strait were annexed to Queensland, by Letters Patent from London again, and by an Act in the Legislative Assembly in Brisbane. Torres Strait had become part of Queensland.

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