

Increasing diversity in the Transport cluster

Transport for NSW's Aboriginal Career Development and Mentoring Program and the apprenticeship program run by Sydney Trains, a division of Transport for NSW, are two of many initiatives that promote diversity in the Transport cluster.

Aboriginal career development and mentoring program

Transport for NSW is improving inclusion and diversity through its Aboriginal Career Development and Mentoring program. The aim of the program is to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees at all levels of the agency and provide career development opportunities.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in the Transport cluster has increased by around 150% since 2016. But ensuring clear career progression and pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees has been challenging.

An independent evaluation by the NSW Public Service Commission found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members across the sector had the highest representation in lower grades and were under-represented in higher grades. To boost representation in higher grades, Transport for NSW established a targeted leadership development program.

The Aboriginal Career Development and Mentoring Program gives aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from across Transport the opportunity to develop their careers through structured mentoring that connects them with a Transport leader. The program also has a reverse mentoring component, helping to build cultural capability among senior leaders.

The 12-week program was designed and informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from across Transport for NSW as well as external partners. To deliver the program, Transport for NSW partnered with the Australian Graduate School of Management at the University of NSW Business School, and Cox Inall Ridgeway, a social change agency working to disrupt disadvantage in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The program gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees meaningful opportunities to develop their skills so they can realise their potential and career aspirations. It assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to build key strategic and interpersonal skills required in the workplace and community. Moreover, the program creates powerful role models for future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.

Seventy participants have graduated from the program, with 50% of graduates from the most recent cohort moving into more senior roles. Executive mentors in the program develop a greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, protocols and beliefs, equipping them to become role models and agents for change.

An independent review in 2019–20 found that 64.3% of participants highly valued the program and felt it had a positive professional and personal impact on the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentees. More than 90% of mentor respondents said they would recommend the program to colleagues.

“It has positively impacted in a personal sense. I have a clear understanding of the goals I now want to achieve.” – Aboriginal career development and mentoring program mentee

“It was a very positive experience for me and made me take the time to get to know more about the personal side of someone’s Aboriginality. It’s not a one size fits all.” – Aboriginal career development and mentoring program mentor

Sydney Trains’ apprenticeship program

In 2017, there was only one woman among 46 apprentices recruited by Sydney Trains, a division of Transport for NSW. Men filled 98% of trade roles offered by the agency.

Increasing the number of women taking up apprenticeship roles was one aim when Sydney Trains established its apprenticeship program.

Sydney Trains recognised that getting more women into apprenticeships would increase the number of women in the pipeline for future trade jobs. It introduced initiatives to attract and better equip and support women wanting to take up frontline roles. One of these initiatives is the Women-only Electrical Pre-apprenticeship Program, which provides training in pre-employment electrical and mechanical skills, maths tuition, basic work health and safety knowledge, and soft skills such as interview techniques and CV preparation. This training enables women to confidently apply for roles and meet Sydney Trains’ stringent recruitment requirements.

The Secondary School Work Experience Program encourages school leavers to apply for an apprenticeship with Sydney Trains and gives them firsthand knowledge of and experience with the various trade options available. This popular program is open to all public and private school students, and particularly encourages girls to try out a trade out for themselves. It is usually booked out early in the school year.

Through its Community Education Program, Sydney Trains representatives visit schools to talk to students about considering Sydney Trains as a career choice. They liaise with careers advisors, and attend careers events such as school expos, community expos and trade organisation events to promote opportunities at Sydney Trains. These events and activities enable Sydney Trains to provide relevant information to girls considering careers in science, technology, engineering and/or mathematics via a trade course or engineering degree.

Sydney Trains collaborates with external organisations to support prospective apprentices, including by connecting them with tradeswomen at 'Try a Trade' days and other events. This initiative gives women hands-on experience and enables them to gain valuable insights and career advice by speaking to women currently employed in trade roles. Sydney Trains has built strong industry links, and has established partnerships with schools and industry organisations. It has also won several awards for being a great work experience employer in several categories.

Its electrical and mechanical apprentices spend time working in various industries to increase their skills and knowledge, and help them attain all competencies required for their trades. A large number of female apprentices are currently undertaking this industry training, highlighting the diverse nature of Sydney Trains' apprentice workforce.

“The Sydney Trains Work Experience Program is an excellent opportunity for our students to discover the broad scope of career options available in the fields of engineering, electro technology, IDT etc. This knowledge supports our students in their career and study decision making process post school, and adds valuable experience to their resumes. The fact that Sydney Trains offers a safe environment for specifically our female students, has opened many doors and interest fields for our girls and changed their perspective on working in a mainly male dominated trade. Great to see this change happening!” – Staff member from participating school

Sydney Trains' Apprenticeship Program has achieved meaningful results in building a diverse workforce. In 2021, women accounted for 27% of the apprenticeship intake, compared to 2% in 2017. Each year, more women successfully complete the pre-apprenticeship program, successfully graduate and may be offered an apprenticeship in electrotechnology, mechanical engineering and telecommunication trades. Moreover, each year shows a significant increase in women interested in trade roles compared to previous years.



Transport's focus on mentoring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and boosting the number of women entering its apprenticeship program has achieved positive outcomes. The Aboriginal Career Development and Mentoring Program is recognised as leading practice in the NSW public sector, and several other agencies have engaged with Transport for NSW to learn more about implementing similar programs in their own agencies.

Transport for NSW's Sydney Trains division will continue its presence in community engagement activities. It will expand its Work Experience Program to encompass even more opportunities for students to learn what Sydney Trains can offer, and will continue to build diversity within its workforce.

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