Australian Workplace Innovation and Social Research Centre

THE STRETTON CENTRE

LITERATURE REVIEW & ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Strategic Framework for Regional Aboriginal Workforce Development in South Australia

Accompanying Report 1

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THE UNIVERSITY of ADELAIDE
AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACE INNOVATION AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTRE

Literature Review & Environmental Scan

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The Australian Workplace Innovation and Social Research Centre (WISeR) *focuses on work and socio-economic change. WISeR is particularly interested in how organisational structure and practices, technology and economic systems, policy and institutions, environment and culture interact to influence the performance of workplaces and the wellbeing of individuals, households and communities.*

WISeR also specialises in socio-economic impact assessment including the distributional impacts and human dimensions of change on different population groups and localities. Our research plays a key role in informing policy and strategy development at a national, local and international level.

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1 BACKGROUND

The City of Playford LGA and various Kaurna Groups in the region have been negotiating since 2006 to establish a Kaurna Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA), with an Agreement presented on 15 June 2012. A key objective of state-wide negotiations has been to 'develop an Indigenous Land Use Agreement for the land and waters of the Kaurna native title claim in respect of state and local government interests (not involving other parties) and for the participating Local Councils in that area and the South Australian Government'[1]. Within the city of Playford context, it was considered that a Strategic Framework for Indigenous Workforce Development would underpin and provide a foundation for future training and employment skills development for Aboriginal people and would support the work being undertaken by the Local Government ILUA Leadership Group.

The Strategic Framework for Aboriginal Workforce Development project has involved the following components:

- Completing a literature review to identify relevant Indigenous workforce strategies being implemented in other jurisdictions;
- Completing an environmental scan of regional Aboriginal workforce initiatives and programs funded by Local, State and National Government, and local employment conditions and outlook in the North;
- Developing a profile of the Aboriginal population in the Playford LGA with particular emphasis on education, employment and training participation and opportunities;
- Consulting with key stakeholders and organisations to draw on their experience and develop a number of case studies of successful Aboriginal training to employment initiatives in Northern Adelaide; and
- Preparing a sector-wide Strategic Framework for Aboriginal Workforce Development in the Northern Adelaide region, and a second Strategic Framework for Aboriginal Workforce Development specifically referenced to the role of South Australia local governments.

The Strategic Framework for South Australian Local Government is published as a separate Main Report. The current report presents the background Literature Review and Environmental Scan of related initiatives and programs (*Accompanying Report 1*). Two further Accompanying Reports include the Aboriginal Population Profile for the City of Playford (and additional data tables for other LGAs intersecting with Kaurna boundaries) (*Accompanying Report 2)* and the Marni Waiendi – ART Employment Training to Employment Model Case Studies (*Accompanying Report 3*).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 GENERAL BACKGROUND

The *Closing the Gap* Indigenous Reform Agenda is a commitment by all Australian governments to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians and to provide a better future for Indigenous children. A key target of the national integrated *Closing the Gap* strategy is halving the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 2018, with increasing the economic participation of Indigenous Australians pinpointed as a key action area or 'building block' (Australian Government Department of

[1] SA Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) Statewide Negotiations: http://www.unley.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/att_1_item_241_csp_august_2009.pdf

Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2012). According to the *Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report* (2013: 90):

> *Economic participation provides a pathway for Indigenous people to enjoy the same opportunities as all other Australians. Economic independence and security are critical for individual and community wellbeing, with jobs and economic development delivering a wide range of benefits for the current and future generations.*

Labour force statistics continue to show a large employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that in 2008 the employment rate of Indigenous males of working age was 59% compared with 85% for all Australian males, and 42% for Indigenous females compared with 69% of all Australian females. At the same time, the report noted a substantial improvement in employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians, with Indigenous employment rates increasing at a higher rate than shown for the general population, particularly in the private sector. The AIHW observed that this increase coincided with a period of strong economic growth and associated job production; changes to the income support system designed to encourage job-seeking; a shift in Indigenous labour market policies toward unsubsidised paid employment; and a lift in rates of Indigenous educational attainment (Gray, Hunter, & Lohoar, 2012).

These trends signal both challenges and opportunities that must be factored into efforts to lift the economic participation of Indigenous Australians. It is important in this context to identify the barriers to participation and successful strategies to overcome these barriers. Even more critical is developing a coherent, systematic, and strategic approach to tackling issues and providing real outcomes for Indigenous Australians, underscoring the need for an Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy. It is also worth noting that while many of the issues identified in relation to Indigenous workforce participation may hold true across a range of contexts, local conditions also play a critical role. The literature reviewed here provides a broad spectrum of related insights and actions to assist in framing a localised workforce development response for Northern Adelaide, which must by necessity be informed and shaped by local engagement and input.

Before progressing to a discussion of what a Strategic Framework for Aboriginal workforce development might look like, it is worth noting some issues associated with the notion of workforce participation. The Australian Institute of Social Welfare (AISR) undertook a review of efforts to meet South Australia's Strategic Plan target to increase the employment of Aboriginal employees in the public sector from 1.2% to 2% by 2009, including an assessment of the quality of the Aboriginal employment experience (J. Spoehr, Barnett, Parnis, McNaughton, & Redden, 2007). Figures showed there was considerable success in increasing the *total number* of Aboriginal employees in the public sector, however less was known about the *quality* of appointments attained by these employees. In response, the AISR flagged the need to differentiate Indigenous and non-Indigenous public sector employment outcomes by type, level and focus of appointment, as well as retention and recruitment outcomes.

The research showed that achieving targets alone is not a strong indicator of successful and sustainable Indigenous workforce engagement. It was demonstrated that existing Aboriginal public sector employees were frustrated by the limited availability of ongoing employment opportunities (as opposed to short-term contracts). Public service data showed increases in recruitment rates counterbalanced by lower rates of retention, with family responsibilities and ill-health listed as the main reason for leaving service (compared with retirement for non-Indigenous employees). Figures also demonstrated a lower proportion of Aboriginal employees in the higher salary groupings (potentially due to their younger age profile and shorter length of service). No data were available to indicate whether increased Aboriginal employment in the public sector was due to uptake in Aboriginal-specific units as opposed to 'discernible change… occurring in "mainstream" public sector appointments' (J. Spoehr, et al., 2007: 5).

These issues are flagged upfront to highlight the ongoing need to hold selected strategies and actions to account. Indicators of success need to go further than meeting quantitative targets (reflecting recruitment), to ensure that once engaged in the workforce Indigenous participants find themselves on an equal footing with the rest of the workforce (supporting retention).

2.2 The broader workforce development context

Skills Australia has reported significant workforce participation challenges looking forward to 2025, mainly due to the ageing of the Australian population. Projections indicate that Australia's participation rate will fall from 65.1 per cent to 63.9 per cent over this timeframe, contributing to a serious shortage in the skills and labour required for an economically productive nation (Skills Australia, 2010). The Australian economy is currently transforming as a result of technological changes and the growth of services and knowledge based industries and the resources sector (Productivity Commission, 2011). Modelling undertaken by the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (AWPA) has pointed to a 'widening gap between the expected supply of higher level skills and expected industry demand' (2013: 9). Moreover, a shortfall in language, literacy and numeracy skills required for people to participate in training and work is posing a serious challenge in terms of developing a workforce to meet the nation's current and future needs.

AWPA has highlighted the need to lift the rate of employment participation across the population more generally, but with a clear focus on drawing more people from disadvantaged backgrounds into the workforce. It is observed that a labour shortage can be combined with a high number of people looking for work, or for more work, who are denied entry because they 'lack the [requisite] foundation and technical skills' (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2013: 3). Consequently, a strategic framework for workforce development should target action across a spectrum of need, from basic core skills and vocational skills (preparing for the workforce) through to multiple and higher level skills (broadening and deepening the skill base).

According to AWPA, workforce development is concerned primarily with providing knowledge and skills in tertiary education; matching tertiary provision to the needs of industry, individuals and society; using knowledge and skills effectively at work; further developing knowledge and skills in the workplace; and developing adaptive capacity so that people and workplaces are able to respond to changing circumstances. Workforce development involves action across a range of key areas, including:

- Positioning Australia as a knowledge economy through **skills development and targeted planning**, responding in particular to the growth in demand for Cert III and IV (while recognising the importance of Cert I and II in developing foundational skills and work preparedness).
- **Improving productivity in the workplace by making best use of employees' skills and capabilities.** AWPA notes that workforce development happens most naturally within enterprise, where it is matched to contextual need. This is central to employers seeing skills development and utilisation as an investment rather than a cost, and is best served by productive partnerships between education/training providers and industry.
- **Building labour force participation to meet the current and future needs of industry and individuals and to promote social inclusion**. From AWPA's perspective, this means increasing the number of people with qualifications; getting less advantaged people into training supported by wraparound services; developing innovative place-based solutions in communities and regions; better aligning the goals and activities of job services and training providers; and extending post-placement support for those who need it.
- **Equipping Australians with the language, literacy and numeracy skills needed for full participation in community life, education and work**. Government

programs have been introduced to develop basic core skills and vocational skills, including the *Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program* and the *Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP),* however these are considered by AWPA to be inadequately funded and potentially not reaching enough people.

- **Enabling individuals and the tertiary system to respond flexibly and creatively to change** by sourcing career development advice, up-to-date labour market information and 'real-life' perspectives from industry to better align student and industry interests. Work integrated learning is important for giving people the type of work experience highly valued by employers, e.g. providing opportunities for internships, industry placements, professional cadetships (for existing employees) and apprenticeships. VET in schools programs are also important in this context.
- **Strengthening quality in the tertiary sector**.
- **Investing in the tertiary system and workforce development strategies** to meet Australia's skills needs.

2.3 Configuring a strategic framework for Aboriginal workforce development

A Strategic Framework for Aboriginal workforce development outlines a way forward for achieving greater economic participation of Indigenous Australians. In a recent position paper on *Closing the Gap Through Place-Based Employment*, Local Government Managers Australia noted an important shift in thinking away from creating employment programs based on a short term funding toward 'a more strategic approach where the potential for the employment of Indigenous persons is incorporated within the permanent on-going workforce established through a local government workforce development strategy' (2012: 6). This shift recognizes that Aboriginal Australians are often frustrated and disillusioned by short-term, unsustainable 'fixes' and what is needed is a well-considered, systematic, strategic approach. It can be argued that this perspective holds true for all sectors of the economy.

A regional Strategic Framework should speak to the broader national workforce development agenda, while recognising and attending to the general and local issues workforce participation experienced by Aboriginal Australians. For example, it is consistently noted that an Aboriginal workforce development focus must be located within a holistic program addressing the multiple, complex layers of Indigenous disadvantage experienced at population level. This imperative is recognised within *Closing the Gap*, and should form a supporting platform for designing localised workforce development strategies.

There is a diversity of workforce participation strategies put forward to address a range of issues and barriers, however these are underpinned by a number of key principles. At a broad level, the Productivity Commission's *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011* report identified four principle factors or 'things that work' in successful Indigenous programs and activities (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011). These include:

- Co-operation between Indigenous people and government principally, but also with not-for-profit and private sectors;
- 'Bottom up' community involvement in program design and decision-making;
- Good governance at organisation, community and government levels;
- Ongoing government support including the investment of human, financial and physical resources.

Beyond these fundamentals, four strategic platforms for driving Aboriginal workforce development emerge from the literature: increasing demand for Aboriginal workers; increasing the number of Aboriginal people who want paid employment and trust the

system to support them; equipping Aboriginal people with the capabilities and skills they need to fill available vacancies (i.e. to be 'job ready' and 'job able'); and equipping workplaces with the cultural competencies required to support and sustain Aboriginal employees. These strategic platforms link across the public sector, not-for-profit sector, local government administration, and the private industry/business.

In response to the continuing underutilisation of Aboriginal people as a labour resource in Western Australian, the Minister for Training and Workforce Development commissioned the State Training Board to develop an Aboriginal workforce development strategy for industry, community and government. The Board established the ***Training together – working together*** committee to lead the initiative, with the goal of 'assisting Aboriginal people to participate effectively in the workforce and to ensure that the development and application of their skills is within a workplace context' (Training WA, 2012: 7). A state-wide engagement and consultation process was undertaken with industry and Aboriginal communities, underpinned by:

- An assessment of the Aboriginal supply and demand outlook on a region by region basis;
- The identification of the critical success factors for sustainable Aboriginal employment outcomes and best practice employer models;
- An assessment of the range of support services in the regions and their effectiveness in transitioning Aboriginal people into employment;
- The identification of the individual and institutional barriers to Aboriginal workforce participation.

The ***Training together – working together*** committee identified six main findings (ibid., p.3):

1. There is a lack of connection and coordination between employers, job seekers and service providers, between State agencies and between State and Australian Governments that creates inefficiency and ineffectiveness.
2. There are job opportunities for Aboriginal people but employers do not know how to successfully engage with them. There is an opportunity to increase employer involvement and commitment to employing Aboriginal people.
3. One size does not fit all – locally responsive solutions are needed to address unique local issues.
4. Support for Aboriginal people transitioning from school to training, from training into jobs, from unemployment to employment is essential. Relationship-based mentoring is the critical ingredient in helping individuals to make successful transitions into sustainable employment.
5. There are major individual and institutional barriers to Aboriginal participation in the workforce – a strategic, systematic response is needed to remove these fundamental barriers.
6. There is a need to raise awareness of Aboriginal employment opportunities and promote new Aboriginal role models.

In response, the ***Training together – working together*** Aboriginal workforce development strategy targeted five strategic themes with associated recommendations for driving the strategy forward:

- **Connecting employers & Aboriginal job seekers**: recommends establishing an Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre (AWDC) to gather and coordinate data about supply and skills of Aboriginal employees, and job demand and skill requirements of employers; link graduates with job opportunities arising from major companies; increase the proportion of companies (especially SMEs) that employ Aboriginal people; and support industry initiatives e.g. Australian Employment Covenant.

- **Engaging local knowledge and capacity**: recommends establishing Aboriginal Workforce Development Hubs (Hubs) in regions to respond to unique requirements, and link local Aboriginal people and employers; and to propose specific projects in the region (funded by AWDC).
- **Improving transitioning of Aboriginal people**: AWDC to develop a statewide strategy to systematically strengthen mentoring arrangements for Aboriginal people and to share/promote successful Aboriginal employment practices by companies. Supporting strategies include:
    - Establishing an employer section on the Department website to assist companies in Aboriginal employment and workforce development plans;
    - Developing an evidence based approach to identifying and promoting good practice mentoring and wrap-around support services, as basis of statewide mentoring strategy;
    - Supporting local employers to develop Aboriginal people as 'job ready' through on the job mentoring, literacy and numeracy and driver's license programs;
    - Supporting local training providers to provide mentoring to assist students to transition from training to employment; further address life skills and personal development needs of young Aboriginal people through linking Aboriginal School Based Traineeship programs to local jobs and funding for mentoring;
    - Reviewing State and Australian Government programs and funding mechanisms for Aboriginal training and transition support, creating a system with the job seeker and employer at the center (rather than the service provider)
- **Removing barriers to participation in the workforce**: forming an overarching across government group to address barriers that require a whole of government approach, with a particular focus on supporting offender transition into employment; assisting Aboriginal people to get a driver's licence or extraordinary licence for work purposes; addressing the gap in supported residential facilities for students in training, housing for Aboriginal people transitioning to employment; and policy changes (at Commonwealth level) to recognise Aboriginal elders in remote communities as Cultural Custodians of Country and recognizing these as paid positions.
- **Raising awareness of Aboriginal employment opportunities, promoting new Aboriginal role models**: through branding, creating a web portal as a central communication and a formal Aboriginal network to facilitate communication, showcasing personal success stories to promote positive Aboriginal role models, and face to face contact with employers in dedicated Aboriginal employment road shows.

2.4 Barriers to Aboriginal workforce participation

A study of Aboriginal employment in the South Australian Public Sector conducted by the Australian Institute of Social Research (AISR) identified a range of barriers associated with achieving the 2% target of Aboriginal employees in the sector (J. Spoehr, et al., 2007). Barriers included the following:

- **Negative or misinformed perceptions and attitudes** on the part of Aboriginal people about the public sector as a culturally respectful employer, and on the part of employers and colleagues about the capabilities of Aboriginal people in the workplace;
- **Under-developed workforce cultural competence and culturally inclusive workplaces**, including widespread lack of knowledge of Aboriginal issues and history in general, and lack of specific cultural understandings relevant to the working lives of Aboriginal people;

- **Gaps in educational attainment**, which has two components: building pathways into employment through opportunities for skill development and acquiring required credentials; and thinking beyond 'mainstream' qualifications to recognizing the specific expertise offered by Aboriginal people in the workplace;
- **Work-life-balance challenges** whereby culturally powerful family and community responsibilities can conflict with workplace culture/expectations;
- **Under-developed culturally inclusive recruitment processes**, recognizing that Aboriginal people are often bypassed by traditional recruitment processes, both in terms of being informed about employment opportunities and supported in application, selection and induction processes;
- **Under-developed support mechanisms** for Aboriginal employees, who often have to straddle community and organizational needs, and have high expectations placed on them to represent 'Aboriginal perspectives' and provide support to other Aboriginal employees.
- **Insufficient ongoing employment opportunities** are a barrier to both the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal people in the public sector.
- **Insufficient use of exit surveys and succession planning** in the public sector precludes the collection of valuable information to inform ongoing improvement processes and planning for contingencies.

In a separate study, the AISR examined Aboriginal employment in the Aboriginal community services sector in South Australia, identifying key challenges and strategies to increase Aboriginal participation in the sector (John Spoehr, Barnett, Guiver, Hordacre, & Gregory, 2011). The most commonly identified barriers included the lack of competitive salaries (particularly compared with Government salaries), lack of a career path, insufficient permanent employment opportunities, and insufficient opportunity for career development and/or promotion.

The AIHW produced an overview of research-based evidence on the reasons for inequities in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The principle identified barriers to Indigenous economic participation at a population level included (Gray, et al., 2012):

- **Lower levels of education attainment, training, and skills**, extending across both secondary and non-secondary educational outcomes;
- **Poorer health** reducing productivity and limiting the range of jobs individuals are able to do; **living in areas with fewer opportunities,** particularly remote areas; and **higher incidence of interactions with the criminal justice system and/or rates of arrest**;
- **Labour market discrimination** by way of negative employer perceptions of Indigenous workers regarding absenteeism, skills and commitment, combined with workplaces having limited or no diversity/equal opportunity/grievance policies;
- **Lower levels of retention in the workplace**, e.g. due to casual/seasonal employment, leaving work to meet cultural obligations.

NCVER similarly identified barriers to employment of Indigenous Australians, albeit noting that 'obstacles to employment differ amongst regions and communities and in many cases are influenced by the type of economy that prevails' (Giddy, Lopez, & Redman, 2009a: 9). The barriers present a high level of overlap with other research findings, with some additional insights, including:

- Level of job opportunities in areas of limited economies, geographical isolation, inadequate transport (including being unlicensed), reluctance to leave the community for employment and limited access to organised childcare;
- Low levels of education, relevant training and relevant job experience;
- Poor health, problems with alcohol, drugs and gambling;

- Under-developed aspirations to work and lack of role models;
- Unsupportive workplace culture and level of support for employees; limited understanding in the corporate sector of how socioeconomic disadvantage impacts on the recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees; and
- Challenges involved in balancing family and community obligations with the demands of work.

The Business Council of Australia surveyed 117 member companies about their contribution to the economic capacity and social wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, resulting in an 81% response rate. Of these, 76% reported Indigenous engagement activities; those that did not reported **lack of resources** (time and money) (69%) and **lack of expertise** (25%) as the main barriers. A much smaller proportion identified that Indigenous engagement strategies were not in line with business objectives, that it was difficult to identify and engage external consultants, and that there was insufficient internal acceptance and support (Business Council of Australia, 2012).

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry identified common issues associated with Indigenous employment from the perspective of Australian business. These include negative stereotyping of Indigenous workers, perceptions of the impact of culture (traditional authority and practices) on Indigenous employment, communication issues, tensions surrounding absenteeism, balancing the demands of family and career; and stress on the part of Aboriginal workers associated with being defined and recognised as high achieving role models.

2.5 Strategies to support Aboriginal recruitment and retention

The various sources canvassed in the literature review identified multiple successful strategies to engage Indigenous Australians in the workforce, in general and in relation to specific sectors. In many cases the strategies overlap, however with some distinctions based on context. These are presented in the following.

2.5.1 General success factors for Aboriginal workforce development

The South Australian Centre for Economic Studies report summarises a series of COAG endorsed measures to increase participation in education, training, retraining, including measures to overcome Indigenous disadvantage (2010: 12). These include:

- The alignment of income support (e.g., youth allowance and Family Tax Benefit A) to support the education and training entitlement to all 15-24 year olds who have not obtained a Year 12 or equivalent qualification;
- The provision of efficient and effective career and transition services to young people with an undertaking by the Commonwealth to transfer responsibility for these services to States and Territories;
- Funding of the Youth Connections and School Business Community Partnerships Brokers (Community and Education Engagement) to be transferred to State and Territories;
- Reforms to the Indigenous Employment Program (IEP) targeting regional areas and specific industries experiencing labour shortages;
- The new employment services (i.e., JSA, DES) will focus particularly on the disadvantaged and long-term unemployed; and
- Employment service providers will be required to have a comprehensive Indigenous Employment strategy, including more tailored and individualised assistance.

In developing an Aboriginal workforce development strategy for Western Australia, the WA Training Board identified eight critical success factors, including:

- **Senior management support**: whereby the most senior person in the organisation must be seen to support and champion an Aboriginal employment strategy.
- **Identified partnerships/relationships to develop a 'talent pipeline'**: developed with local organisations that have Aboriginal involvement, e.g. JSAs, Aboriginal service providers, sports clubs, charitable organisations, schools, TAFE.
- **Merit based employment and career development**: targeting real jobs rather than tokenistic engagement. Review recruitment processes to allow Aboriginal applicants to present and prove themselves. Career development programs may range from on the job training and professional development to structured academic qualifications.
- **Mentoring/role models**: these may be formal or informal; focusing on career and skills development AND cultural/life-skills mentoring; preferably Aboriginal mentors, with consideration to cultural relationship between participants; extended to non-Indigenous employees being matched with Indigenous mentors.
- **Cross-cultural awareness training**: promoting a two-way understanding with a particular focus on awareness of history, contemporary Indigenous issues and daily challenges experienced by Indigenous people, as well as understanding the need for a strong work ethic; leading to the employer accommodating Aboriginal cultural expectations where ever possible; ensuring expectations and procedures are agreed by the employer and employee from the outset of employment.
- **State/regional/area champions (if appropriate)**: this works well with large, multi-site organisations, involves a champion to drive the Aboriginal employment process (incorporating commitment to the process and best practice) across different parts of the business. In the case of SME's (lesser capacity), there is potentially a role for government in undertaking this role/promoting best practice.
- **Work readiness support**: undertaking preparatory training programs to bridge required skills gaps; tailored LLN support; assistance to prepare resumes, obtain birth certificates, achieve policy clearance and drivers licence where appropriate.
- **Realistic target setting and evaluation**: companies should not expect a 100% retention rate of Indigenous employees; should tailor models according to the situation of organisation, for example if formal qualifications are required to do the job, invest in supporting students to complete year 12 and engage in tertiary education through cadetships (Training WA, 2012: 30-34).

The Commonwealth Government's Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-2018 aims to 'support increased personal and economic wellbeing of Indigenous Australians through greater participation in the economy.'[2] The five priorities of the Strategy are to:

- **Strengthen foundations to create an environment that supports economic development**, with a focus on: safe and affordable housing; infrastructure investments to support economic development; access to health services; safe communities; strong leadership; tax and welfare systems that support economic development and participation; and good governance and coordinated government.
- **Invest in education**, with a focus on: school readiness and attendance, and educational outcomes; transitions from school to work; and access to higher education.

[2] Australian Government, Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-2018, p. 5.

- **Encourage participation and improve access to skills development and jobs**, with a focus on: job readiness; employment services to increase participation; assisting Indigenous Australians to secure and retain a job; and government procurement and service delivery processes;
- **Support the growth of Indigenous business and entrepreneurship**, with a focus on growing the Indigenous business sector; access to finance and business support; private-sector partnerships; and increasing economic outcomes from government investment.
- **Assist individuals and communities to achieve financial security and independence** by increasing their ability to identify, build and make the most of economic assets. This includes a focus on: increasing home ownership, savings and financial management skills, and supporting Indigenous Australians to get the most out of their assets.

2.5.2 The job service provider context

NCVER commissioned the Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia to undertake research into the factors leading to successful employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, resulting in a guide for organisations working toward these outcomes (e.g. job service providers) (Giddy, et al., 2009a; Giddy, Lopez, & Redman, 2009b). Managers, staff and job-seekers involved in these organisations, and employers using their services, were consulted to identify what they considered to be critical success factors and strategies.

Factors identified as *essential* included:

- **Having a strong (strategic) vision and monitoring targets:** this goes beyond a singular focus on employment outcomes to extend to a commitment to the health and wellbeing of the community, supported by monitoring targets e.g. KPIs, milestones, and review processes;
- **Responding to the employment market**: involving an in-depth knowledge of the jobs market, the ability to tailor and/or develop training to meet industry needs as they arise; and to prepare people for employment and employers' requirements;
- **Developing strong relationships with community and business**: a key element of this is maintaining regular contact with employers, developing trust and rapport so they are prepared to take risks, and feel supported to do so; relationships with community members, using informal networks, engagement and consultation processes
- **Job related and culturally appropriate training**: focusing on targeted training to take advantage of skills and labour shortages; endeavouring to negotiate jobs for people before they commence their training (e.g. in instances where companies are legally obliged to provide jobs to Aboriginal people). Culturally appropriate training recognizes the potential need for intensive support, and emphasises job readiness, preparing people for workplace expectations, and how to manage what might be a significant culture shift in their lives.
- **Collaboration with ATSI leaders and the community**: this allows organisations to draw on Aboriginal experience and expertise, provides a pathway into communities, and sets up the potential for respectful interaction and relationships. Maintaining the centrality of Aboriginal people in this process is vital, as reflected in the cited quote '*An Aboriginal person servicing another Aboriginal person is powerful, it is building a role model base, and a competition base – it says "if I can do this, so can you*" (p. 6).
- **Providing holistic support**: for example, providing and coordinating integrated services such as health, tenancy, and other community services; establishing an individualised client assessment process to mitigate the problem of 'setting people up to fail' and sharing stories, addressing potential barriers (e.g. transport, work attire, alcohol and drug related issues etc). Mentoring or case

management approaches designed according to individual need can fit well in this context.

- **Demonstrating strong staff commitment**: it was observed that the more successful organisations had staff prepared to go 'above and beyond call of duty'. Organisations can encourage staff by:
    - Sending them to leadership programs, conferences, other information or development forums;
    - Regular staff meetings, staff surveys;
    - Personal development days, cultivating special interest groups looking at best practice;
    - Buddying system to team new and experienced staff.

Desirable factors for success were not consistently raised by participating organisations, but where they were present, they were considered to be key to the successful outcomes achieved. These included:

- **Tailoring available funding to suit individual needs**: Knowing how to combine and tailor funding arrangements to best suit their Aboriginal clients;
- **Providing employment opportunities through internal enterprise**: employing clients in the operations and businesses owned by the organisation so they can be given the experience of real workplace expectations and requirements in a supportive environment (the example given involved the organisation *Quality Industry Training and Employment* which runs several community enterprises, where client/trainees benefit from learning in a work environment and can work through any potential issues 'in house').
- **Learning from other organisations**: this can be done informally through networks or through conferences and research; characterised by scoping for innovative ideas, learning from others' success, sharing ideas and promoting success.
- **Having alternative sources of funding** (other than government): e.g. from their own business, charity, other revenue-raising. This allows flexibility, the ability to take risks, safe in the knowledge they are protected by their independent funds.

2.5.3 The not-for-profit Aboriginal social services sector

In the context of the not-for-profit Aboriginal community services sector, the AISR identified a range of strategies for maximising the recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees (John Spoehr, et al., 2011). Competitive salaries and opportunities for permanent employment ranked high on the list, noting (on the positive side) that Aboriginal community services workers were more likely to be employed on permanent contracts than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. The use of active rather than passive recruitment strategies was recommended, for example using Aboriginal community and work based networks (e.g. Aboriginal family groups, peer groups, associations and organisations) to encourage Aboriginal people to seek work in this sector.

Strategies to improve retention include work-based opportunities for study and career development, including supportive strategies such as study leave, flexible hours and mentoring. At an organisational level, on the job and external training should include a focus on:

- Improving the **staff orientation** process to ensure that Aboriginal staff have a good understanding of their role and the expectations of the organisation;
- Linking the employee with an **independent mentor** who respects the employee and has skills to negotiate for both parties if needed;
- Encouraging Aboriginal staff to work across all areas of the organisation if desired, **not being restricted to Aboriginal specific programs**; and

- Developing **links with tertiary training organisations** providing training to Aboriginal people

Study findings also highlighted the importance of the psychosocial working environment, particularly the following features:

- Attention to building the confidence of Aboriginal staff;
- A focus on keeping the work interesting and fulfilling;
- An "open door" policy encouraging ideas and input from all employees;
- Providing clear and consistent work and community boundaries for Aboriginal staff;
- Recognising achievements, e.g. when work is performed well or milestones are accomplished;
- Drawing links between the day to day activities of staff and the broader outcomes achieved as a direct result of their work; and
- Having organisation-wide policies regarding cultural respect (ibid.,: 27).

The AISR report identified a further range of considerations, including the need for professional development programs to build capacity of existing Aboriginal community services professionals to assume higher level coordination and management roles. Many of these staff were at Cert III and IV level, signaling a gap in higher qualifications. One suggestion was to develop a state government funded program involving both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal managers; another was to adapt private sector models for fast tracking potential management candidates into leadership positions for the community services sector. It is also important to develop pathways into employment for volunteers (representing a high proportion of Aboriginal involvement in community sector), recognizing their prior learning based on volunteer work.

2.5.4 The South Australian Public Sector

The AISR's review of achieving the target of 2% Aboriginal employment in the South Australian public sector recommended a number of key strategies to develop and support this workforce. There is a strong focus on strengthening the cultural competence of employing organisations, through ongoing training that builds informed understanding of Aboriginal culture, history and issues, and develops cross-cultural *skills* as well as awareness and sensitivity (noting that awareness in and of itself is insufficient). In particular, the report flagged the need to develop managers who are capable of 'promoting culturally secure work environments that actively discourage racism and discrimination' (J. Spoehr, et al., 2007: 16).

Other strategies identified in the report include:

- Focusing on **early intervention and building pathways** from secondary school onwards into training and work option;
- Linking Aboriginal traineeships and apprenticeships to **ongoing employment** in the public sector and increasing the numbers of Aboriginal cadetships and scholarships;
- Developing a **culturally inclusive recruitment process** (part of established HR policy and practice), including informed application and interview preparation, user friendly wording of Job and Specification Statements, and Aboriginal membership of selection panels;
- Developing a **multi-pronged communication strategy** in collaboration with Aboriginal community representatives to address gaps in knowledge about how sector operates, how to apply for public sector employment and to inform the expectations of prospective employees;
- Working towards achieving a **'critical mass' of Aboriginal employees** to ensure an adequate support network;

- Ensuring the **skills and knowledge of Aboriginal employees are fully utilised and valued** – 'relies on evaluating Aboriginal expertise within culturally relevant paradigms and not relying solely on mainstream credentialing systems' (p. 14).
- Strengthening **support strategies** such as mentoring, buddying, opportunities for structured Aboriginal networking;
- Conducting **succession planning and exit interviews**; and undertaking a regular survey of SA public sector Aboriginal employees.

2.5.5 The private sector

There are also important economic drivers for increasing the workforce participation of Indigenous Australians. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) is the peak council of Australian business associations and takes a lead role in presenting the views of business to government. This has included a committed role over the last 12 years to developing strategies to increase Indigenous participation rates in the private sector through employment and training opportunities. The ACCI argues that the starting point in bringing business on board is presenting the 'good business sense' of employing Indigenous Australians, hitherto overlooked, but comprising a key 'untapped labour force' (No date provided: 7). The ACCI highlight the significant value attached to utilising the unique skills and perspectives of Indigenous Australians, particularly in helping enterprises take advantage of local opportunities and providing insights into 'niche markets that may not be obvious to non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous employment can serve as a pathway to building sustainable, local and dedicated workforce, and can play a major role in developing deeper cultural understanding across the workplace. A committed approach to improving employment outcomes for Indigenous job seekers also goes toward meeting corporate social responsibilities and objectives of Australian business.

In a separate report about the rewards of employing a diverse workforce, the ACCI identified a range of important benefits to business, noting that 'although being a good corporate citizen is a noble aim, ultimately the effectiveness of plans to increase workforce participation require businesses to see an **economic** benefit of adopting diverse employment practices' (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2012: 10). These include creating a competitive advantage, securing the business's future workforce, presenting as an employer of choice, building employee loyalty, growing the skills of the current workforce, and taking advantages of Government incentives. Further benefits are that employing locally leads to longevity and meeting legal obligations and managing risks (i.e. taking steps to comply with anti-discrimination legislation and Substantive Equity Principles) reduces the likelihood of receiving a complaint of discrimination.

In the *Employing Indigenous Australians: Indigenous Employment Strategy Framework for Industry* report (no date provided) the ACCI outlined a range of questions and issues for enterprises to consider in setting up a successful Indigenous employment strategy. In terms of planning, enterprises are encouraged to reflect on why they want to employ Indigenous Australians and what the benefits would be to their business; how the business is promoted to Indigenous Australians and what might inspire them to work for the business; what success the business has had to date in terms of working with Indigenous Australians; and assessing current capacity for supporting Indigenous employees. Reviewing cross-cultural awareness training in the workplace is important for developing better understanding among staff and workplace cohesion. Cultural awareness should also extend to building effective and equitable community access and relationships, including incorporating Indigenous forms of knowledge and ways of learning, demonstrating awareness and appreciation of Indigenous culture, and supporting Indigenous research though collaborative approaches.

The next step is for enterprises to assess available support services and funding, from providers such as employment agencies and Job Network members, Group Training

Organisations, Training Providers, Indigenous Employment Centres and Industry Associations. Financial assistance might be sought for: on-the-job training (which includes training provided by the employer); licences, uniforms and equipment for the new employee; mentoring and other workplace support; employing apprentices and trainees; and wage assistance.

Consideration to recruitment, induction and retention strategies was also highlighted, to emphasise Indigenous access, support and development in the workplace. Central to this are managerial and/or supervisory skills in working with Indigenous employees, clear communication about roles and expectations, understanding cultural obligations and how these impact on work, employing a critical mass of Indigenous employees, and mentoring.

The Business Council of Australia's *Many Connections, One Goal – Closing the Gap* report lists a number of important lessons that have emerged from member companies engaged in Indigenous employment initiatives. These include stepping up to be involved, establishing a business case for employing Indigenous workers and providing high level leadership. It is also important to secure broad buy-in across a range of partners, and in particular foster Indigenous partnerships and build cultural knowledge and respect. Business are also advised to be realistic about what can they can achieve, stay focused, and review and revise activities regularly.

On a broader scale, further priorities included:

- Increasing the pool of work-ready Indigenous job candidates;
- Improving the responsiveness and flexibility of training providers and programs;
- Better facilitating job matching;
- Exploring the scope to develop employment models that are able to be scaled up;
- Better promoting emerging 'best practice' models and initiatives so they can be replicated;
- Increasing information sharing and collaboration, particularly among companies;
- Continuing to work with government to enhance the effectiveness and flexibility of government funding and programs and to improve the ease of collaboration with business.

2.5.6 Indigenous self-employed and entrepreneurs

In the absence of specific data on Indigenous business in Australia, Hunter (2013) used census data on self-employment as a proxy to examine trends in Indigenous entrepreneurship. The study used the working definition that an entrepreneur is 'an economic agent who organises and operates a business, taking on financial risk to do so' (Hunter, 2013: 7). It was recognised that the concept of Indigenous business is difficult to define, but broadly infers that Indigenous people have substantial control over the enterprise. In a further qualification, the authors note that 'obviously self-employment is conceptually different to a business, as it refers to an individual rather than a social organisation, but the self-employed have to bear the risk of their own economic activities and hence are by definition entrepreneurial' (ibid.,p. 7).

Census self-employment data showed that Indigenous self-employment increased in absolute terms and as proportion of Indigenous employment from the early 1990s (increased by a factor of 2.7 from 4,600 in 1991 to 12,500 in 2011[3]), although the incidence of self-employment in the Indigenous population is still around one third that of other Australians. Indigenous entrepreneurs were more likely to be living in urban areas, although a marginal increase was detected in remote areas. Hunter acknowledges that 'the growing number of Indigenous entrepreneurs makes a tiny contribution to improving Indigenous employment outcomes relative to the rest of the Indigenous labour market',

[3]The number of Indigenous self-employed increased by a factor of 2.7 from 4,600 in 1991 to 12,500 in 2011

however there is potential value add in Indigenous businesses providing working environments that are conducive to wider Indigenous employment.

2.5.7 Local government

As a major employer in regional, rural and remote communities, local government can play a key role in the employment of Indigenous people in local communities. Local Government Managers Australia argue that local government is a 'natural fit' for this as it is uniquely positioned with national reach and offers diverse occupational opportunities; is a significant Australian employer with access to substantial resources; and is geographically comprehensive – covering the gamut of metropolitan, regional and remote areas of Australia (2012: 11). The Reconciliation Victoria *Reconciliation in Local Government Action Research Report* notes that 'as the level of government closest to communities, local government is well placed to lead and influence positive change at the local level' (Reconciliation Victoria, 2011; p.32). While solutions are best tailored to local conditions, common reference points for all local governments include a responsibility to provide effective services to all constituents, legislative responsibilities in relation to Native Title and Aboriginal Heritage, Closing the Gap commitments to reduce Indigenous disadvantage, upholding and protecting human rights, and promoting reconciliation.

The *National Skills Shortage Strategy for Local Government* report recommended growing the regional workforce by drawing under-utilised local populations into the local government workforce (National Local Government Skills Shortage Steering Committee, 2007). In response, Local Government Managers Australia (LGMA) developed a *National Local Government Indigenous Employment Position Paper* (2012) outlining key elements and actions for local government authorities to consider in developing their approach to building Indigenous employment. These included:

- **Demonstrating organisational commitment** to improving Indigenous employment outcomes. Suggested strategies include securing commitment from councillors and/or senior management to increase Aboriginal employment and engage with local communities to this end; engaging and understanding the local community through community mapping and conversations; developing a Statement of Commitment to Indigenous People or a Memorandum of Understanding; and developing a Reconciliation Action Plan;
- Providing **transition to employment, pre-employment or pre-vocational training** that prepares Indigenous employees for life in the local government workforce. This includes life skills training and a sustained mentoring program;
- Adopting **culturally appropriate recruitment strategies** that focus on personal communication and the opportunity to demonstrate skills and abilities; and
- Developing **organisational policies that encourage Indigenous employees to remain in the workforce**. This may include flexible leave and roster arrangements and ongoing mentoring and support, to assist employees in managing family, cultural and financial responsibilities.
- Addressing racism in the workforce, building a **culturally safe and competent organisation** by establishing and maintaining two-way cross-cultural awareness and understanding;
- Establishing a strong foundation of **literacy and numeracy skills** in transition to employment and pre-employment training;
- Explaining and promoting **career pathways and career development opportunities**;
- Explaining and providing access to **Recognised Prior Learning (RPL)**; and
- **Capitalising on the learning** of other Indigenous employment initiatives.

In South Australia it has been noted that 'Local Government Councils have a leadership role in setting local agendas and creating a sense of place and culturally identity. They are ideally placed to demonstrate leadership in creating an environment of tolerance and increased awareness and an understanding of Aboriginal issues in general' (Janet Gould &

Associates, 2000). South Australian Local Government has a history of driving Indigenous engagement and advancement of Indigenous interests. In 1994 the Local Government Association of South Australia (LGA SA) commissioned the *Local Councils Belong to Aboriginal People Too – Local Government and Aboriginal Populations Access and Equity Project.* This provided a Strategic Framework to address issues of coordination and integration, community information, inter-governmental relations, and the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Local Government. The Strategic Framework was reviewed in 2000, where it was identified that more effort should be dedicated to the effective dissemination of information, increasing the employment rate in all areas of local government, allocating resources fairly and equitably, and addressing critical service priorities through an integrated and collaborative approach to future planning. Recommended strategic directions for local government to support Indigenous employment included:

- Local Government Councils (with the support of the LGA) should consider employing an Aboriginal Project Officer, potentially on a regional basis or through consultancy or contract arrangements; include cultural awareness as a selection criteria in job and person specifications (where relevant); and consider specific recruitment through application for exemption from the race discriminatory provisions of the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA);
- Direct employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be recognised as the priority for Local Government. However, Local Government Councils and ATSIC Regional Councils should continue to seek opportunities for work experience through CDEP schemes (led by Local Government Councils with support of LGA and ATSIC jointly);
- Local Government Councils should consider the impact on local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities when assessing tenders within the context of competitive tendering arrangement criteria (led by councils);
- Opportunities for economic development initiatives involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, should be explored between Local Government, State and Federal Government agencies (led by ATSIC and DOSAA jointly, involving LGA, Councils, ATSI organisations).

In 2005, LGA SA launched the Local Government/Aboriginal Service Agreement Project – Case Study and Guide to assist Councils to develop service agreements with Aboriginal organisations. A workshopping process identified that goodwill and a sense of unity existed between Aboriginal Community Councils and Local Government Councils, but that communication pathways could be improved and roles and responsibilities better clarified. The case study guide outlined the Agreement formed between the Coorong District Council and the Raukkan Community Council, which focused on:

- Providing an overarching statement of strategic engagement and good practice;
- Proposing practical and realistic strategies focused on improving the quality of life of people living in the Raukkan community in the Coorong District Council area. This included priority listing of significant topics to progress over 12 months, with an inbuilt review process;
- Recognising distinct responsibilities and interests of partners, benefits of consulting together, bringing together skills and knowledge, and preparedness to work together for betterment of whole Council area;
- Generating opportunities for communities to gain tools for social and economic advancement and empowerment.

The Local Government/Aboriginal Service Agreement Project was founded on a set of principles including identifying and observing protocols for communication, consultation and decision-making, ensuring that outcomes promote local decision-making and community empowerment, and foregrounding mutual recognition and respect.

3 Environmental scan of Aboriginal workforce initiatives and programs

This section provides a snapshot of current commonwealth and state initiatives and programs designed to support employment and training in general, and Indigenous employment and training more specifically. The list identifies the most prominent opportunities, but there are likely to be others also worth investigating, as the

Strategic Framework for Aboriginal Workforce Development would most certainly benefit from linking with any and all available funding and services[4].

Further, this section examines a number of Aboriginal training to work initiatives in the Northern Adelaide region, including case studies of two specific projects that have produced positive outcomes for Aboriginal job-seekers, communities and local industries and employers.

3.1 Commonwealth and state employment and training programs, generic and Indigenous-specific

The following list outlines a range of available services and programs that offer potential avenues for sourcing Aboriginal workforce development support and resources.

- **Job Services Australia** provides job seekers with flexible and tailored support to help them find a job. Employers are able to use Job Services Australia to find staff to meet their recruitment needs.
- **Local Employment Co-ordinators** have been engaged by the Australian Government to work in 21 Priority Employment Areas across Australia identified as needing extra assistance. Local Employment Coordinators work in collaboration with employers, community groups and all levels of government to help develop local solutions to meet local labour market needs.
- **Indigenous employment program (IEP)** provides support for employers, businesses and other organisations for activities or projects that help increase employment outcomes and economic participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- **Industry and Indigenous Skill Centre Program** is a national program providing grant funding for capital infrastructure and/or equipment to establish VET facilities for Aboriginal people.
- **Indigenous Cadetship Support** links full-time Aboriginal students undertaking a diploma, advanced diploma or their first undergraduate degree with employers who can offer work placements and ongoing employment when they finish their studies.
- **Indigenous Wage Subsidy** is a Commonwealth incentive paid to eligible employers who employ Aboriginal people on an ongoing basis.

DFEEST Aboriginal workforce participation programs:

- **Aboriginal Participation Brokers** work in regions to facilitate and broker strategic and operational solutions to local learning, training and employment needs, and in particular to prepare Aboriginal people for local jobs identified by employers.
- **Aboriginal Apprenticeship and Mentoring Program**: assists Aboriginal people into trade-based apprenticeships and traineeships in the private sector.

[4] Information sourced from http://www.dfeest.sa.gov.au/about-us/our-department/initiatives-programs/aboriginal-workforce-participation-programs, access date 5 September 2013.

- **Aboriginal Job Ready Program**: builds the capacity of Aboriginal job seekers, particularly those who face barriers to participation in the workforce, to access learning, skills development and employment opportunities.
- **Aboriginal Leadership Program**: promotes opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate on South Australian Government boards and committees, providing information about and assistance to participate in leadership development training and opportunities for Aboriginal public sector employees to apply for senior positions.
- **Aboriginal Pathways to Excellence Traineeship Program**: provides career development, mentoring, training pathways and employment placement for young people through the South Australian Aboriginal Sports Training Academy.
- **Aboriginal Public Sector Program**: assists South Australian Public Sector agencies to source Aboriginal applicants from an Aboriginal Employment Register to fill their employment vacancies. Concurrently, Aboriginal jobseekers are recruited to join the Aboriginal Employment Register where they are referred to short term public sector vacancies (up to 12 months).
- **Connecting Aboriginal People to Resource Industries Program:** increases training and employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in the resource industries sector.
- **Career Development Centres** offers career planning for job seekers, school students, education facilities and local employers. They belong to a jointly funded initiative supported by all tiers of government and the *South Australia Works* in the Regions program.

DFEEST programs for employers include:

- **Aboriginal Apprenticeship and Mentoring Program**: assists private sector employers to support Aboriginal people in trade-based apprenticeships and traineeships.
- **The Connecting Aboriginal People to Mining (CAPM) Program** supports South Australian businesses in the mining, resource and supporting industry sectors to train and employ Aboriginal people
- **Aboriginal Employment Industry Clusters Initiative**: builds the capacity of South Australian employers across a number of targeted industries to provide long term, meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.
- More generally, **Building Family Opportunities (BFO)** brings together long-term jobless families, local community organisations, government, and employers to find solutions to complex issues that prevent families from participating in employment.

Skills for All Aboriginal support and programs:

- **Aboriginal Access Centres** assist Aboriginal job seekers to identify what training or education they need to get a job. The Centres are based on TAFE campuses across South Australia, with team members well equipped with an understanding of vocational education and training.
- **The Aboriginal Programs unit** directs people to services for training and assistance with finding work.
- **Tauondi College** is an Aboriginal Community College in Port Adelaide offering accredited and non-accredited courses and Adult Community Education (ACE) programs.
- The **Aboriginal Apprenticeship Program (AAP)** connects employers with Aboriginal people who are looking to do an apprenticeship or traineeship in South Australia. AAP can also assist with cultural competence in the workplace.
- **Aboriginal Workforce Participation Coordinators** are located across the state. They provide information and advice to Aboriginal people seeking work or

training, employers seeking Aboriginal workers, employers who have Aboriginal staff, and training providers.

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