

3RD LOCAL GOVERNMENT INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE

1-4 DECEMBER 2013
CAIRNS, QUEENSLAND

OUTCOMES

The 3rd Local Government Indigenous Employment National Roundtable explored:

- The role played by councils in attracting and retaining Indigenous talent;
- A range of learnings from case studies, including successful examples of sustainable regional Indigenous employment, economic development and capacity building initiatives facilitated by Local Government; and
- How these are influenced by government programs.

Following 17 presentations from local, state, territory and Commonwealth representatives, the National Roundtable concluded that the following learnings should be promoted to councils and others committed to the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander talent in Local Government:

PLACE BASED EMPLOYMENT

In the words of the late Patricia Dixon “Local Government is the place where change can happen. It is the place where big issues at the national level have their base.”¹ Local Government can make a difference to its communities and improve the quality of people’s lives on a daily basis. The place based nature of councils means that they are well positioned to be an employer of Indigenous talent, offering diverse and secure employment in remote, rural, regional and urban Australia.

A SHARED JOURNEY – THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGEMENT

There are significant advantages in developing responses to the needs of Indigenous communities within a broad engagement framework. In ACELG/LGMA’s [National Indigenous Employment in Local Government Position Paper](#), Commitment to Engagement is the first of eight key actions to increase Indigenous workforce participation. At the roundtable, Reconciliation Australia presented a clear business case for a comprehensive framework for councils to engage with their Indigenous communities.

¹ The late Patricia Dixon was the first Aboriginal woman elected to local government in NSW (Armidale City Council), and the first Aboriginal woman Federal candidate for the ALP. This is a quote from a speech she gave to the International Union of Local Authorities Congress, Canada in 1994 when she was a councillor.

Many councils are taking steps to demonstrate their commitment to engagement with their Indigenous communities, working hand in hand with them, whether through Reconciliation Action Plans, Memoranda of Understanding, or other similar documents. Local Government can lead by example.

The primary reason for moving towards engagement is to enable community ownership, and this will involve ownership of both the problems *and* the solutions. In the words of one Indigenous community member “Step back so we can step up.”

“REAL JOBS ARE ABOUT INVESTMENT”

The government’s policy direction, programs and financial incentives should be directed at skilling Indigenous talent to take on sustainable employment in Local Government. The direction of employment initiatives should not be about creating jobs that are subject to political shifts, policy whims and funding cuts. Indigenous employment should form part of a council’s foundation and be funded annually by the council as part of their resourcing allocation.

Delegates emphasised the importance of:

- Promoting to the sector the value of channelling Local Government training dollars and helping Indigenous employees raise their expectations both for their future and within their role in Local Government;
- Encouraging and supporting more Indigenous employees in senior management and leadership roles where they are currently under represented;
- Improving evaluation of successful programs and to articulate unquantifiable as well as quantifiable outcomes. The case study and video on Albury City Council’s successful Wagirra Trail Project is an example of well-articulated unquantifiable outcomes. The video showed clearly the value of education, getting a job and a ‘ticket’ and how that can increase self-worth and have a life changing impact on participants.

FACILITATOR OF COMMUNITY BENEFIT AND BUSINESS GROWTH

Governments’ emphasis on provision of infrastructure and services needs to shift towards local economic development and community growth to enable local communities to derive more benefit, where skills can be developed and utilised long after the project funding has disappeared. Creative ‘outside the box’ thinking is needed to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves to match resource requirements that will enable councils to meet the needs of their Indigenous communities.

Sustainable economic development, employment and capacity building models are needed and council can play an important role as key facilitator of local business growth and as a more strategic driver of opportunities in community. Inspiring case studies presented included:

- Structured and strategic inclusive regional development corporation model – Aak Puul Ngantam (APN) Cape York and Aurukun Shire Council, Far North Queensland.
- Joint ventures, including MiHaven, Remote Building Solutions and Cape Indigenous Mayors’ Alliance – Napranum Shire Council, Far North Queensland.
- Social enterprise – Resource Recovery Australia, Great Lakes Community Resources, Great Lakes Council, NSW.

GOVERNMENT OF LAST RESORT

Local Government in many remote communities is the government of last resort. The Local Government sector should not be subsidising the provision of state and federal services in remote or any other community location. In the words of one delegate “Councils are pressured to close the gap that no one else can deliver on.” If anything there should be more support and greater investment in Local Government by other tiers of government. In addition, many delegates emphasised the need for less red tape and more flexible funding arrangements.

MENTORING

Mentoring is a word that is heard a lot in relation to Indigenous employment. However it is not always done well, of sufficient duration or with adequate supports built in. A distinction also needs to be made between real mentoring versus buddying, coaching and troubleshooting. Indigenous mentoring works well when it is one-on-one.

Mentoring provides much needed role models and dedicated ongoing support for Indigenous employees who are in employment for the first time. Roundtable delegates heard presentations detailing the successful outcomes of quality mentoring of sufficient length, including improved engagement and higher retention rates.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Employers need to consider Indigenous talent in a holistic sense and provide the right quality and degree of support to ensure they are able to take on and meet the demands of their training and employment. Ensuring the mental and physical health and wellbeing of Indigenous employees is critical given the additional challenges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face.

Indigenous youth suicide has now risen to become one of the highest in the world. It is now a social issue tearing communities and families apart across remote, regional and urban Australia. Communities are calling out to be heard and for community-led solutions to be supported. Officers from the successful Yarrabah Life Promotion Program spoke about their journey and processes and stressed that employment is a big part of healing. The program was initiated by the Yarrabah Shire Council in the early 1990s and is driven by the community, which has been the key to its success.

CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

The importance of culture, language and cultural identity and their critical contribution to health and wellbeing was also stressed. East Arnhem Shire Council's award-winning community run i-Stories case study was presented. The wide range of benefits of the program include: preserving Aboriginal arts and culture, cultural and community engagement with technology and development of new skills and knowledge. iPads are available as a tool for recording and documenting cultural and language activity.

ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

The following observations came out of open forum discussions regarding attraction and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- Get smarter in engaging with students at all levels of the education system to raise awareness of diverse and secure career opportunities and pathways available in Local Government in 565 locations throughout Australia, using social as well as traditional media to increase reach. This would assist in raising the aspirations of young Indigenous people. The presentation by the ANU's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) included findings from their *Indigenous Population Project* and Indigenous 15 year olds' expectations and plans for the future.
- Appoint champions to promote and support Indigenous employment initiatives.
- Acknowledge that a reality for many working age Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees is that they have a high rate of caring responsibilities
- Engage with and educate HR managers in understanding the benefits of employing Indigenous people
- Increase Indigenous workforce participation rates in senior management and leadership roles, providing mentoring and other forms of support.
- Increase Indigenous workforce participation rates in urban LG areas where 75% of Indigenous people live

“TRUE LEADERS”

In concluding his keynote address on the last day of the Roundtable, David Kempton MP, Queensland Assistant Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, said:

“[Local Government] needs to step up as true leaders of their people. Federal Government needs to listen, listen, listen, and to the right people. Then we will see people rise to their full potential in the [area of their choosing].”

For more information, including and to download the presentations, go to:

http://www.lgma.org.au/news/latest_news/3rd_national_aboriginal_and_torres_strait_islander