

Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2019-2025

Refresh 2022

NSW Working together for a better future



Acknowledgment of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of Country across NSW. We acknowledge the spiritual connections and relationships that traditional custodians have continued to maintain and strengthen since time began, which will continue well into the future.

We pay our respects to elders gone before us, those who present before us, and those who are emerging before us. We recognise their cultural knowledge and wisdom has been passed down through generations and will remain present through stories and song-lines for generations to come.

We extend this respect, acknowledge and appreciate the value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff contribute across the public sector, recognising their skills and experiences as a foundational asset to support the people of NSW.



Title of Artwork: Growth, Support & Success

The Artwork tells the story of the individual journey of growth in the employment sector through consistent support, opportunities for training and experience within your chosen field of speciality and connection to community. This overall will help provide ample platforms to excel throughout one's career paths. Access to employment provides financial stability and empowerment for oneself, thus reinforcing self-determination with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and creating a positive ripple effect in the community by enabling community capacity building and a self-generating cycle of training and growth through connection to multiple employment pathways and training programs.

Artwork

Nikita Ridgeway

“Sharing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as spoken by my ancestors through our dreaming”

Bundjalung/Biripi Artist Nikita Ridgeway believes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is about sharing ancestral stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their continuing connection to country and dreaming. Through her Sydney based creative design agency “Boss Lady Design and Communications” (BLDAC), Nikita creates digital artwork designs that relay stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's connection to country, each other, their history, and the future.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and artwork is beautiful and collaborative. Through my ancestors, I understand that telling stories through my art and creating cultural awareness helps build a strong united country in understanding, which leads to strong people and strong communities. Let us work together to care for our beautiful country and people.”

Boasting 12 years' experience working within the design sector across Australia, BLDAC specialises in brand development, creative design conceptualization, communications, events, and digital marketing projects.

For more information on BLDAC please go to Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn or website: www.bldac.com.au

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Message from the NSW Public Service Commissioner

The NSW public sector is committed to increasing the Aboriginal workforce and the number of Aboriginal senior leaders. This is important because, to be effective and best serve our customers, our public service should reflect our community.



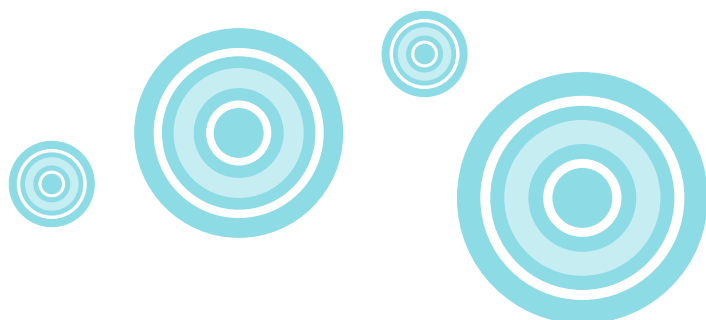
A mid-point review of our Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2019 – 2025 was always contemplated. The NSW public sector, and each of its clusters and agencies, is maturing as an employer of Aboriginal people, but we cannot rest on our laurels. The Aboriginal Employment Strategy Refresh is more targeted and its implementation will direct our collective efforts to initiatives that will deliver greater representation of Aboriginal people across all grades of the public service, as well as in our Executive bands.

In developing this refreshed strategy, we spoke with many of our Aboriginal colleagues and leaders to listen, understand and learn from their lived experiences. We heard about some of the barriers they have faced – and continue to face – in their careers, as well as initiatives and support that they found beneficial. We know that some of our recruitment processes are not inclusive enough, that our Aboriginal colleagues are still subject to racism in some of our workplaces and that for many, there remains a real or perceived ceiling on their career progression. All of these issues need to be addressed if we are to achieve our ambition.

The NSW public sector needs to move together in a coordinated, sustained way. The PSC can point towards best practice, explain why it is important and facilitate collaboration across government, but ultimately the action lies with the individual departments and agencies, and people within them. We need the support of the sector to create change and opportunities and to build a public service workforce that values the contributions of Aboriginal colleagues across a wide variety of roles, champions their success and progress and does not tolerate racism.

As Public Service Commissioner, I am pleased to launch the Aboriginal Employment Strategy Refresh. It sees us continue to build on the successes of the first three years of the Strategy and refine those areas where there is still work to do. I am confident that by working together we can deliver on the ambitious targets that we have set for ourselves, and that it will create a positive impact for our Aboriginal employees and all Aboriginal people living in New South Wales.

Kathrina Lo
NSW Public Service Commissioner



Message from our Executive Sponsor

As Executive Sponsor, I was pleased to be involved in the mid-term refresh of the NSW public sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2019-2025.



While we have seen some progress, the review highlighted that we can do better by focusing on a smaller number of strategic actions which will drive the biggest impact for the sector. Consultation with Aboriginal employees and senior leaders has confirmed the need to intensify efforts to breaking down barriers to progression and ensuring a culturally safe work environment where racism is not tolerated.

We need to be bold in our commitment to increase Aboriginal employment, especially at the senior executive level. Aboriginal senior leaders increase the cultural capability and safety of our organisations and ensure Aboriginal people are represented at the most senior levels of the NSW public sector.

The strategy will challenge the public sector to place cultural capability and safety at the heart of a positive and rewarding employee experience for Aboriginal employees. I'm excited about fundamentally changing the face of the NSW public sector, increasing Aboriginal leadership, and designing and changing public services to improve the lives of our people.

Brendan Thomas

Deputy Secretary- Aboriginal Outcomes,
Department of Communities and Justice



Why refresh the Aboriginal Employment Strategy?

The NSW public sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) is a living document that supports best practices for Aboriginal employees across the NSW public sector.

The AES was launched in 2019. It consisted of 16 actions and 58 tasks, across three core principles – Build a talent pipeline, Improve Aboriginal cultural capability, and Engage with our Aboriginal Workforce.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) committed to an independent mid-term review to inform our approach for the final three and a half years (2022-2025). Thirriwirri, led by Jason Ardler, conducted this review in late 2021.

The mid-term review highlighted areas of success where the PSC and agencies have achieved many great outcomes.

The 2021 Workforce Profile Report shows 3.7% of the sector workforce identifies as Aboriginal, an increase from the 2014 baseline of 2.9%.

The number of Aboriginal senior leaders increased from 105 in 2020 to 130 in 2021, exceeding the Premier's Priority target of 114 by 2025. This uplift in Aboriginal senior leaders was supported by the Aboriginal Career and Leadership Development Program, which facilitates career and leadership development for Aboriginal employees aspiring to leadership roles. The program was initially for Grades 9/10 and 11/12, but was extended in 2020 to include employees at Grade 7/8. Since 2014/15, 194 employees have graduated from the program. Now a minimum of 50 places are available per year.

Other PSC led initiatives to support the employment and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have also achieved positive outcomes. The Career Trackers Aboriginal Internship Program was launched in 2019, with Aboriginal interns placed annually across NSW Government agencies. The PSC has also integrated Aboriginal employment and career development initiatives into a broader inclusion agenda. For example, 8% of the 2022 NSW Graduate Program cohort identify as Aboriginal.



PSC and agencies have achieved many great outcomes

Identifies as Aboriginal

3.7%

of the sector workforce

+0.8% in 2021 vs 2014

Aboriginal Career and Leadership Development Program

194

employee graduates since 2014/15

Now a **minimum of 50 places** are available per year.

Aboriginal senior leaders

130

+25pp in 2021 vs 2020

exceeding the Premier's Priority target of 114 by 2025

2022 NSW PSC Graduate Program

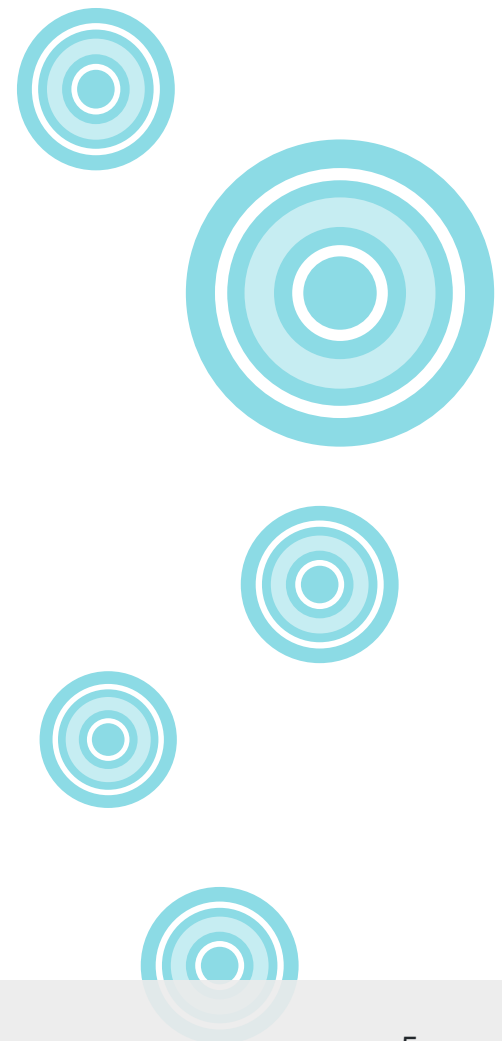
8%

of the cohort identify as Aboriginal

However, there is still more to be done across the public sector to meet our ambition.

The findings of the 2021 independent AES mid-term review also highlighted challenges in supporting the different needs of the sector and focusing on strategic impact. The review recommended that, although the core principles of the AES should remain consistent, the PSC's role should be that of a leader in best practice, a connector for agencies, and the supplier of information and resources.

This refreshed strategy is underpinned by the employment targets set in the AES and will provide agencies with the tools and connections they need to continue to drive the outcomes of the NSW public sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2019-2025 and meet Aboriginal employment priorities.



Aboriginal Employment Strategy refresh

Our ambition

To achieve a culturally safe and capable NSW public sector that reflects the communities we serve and where Aboriginal employees feel supported, respected, valued and empowered to pursue their career aspirations.

Our strategic focus areas

Attracting and recruiting a talented Aboriginal workforce

To support the development of a strong, sustainable Aboriginal workforce across all levels and agencies

Creating inclusive and respectful workplaces for our Aboriginal workforce

To support agencies as they embed culturally safe work practices to provide Aboriginal employees with a safe, supportive work environment

Supporting the career mobility and growth of our Aboriginal workforce

To foster and facilitate workplaces where Aboriginal employees can pursue their career aspirations and are supported as they progress

Brought to life through the following initiatives

1. Creating a platform to share knowledge
2. Attracting and recruiting Aboriginal talent into the NSW public sector
3. Developing and retaining Aboriginal talent in the NSW public sector
4. Listening to Aboriginal voices and learning from their experiences
5. Deepening connections and sharing knowledge
6. Championing cultural capability and safety

Our success measures

We will know we have been successful if, across the NSW public sector:

- representation of our Aboriginal employees has increased to **3% or more at all non-executive salary levels by 2025**
- representation of our Aboriginal Senior Leaders has increased, including at Band 2 level and above
- cultural capability training completion rates are high.

We will know we have been successful if, by 2025, the People Matter Employee Survey results reflect a reduced gap between our Aboriginal employees and non-Aboriginal employees responses to:

- employee engagement
- inclusion and diversity
- job satisfaction.

We will know we have been successful if, by 2025, the People Matter Employee Survey results reflect a decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal employees who have experienced racism.

Our guiding principles

Inclusion

Create an inclusive workplace, free from racism where all Aboriginal employees are treated with respect.

Value

Recognise and value the perspectives and lived experiences Aboriginal employees bring to the NSW public sector.

Yarning

Create spaces for reciprocal dialogue between Aboriginal employees, agencies, and the PSC.

Knowledge sharing

Provide platforms for agencies, the PSC and Aboriginal employees to share their knowledge and learnings. Encourage larger agencies to work with, and support, smaller agencies within their respective clusters as they build their own capabilities in the Aboriginal employment space.

Self-determination

Recognise the importance of Aboriginal voices informing decisions as they relate to Aboriginal employees.

Cultural safety

Create an environment where everyone is open-minded and flexible in attitudes towards people from cultures other than our own and understand that their own values or practices are not always or only the best way to solve workplace problems.

Our commitment to Aboriginal employment

The PSC maintains an unwavering commitment to growing and developing a talented, versatile and sustainable Aboriginal workforce in the NSW public sector.

Aboriginal employees are critical to delivering culturally safe services and have a central place in the public sector as our First Nations people. A strong, respected Aboriginal workforce enables a world class public sector and helps NSW achieve our commitments in Closing the Gap.

An inclusive workplace is one where all employees can participate and contribute. It is one where everyone feels valued, accepted, and supported to thrive at work. We know that a respectful and inclusive workforce for Aboriginal employees fosters an environment where people are confident to generate new ways of thinking and tap into cultural knowledge to solve the challenges we face.

To ensure we achieve this, the AES operates alongside key NSW strategies, which have been incorporated into the initiatives and outcomes. These include:

- NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan
- NSW Public Service Commission Belonging and Inclusion Strategy
- Reparations for Stolen Generations: Unfinished Business report.

The AES Refresh is closely aligned to the NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan. The priority reform to transform government organisations is a key driver behind the AES Refresh strategic focus areas and initiatives. We are committed to making meaningful contributions to the Closing the Gap targets with Aboriginal employees and through partnership with the Council of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO).

The PSC and agencies will continue to work together to:

- exceed the NSW Premier's Priority of the number of Aboriginal senior leaders in the NSW public sector
- aim to achieve 3% Aboriginal representation at all non-executive salary levels by 2025.



Strategic focus areas

1. Attracting and recruiting a talented Aboriginal workforce

Objective: To support the development of a strong, sustainable Aboriginal workforce across all levels and agencies.

As the largest employer in NSW, the public sector is responsible for offering a range of employment opportunities that help meet the national Closing the Gap target to increase the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in employment.

Priority Reform 5 of the NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan aims to increase jobs and pathways to employment by empowering Aboriginal people to access pathways through education, training and employment that aligns with their aspirations. The NSW public sector has achieved an Aboriginal representation of 3.7%, but the data tells us Aboriginal employees sit predominantly at the lower grades. More needs to be done to attract and recruit across mid-level employment and to build a talent pipeline to sustain the progress at the senior executive level.

Understanding the drivers and barriers to employment in clusters and agencies is critical to developing targeted employment strategies unique to their workforce requirements.

The AES Refresh will leverage the work of agencies and clusters, encourage them to build on their achievements, and collaborate on ongoing efforts to attract and recruit Aboriginal employees.

All NSW Government agencies have a responsibility to:

- use culturally safe recruitment practices to attract and recruit Aboriginal employees into the public sector
- increase Aboriginal representation across all levels in the agency
- develop career pathways aligned to the agency's workforce
- share best practice and case studies
- use and share recruitment tools and resources.

The PSC has responsibility for:

- developing recruitment and attraction guidance, with specific attraction strategies for Senior Executives
- sharing recruitment tools and resources
- creating platforms for agencies to share their successes and challenges
- continuing the graduate and internship programs that are crucial to early career pathway opportunities for school and university graduates.



2. Creating inclusive and respectful workplaces for our Aboriginal workforce

Objective: To support agencies as they embed culturally safe work practices to provide Aboriginal employees with a safe, supportive work environment.

Many agencies have made progress in workforce cultural capability, but more remains to be done across the NSW public sector. The 2021 People Matter Employee Survey results showed that Aboriginal people still report experiencing racism in our workforce. Aboriginal communities and customers also still report negative interactions with government services in community consultations. This experience does not reflect a world class public service and is not acceptable. We all need to call out racist behaviour and actively work to promote an anti-racist work culture, with zero tolerance for racism.

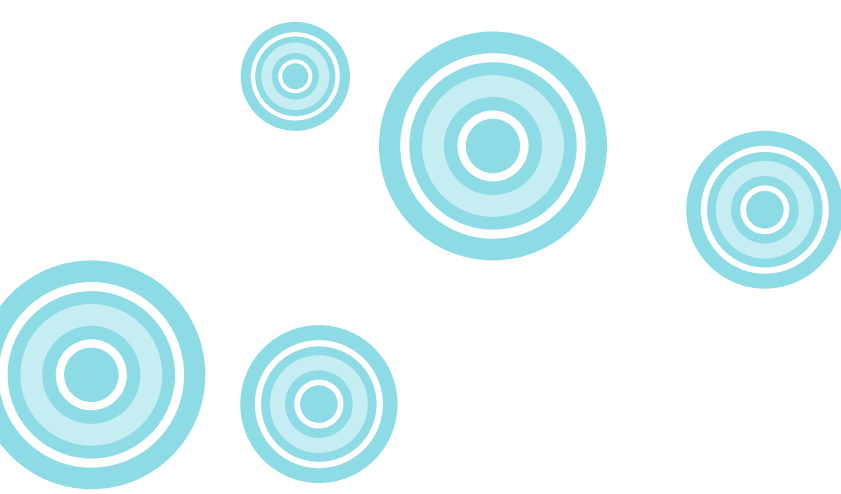
Priority Reform 3 of the NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan aims to decrease the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have experiences of racism by improving mainstream institutions. This means governments, and their organisations and institutions, must be culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including as employees and through the delivery of services.

To achieve this, all agencies have a responsibility to:

- embed cultural capability as a core public service capability
- actively prevent and respond to racism
- develop an Aboriginal cultural capability training plan that incorporates information on past forcible removal policies and the Stolen Generations to build a trauma informed workforce
- embed principles of partnership and two-way feedback in government policies and programs
- increase Aboriginal voices in NSW Government.

The PSC has a responsibility to:

- provide a leadership voice on cultural capability and safety to improve employee and customer experience
- develop anti-racism guidance and tools to support the sector in fostering an environment where racism is not tolerated
- collaborate with the sector to develop cultural capability guiding principles
- facilitate and promote the platforms to enable partnership with and feedback from our Aboriginal employees
- provide agencies with trauma-informed training on the Stolen Generations to support the NSW Government's response to Recommendations 6 & 29 to the General Purpose Standing Committee report into *Reparations for the Stolen Generations Unfinished Business report*.



3. Supporting the career mobility and growth of our Aboriginal workforce

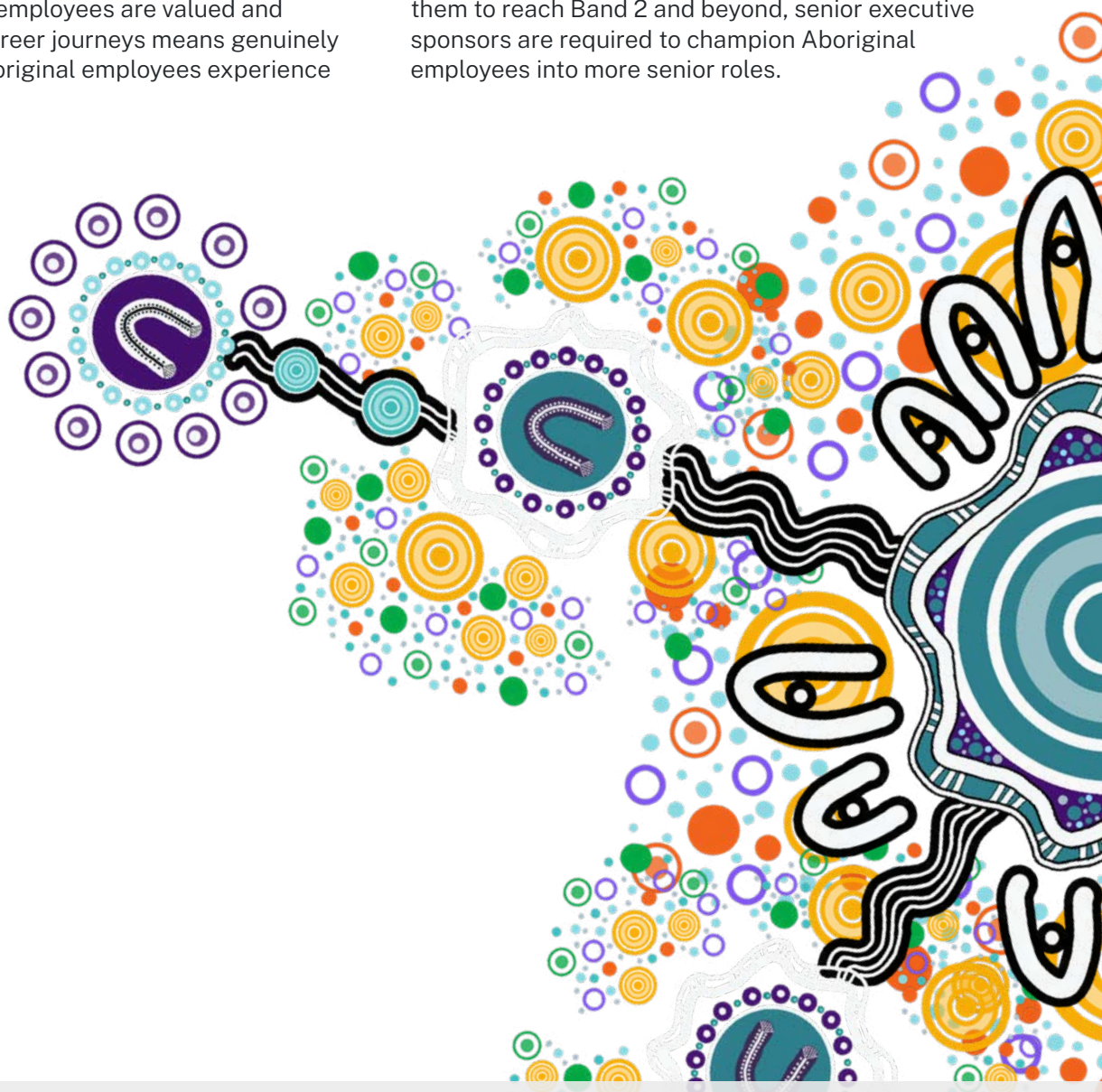
Objective: To foster and facilitate workplaces where Aboriginal employees are supported to pursue their career aspirations and supported as they progress.

Aboriginal representation across all levels is critical to the NSW public sector being an exemplar employer for Aboriginal people and truly reflective of the community it serves.

A key objective of Priority Reform 5 in the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan is to increase Aboriginal voices across all levels of Government. Ensuring Aboriginal employees are valued and supported in their career journeys means genuinely listening to what Aboriginal employees experience

as barriers to advancement and what they believe is required to overcome them. By removing these barriers, Aboriginal employees can gain experiences and develop career pathways, resulting in greater representation across different roles and levels.

We have a significant number of Aboriginal senior leaders at the Band 1 level. To break the ceiling for them to reach Band 2 and beyond, senior executive sponsors are required to champion Aboriginal employees into more senior roles.



Role of the Public Service Commission

As outlined in the Belonging and Inclusion Strategy, the PSC's key roles are to:

Strengthen our foundations in promoting belonging and inclusion

Maximise our impact to connect and empower the NSW public sector

We will achieve this for the AES through the following initiatives:

1. Creating a platform to share knowledge	2. Attracting and recruiting Aboriginal talent into the NSW public sector	3. Developing and retaining Aboriginal talent in the NSW public sector
4. Listening to Aboriginal voices and learning from their experiences	5. Deepening connections and sharing knowledge	6. Championing cultural capability and safety

The PSC has identified actions it is committed to undertaking in each initiative. Each initiative sits across one or more of the three strategic focus areas.

Initiative 1: Creating a platform to share knowledge

The PSC commits to:

- establishing the Belonging and Inclusion Library, including content related to the strategic focus areas of AES Refresh.

The PSC has developed a sector Aboriginal Cultural Capability Hub as part of the Belonging and Inclusion library. The Hub gives Human Resources and Learning and Development professionals access to cultural capability resources and facilitates sharing of good practice and cultural capability resources.

This will form part of the Belonging and Inclusion Library that serves as a repository for best practice guidance, toolkits and templates. It provides users with toolkits and resources, created and shared by the PSC and agencies to achieve the objectives of the AES and support agencies to increase their cultural capability and own Aboriginal employment goals.

Initiative 2: Attraction and recruitment of Aboriginal talent into the NSW public sector

The PSC commits to:

- maintaining and promoting sector participation in the CareerTrackers internship program
- maintaining the high level of Aboriginal participation in the NSW Government Graduate Program
- developing culturally safe Aboriginal recruitment and interview guidance.

The PSC will support programs that create employment opportunities and provide tools and resources that empower agencies to recruit talent in a culturally safe and appropriate manner.

Initiative 3: Developing and retaining Aboriginal talent in the NSW Public Sector

The PSC commits to:

- continuing to facilitate the Aboriginal Career and Leadership Development Program
- commencing an Aboriginal senior leadership talent strategy.

The PSC supports agencies across the sector to support, develop and progress Aboriginal employees on their career journey. The Aboriginal Career and Leadership Development Program is available for Aboriginal employees from grade 7/8 up and will continue as the flagship leadership program for high potential Aboriginal employees.

A targeted talent strategy for senior Aboriginal leaders will provide employees with an opportunity to enhance their careers and personal development. This includes creating connections and career development opportunities across the public sector that extend beyond Aboriginal identified roles and preparing individuals for a greater range of senior roles. The PSC will explore options for sector-wide talent review and mobility to increase visibility of Aboriginal senior leaders.

Initiative 4: Listening to Aboriginal Voices and learn from their experiences

The PSC commits to:

- facilitating 'Listen and Learn' sessions for different Aboriginal employee cohorts, and sharing insights back with the sector
- showcasing successful reverse mentoring programs that deepen relationships between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous employees.

The PSC works in partnership with the Aboriginal workforce, by listening to Aboriginal voices and learning from their experiences. We will facilitate opportunities for Aboriginal employees across the sector to share their stories and perspectives with each other and with senior non-Aboriginal leaders.

We recognise the diversity of experience across our agencies, clusters, places, and grades. This means it will be important to ensure that there are a variety of channels for us to 'hear' these voices, and attention will need to be paid to ensure that these voices are representative of Aboriginal employees across New South Wales.

Initiative 5: Deepening connections and sharing knowledge

The PSC commits to supporting networks to maximise the opportunities and knowledge sharing by:

- establishing the sector Belonging and Inclusion Forum, with Aboriginal employment and cultural safety as regular focus areas
- establishing a NSW public sector Aboriginal Employment network
- establishing an Aboriginal Workforce Inclusion Champions network
- establishing the sector Aboriginal Senior Leadership network, in partnership with Aboriginal senior leaders.

The PSC will facilitate networks which create opportunities to share best practice in Aboriginal employment and cultural safety. Co designed with Aboriginal senior leaders, the PSC will host regular opportunities for Aboriginal senior leaders to connect and discuss the issues that are important to them and their ongoing career development.

Initiative 6: Championing cultural capability and safety

The PSC commits to providing a strong leadership voice on the importance of cultural capability and safety for employees and the communities we serve by:

- leading the NSW public sector in anti-racism interventions
- developing a cultural capability guide for agencies, in consultation with Aboriginal employees and Aboriginal organisations
- providing guidance to agencies on the implementation of Aboriginal cultural capability training and reporting requirements for Everyone's Business.

A coordinated effort is required to strengthen every employee's cultural capability. The PSC will provide additional support for smaller agencies seeking to build culturally safe workplaces.

Agencies role in supporting the AES

All agencies have a role in ensuring that our workplaces are inclusive for Aboriginal employees. The PSC is accountable for the actions in this AES and for NSW public sector-wide reporting, utilising the data sets managed by the PSC such as the State of the Sector Report, Workforce Profile and People Matter Employee Survey.

Agencies are encouraged to continue to run their own programs and initiatives that support their Aboriginal employees. This is already occurring across the NSW public sector, with some agencies currently running a number of programs and initiatives.

These include:

- reconciliation action plans
- Aboriginal employment strategies
- cultural capability training and programs
- celebrating cultural events in the workplace
- leadership programs
- mentoring programs.

Here are more ways for agencies to be involved:

Measure progress

The PSC encourages agencies to continue to build their own measures to monitor progress, but also to set their own measures of success. We all work in a variety of contexts across the state and the PSC wants to support and encourage agencies to set their own targets that meet or exceed public sector wide targets.

Share best practice

The PSC wants to work with agencies to provide a platform to share best practice. With so many programs and initiatives across the sector, sharing best practice can assist agencies to learn from each other. We encourage agencies to participate as sharing best practice means we can achieve our collective goals together.



Encourage staff to participate in opportunities

All agencies are encouraged to support Aboriginal employees to participate in forums, working groups and network with other Aboriginal employees across the public sector. We want agencies to provide space and time for Aboriginal employees to participate in and connect with programs that are happening.

Utilise tools and resources

As the PSC and each agency build tools, resources and frameworks, we want all employees, leaders and agencies to engage with and utilise these tools and resources in their day-to-day work. Under Initiative 1, the PSC will set up a digital platform known as the Library to make these accessible for all agencies. We welcome feedback and sharing of knowledge across the NSW public sector to ensure resources continue to be useful, practical and usable. We ask agencies to share what additional support they might need so that the PSC can connect them to relevant tools, information, and examples of best practice.

Leadership

Our senior leaders have a responsibility to influence and embed the focus areas and initiatives into their agency. This includes promoting the use of the digital platform, leading by example to create a culturally capable workforce, and championing Aboriginal recruitment and progression across a wide range of roles and opportunities. Creating an environment in your agency that is respectful, and listens to its Aboriginal employees, is integral for the success of the AES.



Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2019-2025 Refresh 2022

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