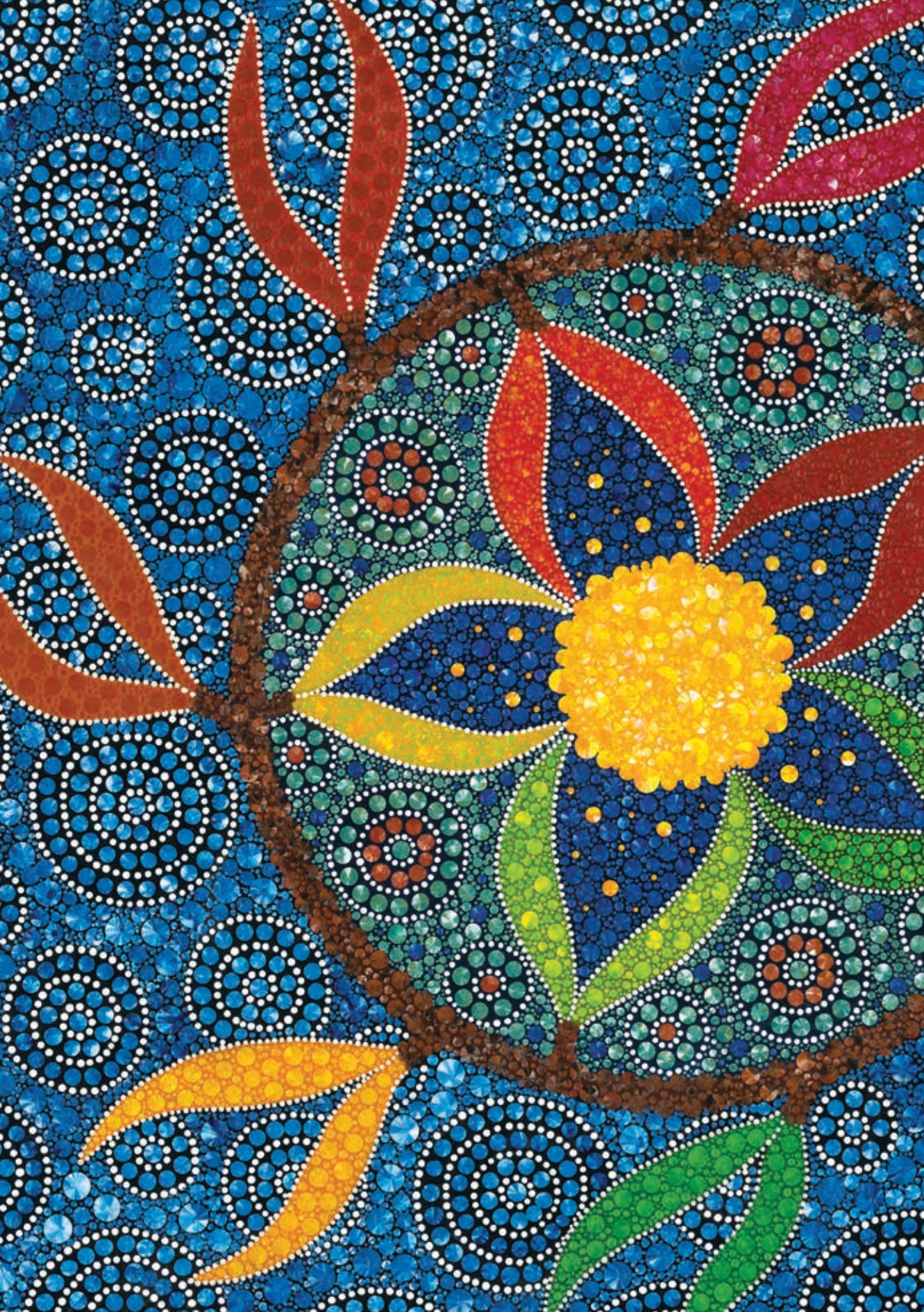


Doing something different: 28 practical ways of improving employment outcomes for First Nations people in the public sector.

Because waiting another 200 years for equality is 200 years too long...







Scan to watch the
welcome message
from Jody Broun

“The 2022 NAIDOC theme of ‘Get Up! Stand Up! Show Up!’ encourages all of us to champion institutional structural and collaborative change in the workplace. All of us in the public service have responsibilities and commitments under the Closing The Gap framework to make those changes...

Trend data over the last 20 years shows there has not been a significant shift in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the APS. We need to change the way we approach this issue and do something different...”

Jody Broun
CEO, National Indigenous
Australians Agency

This report summarises recommendations from a Hackathon run by IPAA ACT with the support of the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) and the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) on 14 July 2022.

Background

Hackathons bring together diverse groups with a range of expertise and experience and use time-constrained and collaborative processes to develop innovative and implementable solutions to an identified challenge. IPAA ACT worked with the APSC and NIAA to engage First Nations people working in the public service to participate in this Hackathon, which brought together 64 First Nation and non-First Nation participants, including facilitators and scribes, to develop practical and implementable ways of improving employment outcomes for First Nations working people in the public service. It was held as part of IPAA ACT's contribution to NAIDOC Week 2022. Participants were recruited via Indigenous Employee Networks and internal diversity and inclusion mailing lists.

What is already known

Improving recruitment and retention outcomes for First Nations people has been a long-term priority for public sector workplaces across Australia and has been a policy priority for successive Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. Disparities between First Nations and non-First Nations employees of the APS have been well documented and were recently summarised in an APSC report¹.

What this report adds

This Hackathon used a technique known as 'backcasting'. This involved framing the discussion around an imagined success state set in 2026 in which First Nation employees made up 5 per cent of the APS Senior Executive Service. This result had been achieved by improving representation at the APS 4 to APS 6 levels (and equivalent) and Executive Levels 1 and 2 to 5 per cent by the end of 2024. Retention rates had improved and Indigenous employees across the sector report high levels of engagement.²

Participants in the Hackathon were asked to brainstorm how this success state had been achieved and the barriers that were overcome in getting to this future position. The 'backcasting' technique helps participants to overcome the tendency to critique ideas before they have even had a chance to be explored.

This report is only a short summary of that discussion and is focused on practical and implementable ideas for action that were across four specific domains: workplace culture, recruitment, employment, and career pathways. This report offers broad sector-wide initiatives, organisational-level changes, as well as actions that could be undertaken within individual workplaces in each of those domains. It is significant that many of these ideas developed through this process take advantage of the workplace and workforce changes created by COVID19. Quotes from participants are included in some specific recommendations and the summaries created and displayed by Digital Storytellers on the day are included as Appendices.





Acknowledgements

IPAA ACT thanks all the Hackathon participants for the ideas they contributed and helped to develop. We would like to particularly acknowledge **Michelle Steele** and **Christopher Simpson**, both from the Department of Health and Aged Care, for agreeing to facilitate the event, and also the contribution made by members of our Hackathon Reference Group:

Rachael Jackson

National Indigenous Australians Agency

Catherine Seaberg

Australian Public Service Commission

Karyn Ervin

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Carlyn Waters

Pat Turner Scholar,
Australian National University

Structure of these recommendations

Workplace culture was identified as a fundamental enabler and precursor for improving employment outcomes and creating long-term sustainable change. This report therefore begins with some general and specific recommendations about creating culturally safe and more inclusive workplace cultures and then outlines some specific actions across three further areas: recruitment, employment, and career pathways. It is important to recognise that successfully implementing the ideas within these three areas will largely be dependent on the creation of a culturally safe and more inclusive workplace culture.

Right —
Facilitator Christopher Simpson and
Hackathon participants Eleanor Coleman
and Alex Macintyre



Facilitators

Carlyn Waters

Australian National University

Jade Cordell

National Indigenous Australians Agency

Karyn Ervin

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Maddie Morton

Australian Public Service Commission

Marisa Woodward

Australian Public Service Commission

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National Indigenous Australians Agency

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IPAA ACT Future Leaders Committee, PWC

Sarwin D'Souza

IPAA ACT

Simone Abbot

IPAA ACT

CULTURE

General recommendations

01

Upfront as you walk in, not just said in values statements.

The creation and maintenance of a culturally safe and inclusive environment for First Nations staff needs to be an underlying objective for all public sector workplaces.

02

Truth telling is critical.

Developing this new environment is an opportunity to support the broader work of Truth-Telling in the reconciliation process, by providing an opportunity for the public sector to learn from the culture and insights of First Nations people.

03

We must act now and fast.

Creating and maintaining this new environment will require public service leaders to model and support the creation of new cultural norms and practices in public service workplaces.

It will also require leaders at all levels of the sector to call out inappropriate behaviours and be seen to act with integrity.

Specific recommendations



04

The workforce should be reflective of the community it recruits from.

Include cultural competency as a key selection criterion in management level positions and assess managers on how they demonstrate this responsibility with their teams.

05

Shift mindset from western to Aboriginal.

Embed cultural practice and language in the internal and external processes of workplaces.

This could include providing Cultural Leave entitlements for staff that allow them to meet their community obligations and implementing slower decision-making processes that allow current/new initiatives to build stronger engagement with First Nation communities.

06

Draw from the lived experience.

Include cultural intelligence as a formal workplace capability and put greater emphasis in public sector capability frameworks, including the APS Leadership Framework³, on the value of 'lived experience'.

07

Mandate SES employment agreements to actively manage and report on development activities for First Nations staff.

08

Embed reporting against a workplace's Reconciliation Action Plan within the formal reporting processes of all public service workplaces. This should have the same scrutiny as financial reporting.

09

Undertake regular reviews of internal staff development programs with input from First Nations employees and external First Nations representatives.

RECRUITMENT

Specific recommendations

10

'Reimagine merit'.

Cultural understanding and knowledge are just as important as other competencies, but often isn't valued in a recruitment process. Ensure that selection processes give weight to the community-level experience that many First Nations applicants will have.⁴ Given the nature of this type of experience, this would have the additional benefit of increasing collaborative capabilities within the public sector.

11

'Give visibility to the employment market'.

Participate in school career expos and promote the sector as an employment option for school leavers. This would also help to build awareness of the sector amongst the growing number of First Nations people with post-secondary educational qualifications.

12

'More at high level'.

Create more job selection panels with First Nations members, especially in externally supported SES recruitment processes.

13

Make greater use of Indigenous-specific employment agencies when looking to recruit staff and use the position of the public sector as a major First Nations employer to play a market creating/ shaping role in recruitment consulting.

14

Recognise the culturally specific nature of some job selection processes and that questions focusing heavily on an applicant's individual achievements or personal initiatives may work against someone familiar with the collective/ collaborative approaches often used by First Nations communities.

15

Advertise and highlight that many public sector workplaces are independently ranked as being an Employer of Choice and that almost all public sector workplaces have a specific goal of increasing and improving employment outcomes for First Nations people.



EMPLOYMENT

Specific recommendations

16

'Stay connected. It's a new lens'.

Use the shift to remote working created by COVID19 to decentralise public sector employment. Create more opportunities outside of Canberra and more public service roles that can be carried out by people who are working 'on country' and away from the 'Canberra bubble'. This shift to staying 'on country' would allow people to more easily fulfil their responsibilities to community and family.

17

'I had to move to Canberra to get a promotion'.

Recognise that the shift to more remote working can reduce the need for existing First Nation public servants to move if they want to access a new public service opportunity – such as a promotion or movement between workplaces.

18

'Invest in mob'.

Support internal First Nation networks so that they are not overwhelmed by consultation processes, and develop face-to-face forums in regional areas that build capacity of those networks outside Canberra.

19

Work to transition First Nation people working as contractors in public service workplaces into becoming permanent staff. This change would also be in line with an objective of reducing the number of contractor positions within the sector.

20

Acknowledge the informal promotional activities that First Nations staff do in their work and community networks, and in other activities related to their job.

21

Value the work of all First Nations staff regardless of level, mould employment around the needs of First Nations staff and be prepared to take risks in appointments by broadening selection criteria.



CAREER PATHWAYS

Specific recommendations

22

'Give competitive opportunities'.

Develop meaningful and well thought out career pathways – beyond traineeships and call-centre roles – that allow First Nation staff to see a career path from the recruitment process into management positions.

23

'Not just one size fits all'.

Provide internal development programs that support career progression and that reflect the life stages of participants.

24

'Engage, adapt and take risks'.

Offer mobility programs that allow job swapping with another person to try out a new role for a couple of months and create opportunities for First Nations staff to backfill temporarily vacant higher-level positions over short periods.

25

'Leaders need to have faith and look into the future'.

Build formal and informal mentoring/ sponsorship opportunities for First Nations staff within workplaces and across the public sector.

26

Allow people to select their own mentor (based on supplied biographies) and consider making it compulsory to have a mentor during the early stages of first employment in the sector.

27

Increase the number of secondment opportunities for public servants to work with First Nations organisations and build more partnerships with these organisations.

28

Destigmatise the use of Affirmative Measures and Identified positions to allow First Nations people to access employment and promotions.



Summary story boards that were compiled and displayed during the Hackathon.

GENERATE NEW THINKING

EQUALITY IN EMPLOYMENT

GET UP STANDUP SHOW UP

ATTRACT INDIGENOUS

SUPPORT & ENCOURAGE

THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH INDIGENOUS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

IMPROVE INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT

WE MUST ACT NOW, & FAST

IMPROVE IMPARITY NOW!

MAKE EMPLOYMENT ENJOYABLE

TAKING A RISK OF EMPLOYMENT IS KEY

FLEXIBLE IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

LEADERS WITH CULTURAL AWARENESS

MOBILITY PROGRAM - JOBSWAPPING

MAKE EMPLOYMENT ATTRACTIVE

4-DAY WEEK MEET THE NEEDS OF EACH

BEAGILE!

LEADERS - HAVE FAITH & LOOK INTO THE FUTURE!

GIVE VISIBILITY TO THE EMPLOYMENT MARKET

ONE PERSON TAKING A CHANCE

ACKNOWLEDGE NON-PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES THAT WOMEN DO IN THEIR NETWORK

THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE A MENTOR

they are ALL DIFFERENT

WE ESTABLISHED NETWORKS

2026 CONSISTENCY IN NETWORKS

HOLD UP & BE PROUD NEXT TO OUR FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES

DIGITAL STORYTELLERS

REGIONAL FORUMS

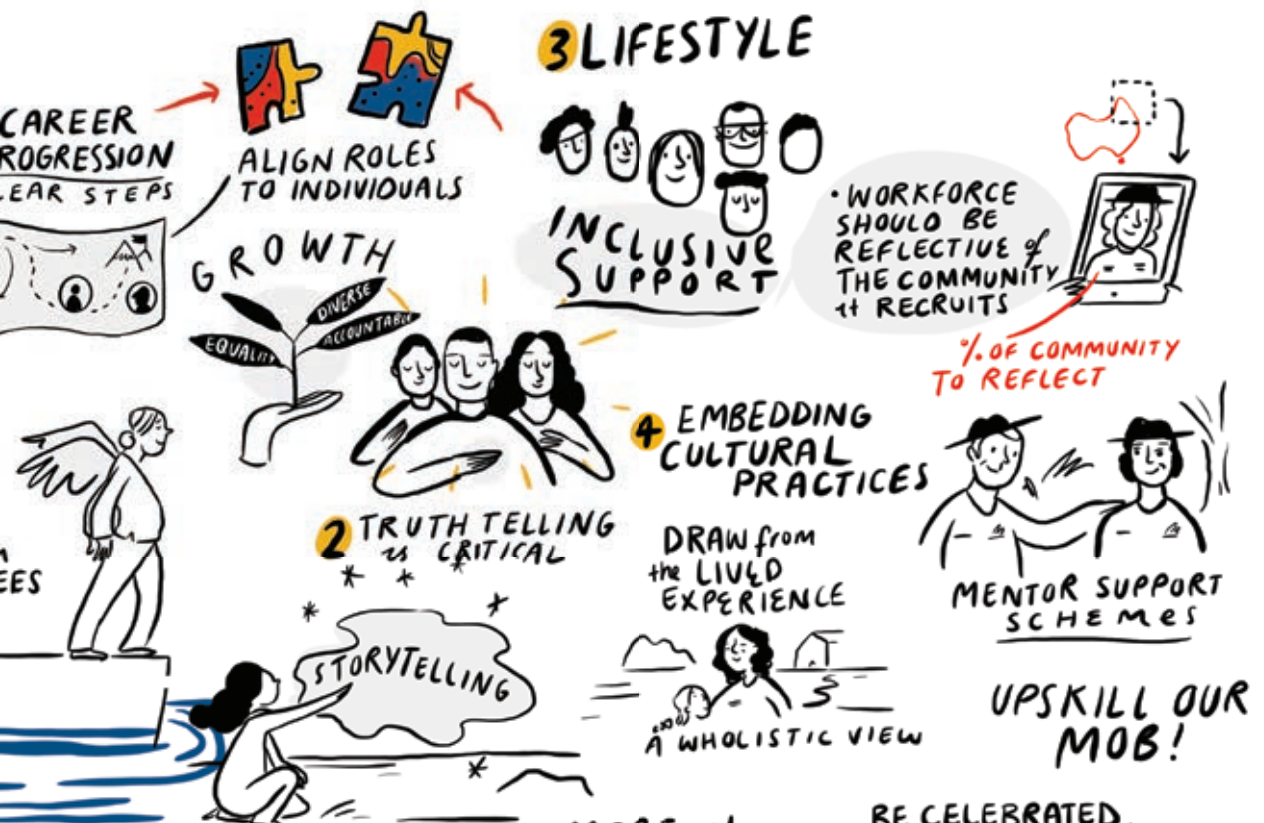
EMPLOYEE NETWORKS

FORUMS

A NETWORK WITH SAME ROLES

EXEC ROLES

HIRING BODY



The recommendations in this report have been compiled by IPAA ACT to support decision makers, leaders and colleagues across the public sector improve outcomes for First Nations employment. If you would like to discuss this report further, please get in touch with our CEO, Caroline Walsh at caroline.walsh@act.ipaa.org.au or via admin@act.ipaa.org.au

- 1 <https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-07/RN%2048-20%20Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20employees%20in%20the%20Australian%20Public%20Service.pdf>
- 2 For comparison, APS workforce data from the end of 2018 showed a significant under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees at the middle management, executive level leadership and senior executive leadership roles. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees were significantly over-represented at the trainee to APS 4 classifications and significantly under-represented at middle management, executive level leadership and senior executive leadership roles.
- 3 <https://www.apsc.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/learning-and-development/leadership-capabilities>
- 4 This approach is already used in other recruitment contexts. For example, IPAA ACT recruitment interviews often ask applicants to speak to their exposure to/experience in the Australian and ACT public services and their level of understanding of how those environments/ecosystems operate.



Commitment to connection

Sarah Richards

July 2021



‘Commitment to connection’ tells the story of IPAA ACT and their commitment to Canberra and community, including their ongoing journey of reflection, respect and reconciliation.

The overall concept reflects connection with the private, public, peak bodies and academic sectors and relationships with the other state and territory IPAA's coming together to share expertise and knowledge. Debating, collaborating, innovating, communicating and building capability in public administration. In particular it shows IPAA ACT as a conduit to connect. The colours and elements of ‘Commitment to connection’ are inspired by those seen in the Canberra region.

The leaves of a eucalyptus, the most common native tree in the region but also common in other regions of Australia, represents IPAA ACT and the other sectors coming together in an abstract royal bluebell shape to represent Canberra. The colours of the leaves were inspired by the colours I see during autumn in the region. Since moving to the region nearly a decade ago, I am still mesmerized by the beautiful colours seen in the distinct seasons experienced in the region, autumn included. The royal bluebell's yellow centre represents IPAA ACT and the sectors coming together, the royal bluebell petals represent each of the sectors and the outside of the royal bluebell represents the ACT community. Surrounded on the outside by IPAA QLD, NSW, VIC, TAS, NT, WA, SA to represent their connection to IPAA ACT but also connection to the Australian community.

