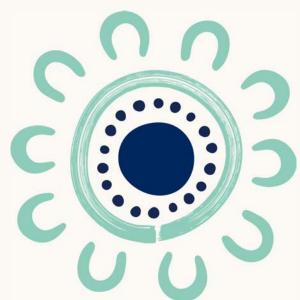
# Creating safe and respectful workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women





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# **Acknowledgement of Country**

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay respects to Elders past and present and recognise the continuing connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to land, culture, knowledge, and language for over 65,000 years.

As a non-Aboriginal organisation, Our Watch understands that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is an issue for the whole community. As highlighted in Our Watch's national resource *Changing the picture*, the evidence clearly shows the intersection between racism, sexism, and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Our Watch has an ongoing commitment to the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, who continue to suffer from violence at a significantly higher rate than non-Aboriginal women. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations who continue to lead the work of sharing knowledge with non-Indigenous people and relentlessly advocate for an equitable, violence-free future in Australia.





# **About this guide**

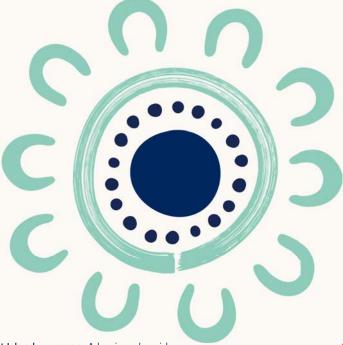
This guide was developed for Our Watch by Goorlil Consulting and Ashlee Wone. Goorlil Consulting is a First Nations-led organisation that fosters culturally safe, equitable, and inclusive workplaces. Grounded in expertise and lived experience, Goorlil provides tailored anti-racism, cultural safety, and gender-affirming strategies that empower organisations to address systemic inequities effectively.

Ashlee is a proud Ngiyampaa Wangaaypuwan, Wiradjuri and Ngemba woman and the principal consultant at Wone Consulting, a consultancy specialising in strategy, impact, and community-led change. She brings extensive expertise in navigating systems change, stakeholder engagement, and strategic design, focusing on justice, gender, and Aboriginal affairs.

# Purpose of the guide

### This guide aims to:

- enhance the understanding of people and culture and diversity and inclusion teams about the nature and drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in workplaces
- support people and culture and diversity and inclusion teams to embed workplace equality, respect and cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, clients/customers and partners in the workplace
- outline actionable steps workplaces can take to address discrimination experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in workplaces, stemming from the impacts of colonisation, racism and sexism.



# A note on language

This guide uses the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' to include Aboriginal peoples, Torres Strait Islander peoples and people with both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage. On occasion, in keeping with international human rights language, the term 'Indigenous' to include both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities or to differentiate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and organisations may also be used. In using these collective terms, Our Watch nevertheless acknowledges the diversity of the many distinct nations and different language, tribal and clan groups that make up Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

At Our Watch, we recognise that gender-based violence affects diverse groups. When we refer to 'women', we include both cisgender (a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex registered for them at birth) and transgender women. We also acknowledge and stand in solidarity with non-binary people, who face unique forms of discrimination and violence while respecting their distinct identities outside the gender binary. To understand more about the use and limitations of binary language, that is, language that assumes only two categories of sex and gender, such as men/women, male/ female, and masculinity/femininity, see *Change* the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (p. 126).

# **Further reading**

Our Watch, Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children

Diversity Council of Australia/Jumbanna
Institute, Gari Yala - Speak the truth: Centreing
the experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres
Strait Islander Australians at work

Australian Human Rights Commission, National anti-racism framework

# Introduction

Creating equal, safe, inclusive and respectful work environments is key to addressing intersectional gender inequality and stopping unwanted workplace behaviours, like sexual harassment before they start. In doing so, employers ensure compliance with legal and ethical obligations while contributing to a broader culture of equality and respect.



In this guide, we focus on creating equal, safe, inclusive, and respectful workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, especially women. The evidence tells us that something needs to be done - 59% of Aboriginal women experienced workplace sexual harassment in the last years. Creating safe and respectful workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women: A beginner's quide gives workplaces a starting point by providing tools and resources to create safe and respectful workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait **Islander women.** Some workplaces may already have diversity, equity and inclusion strategies or initiatives in place. This kit can strengthen and enhance diversity and inclusion efforts to create a more equitable and empowering workplace for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, especially women.

While the content in this guide may apply to various workplace roles, the primary audience is people and culture teams and diversity, equity, and inclusion teams. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that all employees have a responsibility to create safe and respectful workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### Things to keep in mind

- Make a start. By not acting, we perpetuate inequality and disrespect. Missteps will happen along the way, and your good intentions may not land the way you want them to. So be open to learning from and centring the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Whether or not you have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, all workplaces should take steps to create culturally safe and responsive workplaces for all employees, contractors, partners, customers and service users.
- Focus on cultural safety, which is about truly listening, shared respect, living and working together with dignity.
- It is okay to begin your journey by prioritising one or two actions and then scaffolding other actions as you gain confidence and momentum. It may be a cliché, but it is true that from little things, big things grow.
- Take the time to understand key concepts like colonial load, identity strain, cultural responsiveness, and what drives inequality and disrespect—these are fundamental to creating culturally safe and respectful workplaces.
- Frameworks like Reconciliation Action Plans and the Our Watch Workplace Equality and Respect resources can help you create pathways to progress your work within your organisation.

### Four steps to get you started

- Build your understanding of key concepts.
- 2. Improve your understanding of the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in workplaces.
- 3. Explore the roadmap for creating safe and inclusive workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- 4. Use the tools and resources to support your actions.

# **Build your understanding of key concepts**

### **Cultural responsiveness**

Cultural responsiveness involves recognising, valuing, and engaging with individuals' cultural identities, knowledge, and lived experiences. It requires ongoing self-reflection, continuous learning, and collaboration with individuals and communities to promote culturally safe, inclusive, and respectful environments. This active approach creates the conditions for cultural safety, which ensures that environments are inclusive, respectful, and free from cultural harm. Cultural responsiveness is an active responsibility of all employees, requiring them to engage, reflect, and adapt their practices or operations to respect and value cultural identities. On the other hand, cultural safety is determined by those from marginalised groups. Only they can assess whether an environment or interaction feels respectful, inclusive, and free from harm.

## **Cultural safety**

The concept of cultural safety emerged in Aotearoa, New Zealand, led by Irihapeti Ramsden, a Māori nurse. The concept was meant to help white nurses improve the care provided to the Māori community. Since then, the concept has widened its applicability beyond just the provision of health services.

Changing the picture describes cultural safety as 'an environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity, and truly listening.'

## **Build your knowledge**

Cultural Safety in Australia by the Lowitja Institute provides details on the term and compares it with other commonly used terms (see pages 33-36).

The Anti-Racism Framework (on page 28) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety by the Victorian Government, Department of Health provide more information on cultural safety.

## Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a way to understand how our social systems and structures (reflected and replicated in our workplaces) create experiences of privilege and disadvantage. It recognises that people's lives are shaped by their identities, relationships and social factors. These combine to create intersecting forms of privilege and discrimination depending on a person's context and existing power structures, such as patriarchy, ableism, ongoing impacts of colonisation, imperialism, homophobia and racism.

# **Build your knowledge**

To understand more about intersectionality, view the video What is intersectionality? Commissioned and Produced by Professor Peter Hopkins, Newcastle University.

Read <u>Changing the picture</u> to learn how working in intersectional ways is essential to preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

#### **Racism**

Racism is a process by which systems, policies, actions and attitudes create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on race. Racism is more than just prejudice in thought or action. It occurs when this prejudice – whether individual or institutional – is accompanied by the power to discriminate against, oppress, or limit the rights of others.

## **Build your knowledge**

Read the National anti-racism framework: A roadmap to eliminating racism in Australia.

# Trauma-informed violence prevention

Trauma-informed violence prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australian workplaces is an approach that recognises the pervasive impact of historical and intergenerational trauma resulting from ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and sexism. It integrates this understanding into workplace policies, practices, and procedures to prevent violence and support healing. This approach actively avoids re-traumatisation by creating culturally safe and responsive environments that acknowledge and respect the unique experiences and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, fostering their wellbeing in the workforce.

## **Build your knowledge**

Intergenerational trauma describes how the impacts of events like colonisation and forced child removal continue to affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women today and are passed down through generations, influencing emotional, social, and cultural wellbeing.

To learn more about intergenerational trauma, visit the <u>Healing Foundation</u> website or view the <u>Intergenerational</u> trauma animation.

To understand more about traumainformed approaches to safe and respectful workplaces, read the Australian Human Rights Commission factsheet. **Identity strain:** refers to the strain employees feel when they or others, view their identity as not meeting the norms or expectations of the dominant culture in the workplace. This leads to employees expending effort and energy managing their identity in the workplace to avoid the negative consequences of discrimination, harassment, bias and marginalisation.

**Cultural or colonial load:** is the invisible load borne by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace. When someone is the only Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person in the workplace, or one of a small few, there is often an expectation that they respond to all things relating to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace and speak on behalf of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

NOTE: Our Watch prefers the term colonial load as this shifts the focus to colonial systems as the root cause of additional responsibilities rather than culture itself. We acknowledge that culture is not a burden but rather a source of strength and responsibility.

**Cultural safety:** Cultural safety means being able to practise your culture free of ridicule or condemnation. Our Watch recognises cultural safety as a practice that ensures individuals feel respected, valued, and supported in environments that acknowledge their cultural identities and needs.

## **Build your knowledge**

Read Gari Yala—Speak the truth:
Centreing the experiences of
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
Australians at work to improve your
understanding of key concepts like
cultural safety, identity strain, and
colonial load.



# Improve your understanding of the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in workplaces

Research on the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the workplace is limited. This is why Gari Yala—Speak the truth: Centreing the experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians at work is a landmark study. Gari Yala (Speak the truth): Gendered insights extend the research to understand how the intersection between gender and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity is experienced in the workplace.

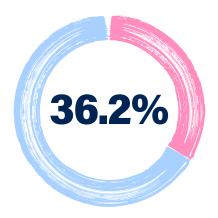
Gari Yala identifies 5 themes that influence the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in workplaces-identity strain, cultural load (which Our Watch refers to as colonial load), cultural safety (see page 7 in this document for an explanation of these terms), organisational authenticity and organisational activity. Organisational authenticity is genuine support within the workplace to be inclusive and provide equitable treatment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and employees. Organisational activity is the number of initiatives, programs and events organisations undertook relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and cultures.

While there are shared experiences between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women, the experiences of women differ in significant ways. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women:

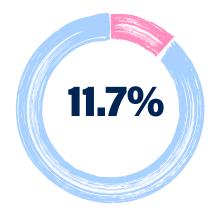
- receive significantly less support in culturally unsafe environments
- bear the highest levels of colonial load:
   Women frequently shoulder additional cultural responsibilities, such as educating others, often unacknowledged or unsupported by their organisations
- experience higher rates of workplace discrimination and racism: The Gari Yala report highlights that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women often report feeling excluded or undervalued in workplaces, facing both overt and covert forms of racism that exacerbate feelings of cultural unsafety
- are more likely to be expected to lead reconciliation and diversity efforts: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, particularly those in managerial roles, often find themselves burdened with leading or advocating for reconciliation and diversity initiatives without proper resources, support, or recognition
- are underrepresented in leadership roles across industries: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are less likely to hold senior leadership positions, often due to systemic racism barriers like inflexible workplace policies and the undervaluing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives

- face challenges accessing flexible working arrangements: As primary carers, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women require flexible work conditions, yet the Gari Yala report shows that workplaces frequently fail to offer these, forcing women to navigate incompatible workplace demands
- report feeling culturally isolated in the workplace: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are more likely to be the only Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person in their team or workplace, which increases isolation and colonial load
- experience pay inequities and job insecurity: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are often overrepresented in casual, part-time, or insecure roles, which compounds their financial vulnerability and limits opportunities for career advancement
- face more significant mental health challenges: The combined pressures of workplace discrimination, colonial load, and caregiving responsibilities contribute to significantly higher rates of workplacerelated stress and burnout among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

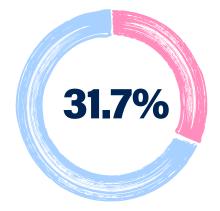
Gari Yala also highlights the 'triple jeopardy' experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with the intersection of their Indigenous, woman and carer identities. For example, women are often overrepresented in insecure and culturally unsafe roles, left without adequate support structures to manage the added burdens of colonial load and caregiving responsibilities. As a result, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are more likely to experience workplace discrimination and a lack of organisational authenticity in addressing these barriers.



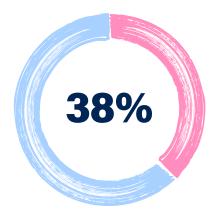
36.2% strongly disagreed and disagreed with the statement: 'I had the workplace support I needed when I experienced unfair treatment and/or racial slurs or jokes at work because of my Indigenous identity.'



11.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience high identity strain.

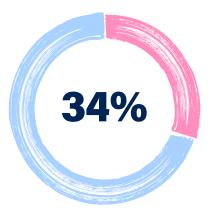


31.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in workplaces say they carry a high colonial load.

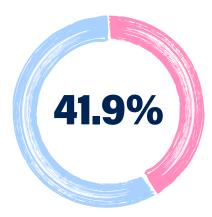


38% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women work in workplaces that are low in organisational authenticity.

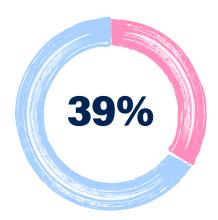
# **Triple jeopardy**



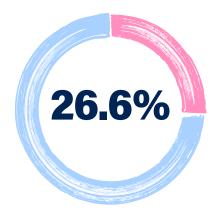
34% of women with caring responsibilities were more likely than any other group to report working in culturally unsafe organisations.



41.9% of women with caring responsibilities also had the highest rates of colonial load.



39% of women with caring responsibilities were the most likely group to disagree or strongly disagree that they had support when they needed it.



26.6% of women with caring responsibilities stood out as the most likely to work at organisations with low authenticity.

Further, the Australian Human Rights Commission found that 59% of Aboriginal women experienced workplace sexual harassment in the last 5 years.<sup>2</sup> This evidence indicates the urgent need for workplaces to implement comprehensive strategies that address both the prevalence and the drivers of violence and discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

# **Build your knowledge**

Read Gari Yala – Speak the Truth:
Centreing the experiences of Aboriginal
and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians
at work.

Read Gari Yala (Speak the truth): Gendered insights

# Explore the roadmap for creating safe and inclusive workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

So, what will it take to create safe, equal and respectful workplaces for Aboriginal women? Workplaces need tailored approaches to address the key drivers that create hostile, unsafe and disrespectful environments. According to Changing the picture, these drivers are the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and sexism — rooted in systemic structures and cultural norms. These drivers do not work in isolation but in tandem, compounding the discrimination faced by Aboriginal women in the workplace.

Workplaces are a critical setting for addressing racism and sexism. By fostering equity and respect, workplaces improve the immediate conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and model inclusive behaviours that ripple outward into the broader community. For example, a workplace that prioritises cultural safety, implements anti-racism training, and actively supports Aboriginal women in leadership positions can inspire similar practices in schools, local councils and other institutions connected to the community.

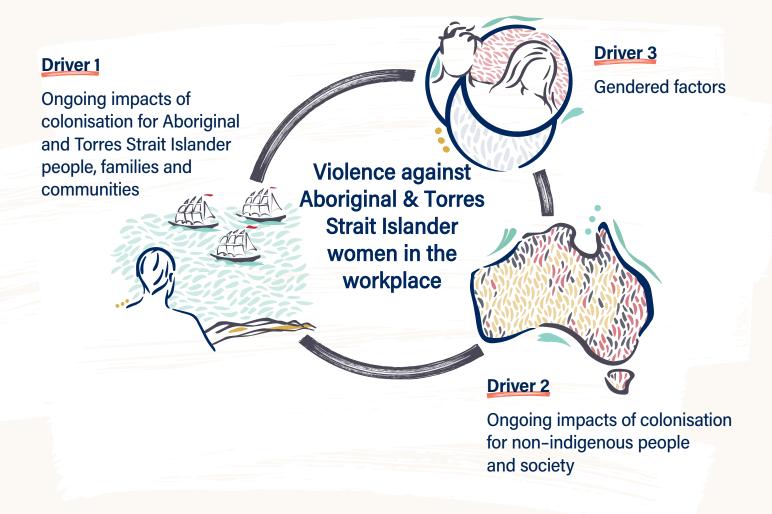
The impact of workplace policies often extends far beyond the organisation itself. When workplaces create conditions where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women feel valued, supported, and empowered, the positive effects extend to their families and communities. Improved mental health, economic independence, and access to leadership roles contribute to collective healing and uplift community wellbeing.

Aligning workplace initiatives with broader advocacy efforts is essential to address the root causes of racism and gender inequality. This means connecting organisational policies with broader movements for justice, such as advocating for policy reforms, participating in reconciliation actions and supporting Aboriginal-led initiatives. Workplaces can amplify their impact by embedding systemic change into their strategies — for example, by supporting treaty processes, championing the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, or contributing to educational campaigns that challenge colonial narratives.

Creating safe and inclusive workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women requires more than internal reforms. It involves recognising workplaces as key players in collective healing and systemic change, with the potential to challenge entrenched inequities and build a more just and equitable society.

# **Intersecting drivers for**

# **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women**



A whole-of-organisation approach to addressing these key drivers involves looking at a workplace as a whole system, considering all parts and how they work together – the workplace's structure, goals, performance, community, external environments, and stakeholders.

Our Watch's Workplace Equality and Respect resources provide workplaces with tools to address the root causes of inequality and disrespect faced by women in workplaces.

Workplaces are strongly encouraged to design specific actions to address the root causes of inequality and disrespect experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in workplaces. It's important to ensure that actions are trauma-informed.

# Drivers creating hostile work environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

# **Driver 1**

# Ongoing impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities

- Intergenerational and collective trauma faced by Aboriginal people
- Systemic oppression, disempowerment, racism
- Destruction/disruption of traditional cultures, family and community relationships and community norms about violence
- Personal experience of/exposure to violence
- Condoning of violence within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities



## Examples of how this manifests in workplaces

#### Bias in leadership representation

Overrepresentation of non-Indigenous leadership while limiting Aboriginal employees to entry-level.

#### **Tokenistic acknowledgement of cultures**

Displaying Indigenous artworks or symbols without engagement or inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in consultation and/or decision-making.

#### **Erasure of Indigenous identity**

Overtly or covertly putting pressure on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees to conform to dominant cultural norms, such as discouraging the use of traditional languages, Aboriginal English, or cultural practices at work.

#### **Colonial load on Aboriginal employees**

Expecting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees to educate colleagues about cultural issues or lead reconciliation initiatives without remuneration.

# Drivers creating hostile work environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

# **Driver 2**

# Ongoing impacts of colonisation for non-indigenous people and society

- Racialised structural inequalities of power
- Entrenched racism in social norms, attitudes and practices
- Perpetration of racist violence
- Condoning of, and insufficient accountability for violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people



## Examples of how this manifests in workplaces

#### **Racial microaggressions**

Making offhanded comments that demean or stereotype Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees.

#### **Systemic exclusion**

Lack of access to mentorship, promotions, or professional development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

#### **Tolerating racist behaviours**

Ignoring or inadequately addressing incidents of racial slurs, racist jokes, or discriminatory behaviour by colleagues.

#### **Unequal disciplinary action**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees facing harsher consequences for comparable mistakes than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

#### Limited or no senior executive positions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff

Workplaces often lack senior executive representation or opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to provide cultural expertise and influence. Most often, when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are in senior executive roles, they are the only one, resulting in issues of isolation and making it challenging to advocate for change.

# Drivers creating hostile work environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

# **Driver 3**

#### Gendered factors

- Excusing or minimising violence against women and sexual harassment or trying to justify why the violence occurred
- Gender inequality in workplaces resulting in men dominating decision-making
- Rigid gender stereotyping which limits the ways people can express themselves
- Male peer relations at work that disrespect women and each other



## Examples of how this manifests in workplaces

- Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that intimidate or offend
- Gender pay gaps
- Lack of women in leadership
- Making assumptions that certain types of work are better suited for certain people based on gender identity
- 'Locker-room talk'
- Unwanted touching or sexual gestures

- Readily excusing a peer's disrespectful behaviour
- Believing that all violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is exclusively perpetrated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and ignoring evidence to the contrary
- Generalised stereotypes like Aboriginal people all abuse alcohol and drugs, and most Aboriginal people are freeloaders

# What can workplace do?

To address the drivers that create unsafe workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, workplaces must adopt trauma informed practices.

# What do trauma-informed practices involve?

Trauma-informed practices recognise the intergenerational trauma caused by the ongoing impacts of colonisation and systemic inequities, ensuring that policies, processes and workplace interactions are designed to avoid re-traumatisation. This includes implementing culturally safe grievance systems, fostering trauma-aware leadership, and providing staff training that prioritises respect and cultural awareness.

Trauma-informed approaches align closely with the collective healing focus of *Changing the picture*. These practices don't just improve individual experiences, they play a vital role in driving systemic change and strengthening community resilience.

Trauma-informed workplaces are not optional — they're fundamental to breaking down systemic harm.

The tools and resources in this guide can support you to develop tailored responses to create safe, equal and respectful workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

# Workplace Equality and Respect actions

Commitment:	Conditions:	Culture:	Support:	Core business:		
We demonstrate an ongoing commitment to workplace gender equality and preventing sexual harassment and other forms of genderbased violence.	We apply a gender lens to our workplace policies and practices to ensure they are fair and equitable.	We promote a workplace culture where all people feel safe, confident, and supported to actively challenge gender bias and discrimination, gender stereotypes and harmful gender norms without adverse consequences.	We listen to, respect and support people who experience sexual harassment and gender-based violence (including domestic and family violence) through policies and practices that consider the impact of trauma.	We promote gender equality in our external engagement with customers, stakeholders and the community.		
Example of workplace actions	Example of workplace actions	Example of workplace actions	Example of workplace actions	Example of workplace actions		
Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are represented in leadership and decision-making roles by implementing strategies to enhance career development and progression into leadership roles. For example, training and skills development opportunities, encouraging 'acting' role opportunities.  Embedding strategies with clear targets to ensure Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women are promoted and supported into decision-making roles.  Setting workplace policies which ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees 'have a seat' at decision-making meetings and discussions.	Developing workplace policies that explicitly address the intersection of racism, sexism, and colonialism.  Encouraging the workplace or teams to undertake cultural immersion activities or practices with local experts. For example, if conducting a strategic planning day, invite a local Aboriginal community leader to facilitate a 'yarning circle' approach.	Addressing identity strain and colonial load and promoting cultural safety through the application of a colonial load remuneration packages such as additional superannuation, additional cultural leave, etc.  Sign up and commit to campaigns such as 'Racism. It stops with me.'	Employee support programs: Providing access to culturally responsive Employee Assistance Programs and mental health services.  Support and resource the establishment of a peer-led Aboriginal Staff Network for Indigenous employees to access informal cultural supports.	Community partnerships: Collaborating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to support cultural safety and workplace education and ensure accountability.  Incorporating an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement policy when engaging external suppliers or businesses.  Initiate team building activities that foster team cohesion whilst undertaking cultural competency workshops or activities.  Develop an organisational-wide and public-facing zero tolerance policy: The organisation does not accept racism, sexism and colonial violence and will not work with customers or suppliers who do.		

# Tools and resources for workplaces

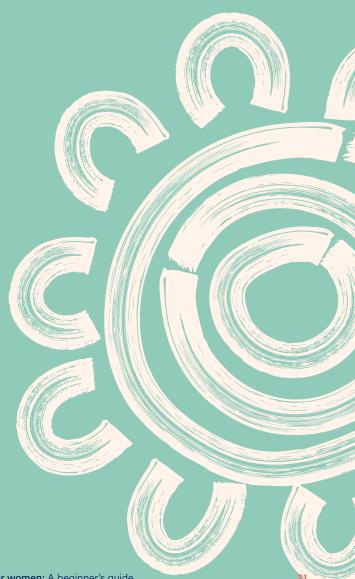


There is significant work to be undertaken by non-Indigenous people and organisations to address the drivers of violence associated with systemic racism and discrimination—in both its interpersonal and institutional or structural forms. This means working as effective allies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Further, because the perpetrators of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women can be from any cultural background, 'mainstream' organisations have a particular responsibility to implement prevention strategies that reach and engage non-Indigenous men

- Changing the picture



To be free from discrimination and violence, workplaces must focus on cultural safety, foster genuine inclusivity, and engage in targeted prevention strategies. To support workplaces, this guide provides some suggested actions. There are associated tools (tipsheets, checklists, links) that will help workplaces implement these actions.



# Priority area: Commitment

We demonstrate an ongoing commitment to workplace gender equality and preventing sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence.

#### **Tools and resources**

Tip sheet: Engaging leaders in cultural safety and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

- Cultural safety initiatives responsibility matrix
- Reconciliation Australia has extensive resources to support workplaces in developing Reconciliation Action Plans.



# Facilitating leadership learning initiatives

- Establish forums for senior leaders from different organisations to share challenges and best practices in advancing cultural safety and inclusion.
- Develop resources to ensure leaders know their legal and ethical obligations regarding discrimination and harassment.
- Organise on-Country learning experiences for senior leaders, led by Traditional Owners, to deepen their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and perspectives.
- Organise workshops by Aboriginalowned organisations to educate senior leadership teams about the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and sexism on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Deliver customised cultural training for executives, focusing on their roles in advocating for cultural safety and leading anti-racism efforts.

### **Requiring commitment statements**

- Have senior leaders publicly commit to measurable actions addressing the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and sexism in the workplace, such as publishing progress in annual reports and developing a Reconciliation Action Plan to assist in embedding the principles and purpose of reconciliation within the workplace.
- Develop resources, such as key messages, that senior leadership teams can use to emphasise the importance of equity and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women specifically.



# Creating a cultural safety accountability council/advisory group

- Form a cross-functional cultural safety accountability council/advisory group to monitor progress on addressing the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and sexism. The group should include workplace senior leaders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives (employees and community members), meet quarterly, remunerate community members, and account for employee colonial load.
- The advisory group should include matriarchal voices\* where applicable, prioritise the inclusion of women and people with diverse lived experiences, and vet all applicants to assess suitability and alignment with cultural safety principles.
- Support the advisory group in reviewing the findings from the workplace cultural safety and respect audit to identify workplace strengths, gaps, and areas for improvement and suggest actions for senior leadership teams to action.
- Create formal feedback loops where the advisory group evaluates the organisation's policies and practices and provides ongoing recommendations directly to the board or executive team to influence decision making.
- \* Matriarchal voices refer to the inclusion of perspectives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who hold positions of influence, leadership, or deep cultural knowledge within their communities. Matriarchs often play a central role in maintaining cultural traditions, nurturing relationships, and advocating for their communities. By ensuring matriarchal voices are represented, the council/advisory group acknowledges the significance of women's leadership and lived experiences in addressing structural issues like the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and sexism.



# Developing tailored leadership development plans

- Incorporate cultural safety and equity goals into leaders' Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to ensure accountability.
- Provide regular coaching sessions focused on inclusive leadership practices.
- Use workplace audit tools to get an overview of the workplace's strengths and areas for development.
- Support senior leadership teams in setting bold targets/minimum standards for recruiting Aboriginal women, including into leadership positions. For example, at least one senior leadership team member should identify as Aboriginal, noting the 3 'working criteria'.



# Priority area: Workplace conditions

We apply a gender lens to our workplace policies and practices to ensure they are fair and equitable.

#### **Tools and resources**

- Workplace cultural safety and respect audit: Creating safe and inclusive environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
- Cultural safety and respect assessment tool for individuals
- The Australian Human Rights Commission's <u>Targeted recruitment of</u>
   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people provides a guide for employers.
- Our Watch's Creating safe to speak cultures
- Checklist for a cultural remuneration package

Tip sheet: Developing policies to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander women's employment, retention and career development

Tip sheet: Culturally safe recruitment focussing on job advertisements

and the selection process

Tip Sheet: Understanding and addressing racism, microaggressions,

and promoting anti-racism in Australian workplaces



# **Workplace audits**

- Use audit tools to determine areas where the organisation may be unintentionally perpetuating discrimination or exclusion against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Share the audit's findings with the cultural safety accountability council/ advisory group to identify workplace strengths, gaps, and areas for improvement and suggest actions for senior leadership teams.
- Share the findings from the audit with employees with a clearly articulated plan of action to build on strengths and address gaps.
- Establish a schedule for regular reviews of pay, promotions, and workplace policies to address disparities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Based on the findings of the workplace cultural safety and respect audit, codesign policies with employee resource groups/networks/affinity groups (See Workplace Equality and Respect Standard: Culture for more information on this group) to ensure they reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values.
- Partner with employee resource groups/ networks/affinity groups to co-design employee support programs, mentorship initiatives, and workplace cultural events and allocate a dedicated budget to support activities, including research, outreach, and event organisation.

## **Cultural safety assessments**

 Support employees to use the Cultural safety and respect assessment tool for individuals to inform individual performance agreements



# Recognising and remunerating the colonial load

- Recognise and reward colonial load in job descriptions to facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to spend time on and be compensated for this work.
- Introduce a cultural remuneration package that provides leave and other financial remuneration for managing the colonial load.
- Reduce the burden on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees by training non-Indigenous employees to share responsibilities for organising events such as those held during National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC week.

### Policy development and action plans

- Revise and/or develop policies to explicitly promote cultural safety and prohibit discrimination, racism, and sexism.
- Develop a clear action plan addressing identified issues, with measurable outcomes and transparent reporting to all employees.
- Develop an action plan or embed actions in existing diversity, equity and inclusion plans and fund an internal working group to lead the work.
- Develop policies that explicitly address intersectionality.
- Implement workplace sexual harassment policies informed by the Respect@
   Work report, ensuring a zero-tolerance approach to unacceptable workplace behaviours.
- Explicitly integrate cultural safety initiatives into the organisation's longterm strategic and operational plans.



### Focusing on sustainable careers and career development

- Co-create career mentorship programs with employee resource/networks/ affinity groups. The mentorship program pairs Aboriginal employees with mentors to support career progression and address systemic barriers. Non-Indigenous mentors must undertake and commit to ongoing anti-racism, cultural safety, and cultural awareness training. These mentoring programs can also explore partnerships with Aboriginal-led organisations to provide mentoring programs that support career progression,
- Gari Yala recommends providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors to employees entering the workforce for the first time.
- Create pathways and opportunities to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation and leadership at management and executive levels, including setting, tracking and reporting on targets.
- Support employees with caregiving responsibilities by introducing flexible work arrangements, such as part-time leadership roles and adaptable schedules.

- Develop and implement programs that support career progression for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. For more information, see Champions of Change Sponsorship track: A practical guide to gender inclusive progression.
   Sponsorship programs should be codesigned in partnership with employee resource groups/networks/affinity groups and monitored by the Cultural safety accountability council/advisory group to ensure that such initiatives are anti-racist and culturally safe.
- Develop an employment and retention policy that addresses the specific barriers experienced by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women with particular attention to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's leadership.
- Work in partnership with the advisory group to establish a leadership program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. An Indigenous leadership program aims to develop, connect, and enhance management skills through training and development sessions, peer support, networking, and information sharing.
- Create a professional learning strategy that addresses needs-based onboarding and incremental learning opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.
- Measure retention, promotion rates, and job satisfaction, specifically among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women employees, to track the outcomes being achieved (or not achieved).

# Priority area: Workplace culture

We promote a workplace culture where all people feel safe, confident, and supported to actively challenge gender bias and discrimination, gender stereotypes and harmful gender norms without adverse consequences.

Engaging men, particularly non-Indigenous men, in violence prevention, is crucial to addressing the systemic drivers of violence outlined in *Changing the picture*. This involves educating men about the intersections of the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and sexism and their role in fostering respectful relationships. Strategies include training on unconscious bias, privilege, and bystander intervention to equip men with skills to safely challenge sexism, racism, and discrimination. Organisations should promote positive male role models, challenge harmful gender norms,

and encourage male leaders to champion antiviolence initiatives with clear accountability measures. Partnerships with Aboriginal-led organisations can ensure culturally informed approaches while centring Indigenous voices. Connecting workplace efforts to broader community campaigns, such as White Ribbon Day, reinforces the importance of allyship and systemic advocacy. These steps empower men to actively contribute to creating safe, respectful environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

#### **Tools and resources**

Tip Sheet: Building relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people



# **Capacity building**

- Deliver repeated and incremental cultural safety, anti-racism and anti-discrimination training to all staff.
- Implement compulsory cultural safety, anti-racism and anti-discrimination training for senior leadership teams
- Aboriginal organisations should lead mandatory annual training on cultural safety and anti-racism practices for all employees, particularly senior leaders.
- Incorporate anti-racism modules in onboarding new employees, requiring new hires to engage in ongoing training on anti-racism, cultural competence (the ability to participate ethically and effectively in personal and professional intercultural settings³) and promoting cultural safety as part of their induction.

#### Data collection

- Conduct anonymous surveys to understand employees' experiences, focusing on cultural safety, identity strain, and gender-based inequities. For example, a national organisation surveyed its workforce and discovered that only 35% of Aboriginal women felt supported after incidents of workplace discrimination. They used this data to develop targeted support systems.
- Support employee resource groups/ employee networks/employee affinity groups in hosting regular listening sessions that are safe spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to share feedback on workplace culture. For example, a mining company initiated quarterly 'Truth Forums' where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees could anonymously share concerns and suggestions directly with leadership and shape workplace strategies.



#### **Internal communications**

- In internal communications, highlight the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and respectful interactions with Aboriginal colleagues. For example, a corporate firm shared videos featuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees explaining identity strain and its workplace impacts.
- Develop awareness campaigns to educate staff about identity strain. Identity strain refers to the emotional and mental effort individuals, particularly those from marginalised groups, expend to manage or adapt their identity in environments where it is undervalued, misunderstood, or discriminated against.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), also known as Employee Networks or Employee Affinity Groups, are voluntary, employee-led groups that serve as resources for members and organisations by fostering a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with an organisation's mission, values, goals, business practices, and objectives. ERGs play many different roles, depending on their objectives and goals for the organisation and the membership.



# Employee resource groups/employee networks/employee affinity groups and activities

- Gari Yala recommends building an accessible, meaningful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff network that provides a culturally safe space to network and seek support. One approach could be supporting the establishment of employee resource groups/networks/affinity groups. These groups provide employees with a platform to connect, share experiences, support each other, and advocate for progressive change.
- Celebrate cultural events, like NAIDOC Week, through meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. See actions under Minimise cultural colonial load, below, on how to celebrate these events without adding to colonial load
- Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in events like International Women's Day.
- Recognise and celebrate identity, the richness and diversity of Indigenous cultures by creating opportunities, in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, for them to share cultural practices without the burden of expectation or judgment.

# Priority area: Support

We listen to, respect and support people who experience sexual harassment and gender-based violence (including domestic and family violence) through policies and practices that consider the impact of trauma.

#### **Tools and resources**

Checklist for a cultural remuneration package



### Reporting

- Introduce immediate response protocols for addressing culturally unsafe incidents to ensure timely and effective action.
   Culturally unsafe behaviours in the workplace can include stereotyping, discrimination, prejudices, racism, microaggressions, and disrespectful comments or jokes.<sup>4</sup>
- Display: <u>Call it out First Nations Racism</u>
   <u>Register</u> poster to support staff in
   reporting their experiences of racism.
   Jumbunna Research collects, holds
   securely, and analyses reports to
   inform annual reports, helping to raise
   awareness and drive systematic change
- Establish robust reporting mechanisms that are culturally safe for reporting discrimination, harassment, or expressing concerns, ensuring confidentiality and accountability. This includes meaningful engagement with Aboriginal employees for input on improving reporting mechanisms and ensuring that reporting mechanisms are trauma-informed. Reporting mechanisms should include providing easy access to reporting avenues, ensuring response personnel/ teams are appropriately trained on the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, and continually improving operational responses to reports.



# Partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations

- Partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned organisations to offer healing programs for employees affected by workplace discrimination or racism.
- Invest in holistic wellness programs by providing mental health resources tailored to the needs of Aboriginal employees, such as culturally responsive counsellors and access to culturally safe Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and implement policies to support mental health and well-being for all employees.

### **Minimising colonial load**

- Consult with the advisory group or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee resource group/network/ affinity group (if they have been established in your organisation) to guide strategies on reducing colonial load. For example, a retail chain sought input from its Indigenous network to streamline the organisation of cultural events and when they were held, reducing the overburden on individual staff.
- Rotate responsibilities for organising events such as National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week by distributing responsibilities across teams rather than concentrating them on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. Regularly conduct post-event surveys to ensure events are impactful without overburdening participants.

# Priority area: Core business

We promote gender equality in our external engagement with customers, stakeholders, and the community.

#### **Tools and resources**

Tip sheet and checklist:

**Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** 

service providers

Tip sheet: Building organisational authenticity

Use Supply Nation to engage local Aboriginal women-owned

service providers



- Striving to be a culturally safe workplace for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Ensure that your workplace can state:<sup>5</sup>
  - » our organisation is culturally safe for workers and the community
  - » we are well connected to the local Aboriginal community
  - » we respond to needs identified by Aboriginal people
  - we are accessible to Aboriginal people and communitieswe work in a culturally safe and appropriate manner.
- Monitor, evaluate, and report (internally and publicly) on progress by defining key performance indicators within your action plan, scheduling periodic evaluations to assess progress against goals, and sharing outcomes with stakeholders to demonstrate commitment and transparency.
- Look for pathways to diversify your supply chain by exploring procurement of services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander- owned service providers.



# A call to action

Creating safe, respectful, and inclusive workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is not just an organisational responsibility—it is an opportunity to lead systemic change. This resource provides actionable steps to address the drivers of violence, such as the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and sexism, while fostering cultural safety and equity.

We challenge every organisation to reflect on their current practices and commit to implementing the strategies outlined here. From recognising colonial load to embedding trauma-informed approaches and amplifying the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, each step contributes to dismantling systemic barriers and creating environments where all employees can thrive.

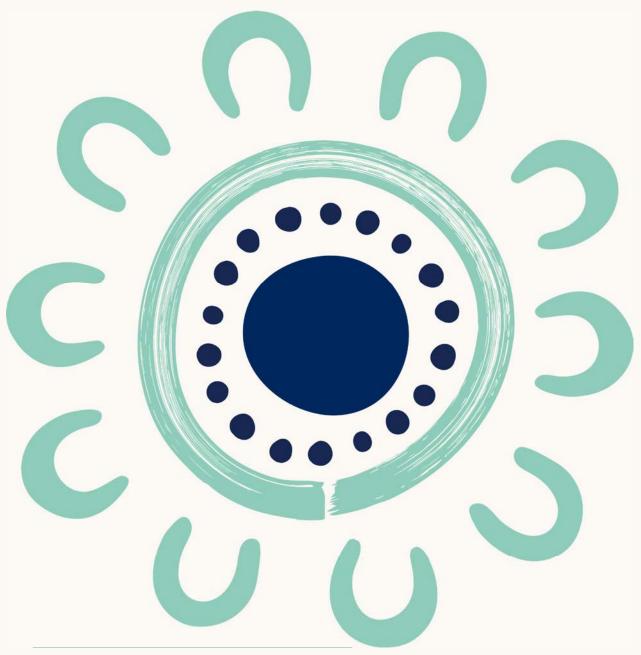
Now is the time to act. Equip your teams, align your leadership, and prioritise cultural safety in every aspect of your workplace. Together, we can build workplaces that model equity and respect, not just within the organisation but across the broader community.

# Take the first step today – your actions can make a profound difference.



# **Endnotes**

- 1. Eckermann A, Dowd T, Martin M, et al. Binang Goonj: Bridging cultures in Aboriginal health. University of New England, 1994. For guidance on practical steps to create cultural safety, see Commission for Children and Young People
- 2. Australian Human Rights Commission. (2022). *Time for respect: Fifth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces*.
- 3. University of Sydney. (n,d.). What is cultural competence?
- 4. NITV (n.d.) What does 'cultural safety' mean in the workplace?
- 5. Safe Work, New South Wales. (n.d.) What a culturally safe workplace looks like



# **Tip sheet:**

# Engaging leaders in cultural safety and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

This tip sheet is for anyone promoting cultural safety, anti-discrimination, and the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in their workplace.

Please note that this tip sheet is for general information only and does not constitute legal advice or material tailored specifically for your organisation or circumstances.

## Why is it important?

Engaging leaders is a crucial step in driving organisational change. The commitments and actions of senior executives and board members are critical to changing the attitudes, behaviours, and structures that contribute to violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Engaging leaders ensures that efforts to achieve cultural safety and respect are successful and sustained.

By committing to cultural safety, antidiscrimination, and the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, leaders can foster a workplace environment where all employees feel respected, valued and safe.

Engaging leaders, including boards, CEOs, and other senior executives, helps to:

- set the tone for organisational change: Leaders can leverage their positional power to mandate change and actively model cultural safety and respect specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- reinforce commitment: Allocating resources and driving strategic initiatives should highlight the organisation's dedication to creating a culturally safe and inclusive workplace. For example:

- » Funding annual workshops led by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural advisors or Elders to educate staff on cultural protocols and histories.
- » Funding and supporting an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee network.
- » Allocating a budget for regular meetings, guest speakers, and professional development opportunities tailored to the network's members.
- » Investing in procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers. For example, partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander catering businesses for workplace events or contracting Indigenous businesses for services like office supplies or facility management.
- empower staff: Encourage employees to speak up or act when they witness racist, sexist, or discriminatory behaviours, knowing they have leadership support and clear policies stating such behaviours will not be tolerated.

Tip 1:

# Use your understanding of the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism and sexism to bring senior executives on board

Familiarise yourself with key facts about how the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and sexism have historically and currently impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the workplace. Understand how these factors contribute to discrimination and violence, including sexual harassment.

- Utilise resources: To gather evidence and insights, refer to frameworks like Changing the picture and reports like Gari Yala.
- Educate leaders first: Consider training senior executives or engaging them in conversations about these issues before extending training to other staff. This ensures a strong shared understanding of the need for change and prepares leaders to address possible questions, critiques, or issues.

### **Tip 2:**

# Identify individual champions in your workplace

Individual champions can play a significant role in challenging the attitudes, behaviours, and structures that perpetuate discrimination and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

- Establish a leadership team: Form a small team responsible for creating cultural safety. Choose individuals who demonstrate leadership and have the authority to influence strategies, policies and procedures.
- Support champions: Recognise that driving change can be challenging. Provide support to champions to prevent them from feeling overwhelmed when facing barriers.

### Tip 3:

# Aligning organisational priorities with cultural safety and inclusion

Creating a culturally safe and anti-discriminatory workplace requires structured alignment with organisational priorities and values centred on the safety and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

While decency and respect should be inherent in leadership, embedding cultural safety into the workplace framework ensures sustained commitment, measurable progress, and accountability. By embedding cultural safety into organisational priorities and everyday operations, workplaces can ensure that efforts to promote inclusion and prevent discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are resourced, sustainable, and impactful. This approach strengthens workplace culture, supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's feelings of safety and being valued and respected, and demonstrates a genuine commitment to equity and justice.

Structured alignment equips leaders with clear, evidence-based reasons to champion initiatives that benefit employees and the organisation. For employees, it reinforces a commitment to safety, respect, and equity for all staff, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. For clients/customers and partners, it demonstrates the workplace's dedication to values of inclusion, respect and cultural responsiveness.

- Highlight organisational values: demonstrate how promoting cultural safety aligns with your workplace's mission, values, and objectives. For example, inclusion may already be a stated value that can guide antidiscrimination efforts.
- Use data to drive change: Conduct organisational audits to identify gaps in cultural safety specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Reports like Gari Yala can provide evidence to focus efforts effectively.

- Quantify the benefits: Illustrate how cultural safety enhances employee satisfaction, retention and productivity. Highlight employee satisfaction rates.
- Address the risks of inaction: Clearly outline potential legal, financial, and reputational risks associated with not addressing systemic discrimination, including non-compliance with antidiscrimination laws like the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) and Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth).
- Set measurable targets: Establish clear, actionable goals, such as increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's representation in leadership by xx% or achieving xx% staff participation in cultural safety training.

Tip 4:

# Educate leadership on cultural safety, anti-racism and violence prevention

Involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and professionals to provide authentic insights and lead training sessions for leaders on:

- Cultural safety: Understanding what it means for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and how to implement it within the workplace.
- Anti-racism: Recognising and combating racist behaviours and systemic discrimination.
- Violence prevention: Identifying and addressing factors that contribute to violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Legal frameworks: Ensure leaders know their responsibilities under laws such as the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) and the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth).
- Ethical considerations: Discuss the moral obligations of promoting equality, respect, and safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the workplace.

Tip 5:

# Support senior leaders to action cultural safety, anti-racism and violence prevention

- Lead by example: Encourage leaders to model behaviours that reflect cultural safety and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Policy enforcement: Ensure leaders are committed to enforcing antidiscrimination and anti-harassment policies.
- Continuous improvement: Promote an ongoing commitment to learning and adapting practices to enhance cultural safety.

#### **Further information and support**

For more information, tools, and resources on how to create culturally safe and inclusive workplaces, visit:

- Our Watch: Changing the picture
- Australian Human Rights Commission:
   <u>Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres</u>
   <u>Strait Islander children and young people: A background paper to inform work on child safe organisations</u>
- Australian Institute for Family Studies:
   How to build a culturally safe workplace
   with Aboriginal and Torres Strait
   Islander staff

# **Cultural safety initiatives responsibility matrix**

This tool provides an overview of roles and responsibilities for ensuring cultural safety. All employees can use it to hold the organisation accountable for its commitments.

#### Why is it important?

The Cultural safety initiatives responsibility matrix uses the well-known Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed (RACI) format. A RACI matrix is important because it can help reduce confusion, improve communication, and streamline processes. It helps teams define and assign roles and responsibilities to ensure that work is carried out in an inclusive and effective manner.

Task/Initiative	Executive leadership	HR/People and culture	Cultural safety advisory group	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander employees	All staff
Develop a cultural safety framework specific to the unique circumstances of your workplace and ensure it is promoted throughout the workplace	Α	R	С	С	ı
Conduct locally place based workplace cultural safety audits in partnership with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community	Α	R	С	С	I
Engage an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service provider/consultant/training expert to develop cultural safety training that reflects the principles of the framework	А	R	С	С	1
Engage an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service provider/consultant/training expert to deliver cultural safety training that reflects the principles of the framework and the unique circumstances of each of the communities of your workplace	А	R	С	С	1
Ensure the principles of cultural safety are reflected in all strategic plans	Α	R	С	С	1
All staff participate in cultural safety training	Α	R	С	С	R
Ensure the principles of cultural safety are reflected in reporting mechanisms for racism and discrimination	Α	R	С	С	1
Remunerate all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff for colonial load	Α	R	С	С	I
Engage local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community Elders and leaders on the cultural appropriateness of your workplace	С	R	С	С	1
Mandatory monitoring and reporting on progress and outcomes through existing mechanisms such as the Annual Report or Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)	Α	R	С	С	1

#### **Explanation of roles:**

- Executive leadership: Responsible for overall accountability, providing resources, and driving organisational commitment.
- HR/People and culture: Leads implementation, oversees operational aspects, and ensures alignment with organisational goals.
- Cultural safety advisory group:
   Provides cultural guidance, ensures policies and actions align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, and supports decision-making.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees: Consulted to provide lived experience insights and co-develop culturally safe initiatives.
- All staff: Participate in cultural awareness training and ensure the workplace remains respectful and inclusive.

The letters in the matrix follow the **RACI** model, which stands for:

#### **R** - Responsible

The person(s) or team(s) who actually complete the task or work on the initiative. They are the 'doers' and take ownership of getting the task done.

#### A - Accountable

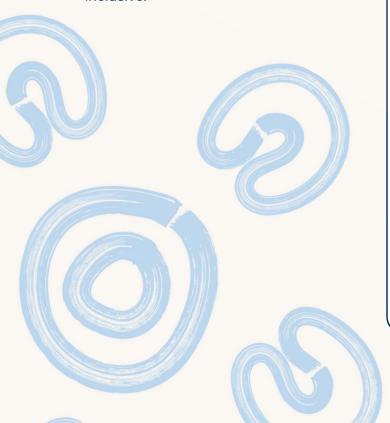
The person(s) or team(s) ultimately answerable for the task's success. This individual approves the work and ensures the task is completed. There must always be one accountable person for every task to avoid confusion.

#### C - Consulted

The person(s) or team(s) whose input is sought before decisions or actions are taken. These stakeholders provide expertise or advice that informs the process.

#### I - Informed

The person(s) or team(s) **kept informed about progress or decisions**. They do not have to be consulted or involved in the work but need to stay updated.



# Workplace cultural safety and respect audit:

# Creating safe and inclusive environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

This audit tool supports anyone who is tasked with reviewing workplace policies and practices related to promoting equality, safety, and respect and creating a culturally safe and respectful environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Usually, these teams are human resources, people and culture, and diversity and inclusion teams. However, employee resource groups/networks/allyship groups might also find this useful if they are participating in organisation-wide reviews.

#### Why is it important?

By undertaking this audit, workplaces can systematically address cultural safety and responsiveness barriers, ensuring a supportive and respectful environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

#### How to use this tool?

- For each competency listed in the first column, assess whether your organisation works below, towards or within.
- 2. For those competencies where you are working below or towards, set improvement goals by identifying specific actions to progress to the 'working within' level. If you are already 'working towards', set stretch goals that will allow your organisation to move to 'working within.'
- 3. Monitor progress by regularly revisiting the audit to track improvements and update practices.
- 4. Engage stakeholders like the cultural safety council/advisory group (see Creating a cultural safety accountability council/advisory group in this guide) to guide the improvements you need to make.

	Working below:	Working towards:	Working within:
Understanding the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and sexism	No awareness of how the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and sexism impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.	The workplace is starting to acknowledge systemic issues and provide learning opportunities.	The workplace actively integrates knowledge of systemic issues into policies and decision-making processes.
Example	Workplace leadership dismisses systemic issues or does not address discriminatory policies.	Staff are encouraged to attend systemic bias and colonial legacies workshops.	Policies are reviewed to ensure they address systemic biases impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
2. Cultural responsiveness	The workplace does not consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in its practices.	The workplace is beginning to incorporate cultural responsiveness into processes.	Cultural responsiveness is embedded across all workplace practices.
Example	Policies are created without consulting cultural experts or Indigenous stakeholders.	Consultation with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups is included in project planning.	Workplace practices incorporate locally based cultural protocols that prioritise the voices and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
3. Promotion of cultural safety	The workplace does not provide a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.	The workplace is working to promote cultural safety through initiatives and audits.	The workplace actively fosters a culturally safe environment.
Example	There are no mechanisms for employees to raise concerns about cultural safety.	Anti-racism policies and cultural safety workshops are implemented regularly.	The organisation collaborates with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to evaluate and enhance cultural safety for women employees.
4. Challenging racism and discrimination	Senior leaders in the workplace do not prioritise cultural safety or systemic change.	Senior leaders in the workplace start advocating for cultural safety within the organisation.	The workplace consistently and proactively challenges racism.
Example	Racist remarks or behaviours are not reported or addressed by leadership.	Employees are trained to recognise and report racist behaviour, and HR policies are updated.	Leaders immediately address discriminatory actions and ensure compliance with anti-racism policies.

	Working below:	Working towards:	Working within:
5. Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities	The workplace has no engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.	The workplace starts building relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.	The workplace has established long-term partnerships with communities.
Example	Community projects are developed without consulting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.	The organisation sponsors or participates in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events and activities.	There are regular collaborations with matriarchal community leaders to codesign programs and projects.
6. Policy implementation	Policies related to cultural safety are absent or not enforced.	The workplace begins aligning policies with cultural safety goals.	Policies are fully integrated into workplace practices and monitored for compliance.
Example	Anti-discrimination policies exist but are not communicated or upheld.	Workplace policies are reviewed to ensure they are inclusive and culturally appropriate.	Regular staff training and policy reviews ensure ongoing cultural safety and accountability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
7. Leadership and advocacy	Senior leaders in the workplace do not prioritise cultural safety or systemic change.	Senior leaders in the workplace start advocating for cultural safety within the organisation.	Senior leaders in the workplace champion systemic change and cultural safety.
Example	Business outcomes are prioritised over cultural safety initiatives.	Cultural responsiveness and safety goals are introduced into leadership KPIs.	Allocate dedicated resources to support cultural safety initiatives and professional development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

# Cultural safety and respect assessment tool for individuals

This tool provides non-Indigenous employees with a way to reflect on and assess their progress in fostering cultural safety and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the workplace. The assessment results can be used during performance assessments to discuss and implement the support needed to build competency in the key areas listed in the tool.

People and culture teams should mandate that all non-Indigenous employees complete the *Cultural safety and respect assessment tool for individuals*.

#### Why is it important?

Cultural safety is a fundamental human right. It is also a legislative requirement to provide safety in the workplace.

Cultural safety and respect cannot be achieved through one-off training; it is a continuum of learning that recognises that to embed cultural safety, we all must engage in an ongoing journey of learning that moves us towards creating culturally safe environments for all employees, stakeholders, customers and clients. Proactive efforts in positive recognition and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures empower people and enable them to contribute and feel safe to be themselves, making a significant difference in creating a more equitable and just workplace for all.

#### How to use this tool

- Use the examples in each key area to identify your current competencies and to identify what you are working towards. The tool provides concrete examples of behaviours and actions at 3 levels:
  - Working below:
     The employee requires guidance and development in this area.
  - Working towards:
     The employee is actively developing understanding and skills.
  - Working within:
     The employee consistently demonstrates a safe level of competency or above.
- 2. Set improvement goals that identify specific actions to move towards the 'working within' level. Include these actions in performance assessments to engage with your managers to meet your learning needs.
- 3. Monitor progress by regularly revisiting the completed assessment to track improvements and update practices.

	Am I working below?	Am I working towards?	Am I working within?		
Behaviour	I don't understand how the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, and sexism impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.	I acknowledge the existence of systemic issues and seek to learn more.	I understand these systemic issues and integrate this knowledge into my professional practice.		
Example	Dismissing concerns about systemic biases by saying, 'I treat everyone the same; I don't see how history affects us now.'	Enrolling in workshops about historical and current impacts of colonisation and participating in discussions about discrimination.	Considering the impact of policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and advocating for changes to address inequalities.		
Cultural a	wareness and responsiveness				
	Am I working below?	Am I working towards?	Am I working within?		
Behaviour	Behaviour: I am unfamiliar with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.	Behaviour: I am learning about cultural practices and starting to adjust my behaviours.	Behaviour: I am knowledgeable and consistently adapt actions to be culturally responsive.		
Example	Insisting that someone attends a meeting when they have Sorry business to attend to.	A sking meeting participants about culturally appropriate meeting approaches and beginning to incorporate this information into planning.	Proactively including cultural considerations in all aspects of project planning and execution.		
Promotion	n of cultural safety				
	Am I working below?	Am I working towards?	Am I working within?		
Behaviour	I do not know how create an environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women feel safe to express themselves.	I recognise the importance of cultural safety and begin to promote it.	I actively foster a culturally safe environment.		
Example	Ignoring or interrupting when cultural perspectives are shared in meetings.	Working with team members to audit policies and procedures that impact cultural safety, including anti-racism policies.	Seeking regular input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned organisations to support cultural safety initiatives such as ongoing professional learning for all employee		

3-3-3	ng racism and discrimination			
	Am I working below?	Am I working towards?	Am I working within?	
Behaviour	I ignore discriminatory behaviour.	I am beginning to recognise discriminatory actions and seek advice on addressing them.	I actively challenge racism and discrimination.	
Example	Overhearing a colleague making a racist remark but saying nothing.	After witnessing inappropriate behaviour, consult human resources/people and culture or an external agency to discuss how to intervene.	Immediately addressing discriminatory remarks in meetings and following up according to antiracism policy.	
Engagem	ent with Aboriginal and Torres St	rait Islander communities		
	Am I working below?	Am I working towards?	Am I working within?	
Behaviour	I have no engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.	I am beginning to build relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.	I have established respectful partnerships with communities.	
Example	Developing community programs without consulting or involving local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	Attending local Indigenous events to learn and begin forming connections.	Collaborating with community leaders on projects and incorporating their feedback into organisational practices.	
Policy				
	Am I working below?	Am I working towards?	Am I working within?	
Behaviour	I am unaware of or do not apply policies related to cultural safety.	I am familiarising myself with relevant policies and beginning to implement them.	I actively ensure policies are upheld and integrated into daily practices.	
Example	Not enforcing the organisation's anti- discrimination policy within my team.	Reviewing team policies to ensure they align with cultural safety standards.	Ensuring the team is regularly updated about policies and supporting them to implement the policies.	
Leadersh	ip and advocacy			
	Am I working below?	Am I working towards?	Am I working within?	
Behaviour	I do not promote cultural safety or address systemic issues.	I am beginning to advocate for change within my role.	I proactively promote cultural safety and address systemic barriers.	
Example	Focusing solely on business outcomes without considering the cultural implications.	thout Proposing the inclusion of cultural competency goals in performance reviews.  Championing cultural safety and plearning and advocating for the all resources to support such initiative.		

# Checklist for a cultural remuneration package

This checklist can be used by human resources, people and culture and diversity and inclusion teams to address the colonial load accrued by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

#### Why is it important?

A cultural remuneration package is one way to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, especially women, in managing the colonial load (also called cultural load). Unrecognised colonial load can lead to burnout, inequity, and diminished job satisfaction, particularly for Aboriginal women who frequently experience higher colonial loads.



Colonial load is the invisible additional load borne by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at work.

This load occurs when someone who is the only Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person (or one of few) in a workplace or team is expected to become a representative of the Aboriginal experience. This results in extra Indigenous-related work demands that non-Indigenous colleagues do not have. These demands can include expectations to educate non-Indigenous colleagues about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and racism and to talk on behalf of all Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander people.

Diversity Council Australia, <u>Gari Yala (Speak the truth)</u>: Centreing the experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians at work.









Not recognising colonial load creates an unsafe workplace and negatively impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees who experience high levels of colonial load are: Additional remuneration helps make workplaces safer and evens the playing field.

It will have broader benefits for all employees of an organisation.

- Nearly 40% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees experience high levels of additional workplace load.
- Of this group, 27% seek to change workplaces.
- (Gari Yala report)

- Twice as likely to be dissatisfied with their iobs.
- Half as likely to recommend the organisation to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Likely to leave and take up employment elsewhere.
- (Gari Yala report)

- It is an incentive to attract, recruit and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to an organisation.
- It helps support

   a culturally safe
   workplace where

   Aboriginal and
   Torres Strait Islander

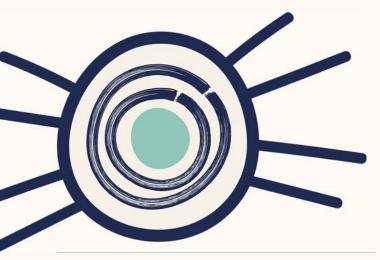
   employees thrive.
- It positively impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees' overall job satisfaction, mental well-being, stress levels, and productivity.
- Receiving additional remuneration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees who share knowledge and build the cultural competency of non-Indigenous Australians will strengthen reconciliation outcomes.

Organisations have differing levels of resources to dedicate and experience with advancing reconciliation. However, this does not mean that organisations cannot begin to consider how to fairly compensate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees for the load they carry or the cultural contribution they make to an organisation over and above their job descriptions.

Self-determination is a key principle and indicator of success. Designing and implementing a successful cultural remuneration package must involve meaningful consultation and co-design. It should be driven by needs, priorities and solutions identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and stakeholders.

#### **Examples of colonial load**

- Requests to conduct a Welcome to Country.
- Answering questions from colleagues on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and/or the impacts of colonisation.
- Representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander views in steering committees.
- Contributing to reconciliation strategies and outcomes.
- Being held accountable within the community for decisions made by your organisation.



#### **Tips for employers**

#### 1. Acknowledge cultural load

- Include cultural responsibilities in job descriptions.
- b. Compensate employees for these additional roles with time or financial allowances.

#### 2. Distribute responsibilities

 Rotate cultural responsibilities among all staff, including non-Indigenous employees.

#### 3. Support through resources

 a. Provide resources like external facilitators for cultural events to reduce internal demands.

#### 4. Celebrate contributions

a. Publicly recognise the efforts of employees undertaking cultural roles.

#### Tips for employees

- Advocate for shared cultural responsibilities.
- Document the time and effort spent on cultural tasks to discuss with managers.

# **Checklist for a cultural remuneration package**

Package development is based on the principle of self-determination, meaning it:

> Involves meaningful consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and stakeholders

> Is co-designed and driven by needs, priorities and solutions identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and stakeholders

Recognises the contribution our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are making, but it is respectful that 'colonial load' is not a term that resonates with some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Their culture is not a load; the additional work is.

#### The package includes:

Paid time off to participate in cultural practices and meet cultural expectations (also called cultural leave loading).

At least 10 days of unpaid leave to participate in cultural practices and ceremonies and meet cultural expectations.

An annual colonial load allowance.

Additional superannuation contributions.

Additional annual learning and professional development budgets.

Trauma-informed support services.

# Our Watch Case Study

What steps did Our Watch take?

#### Exploration

We looked for other organisations that had implemented additional remuneration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees for their additional cultural contributions.

#### Test and learn

We formed a steering committee of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board and staff members to learn their perspectives and test different options.

# 4

#### **Presentation**

After multiple iterations and consultation, we presented our package to broader staff.

#### Consultation

We spoke with academics, The Diversity Council of Australia, large businesses and a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and leaders to understand current thinking and best practice.

Many other examples were based on 'time and expenses' however we couldn't find one that recognised the ongoing and 'always on' contribution.

#### **Implementation**

Ongoing work is neded to integrate the Cultural Knowledge Recognition package into workplace processes so all relevant people undserstand how to access, use and support the package.

2

#### The Our Watch cultural knowledge recognition program

Remuneration initiative	emuneration initiative		Description				
Cultural knowledge contribution allowance		A \$5,000 (plus superannuation) per annum cultural knowledge allowance					
Additional superannuation				ation paid at 2º ation guarante	_		
2 additional days paid leave			•	tional days of purposes	paid lea	ave per annum for	
Additional development fund				ditional \$5,000 Il development	•	nnum to fund	
Extended compassionate leave		Extended version of compassionate leave to encompass extended kinship structures; immediate family may include aunties, uncles, nephews, cousin, or other community members					
Clinical and cultural supervision		Access to chosen clinic/cultural supervision through an Aboriginal/Torres strait Islander specialised service					
10 days of cultural and ceremonial leave		3 days paid and 7 unpaid days of cultural and ceremonial leave annually					
*These are in addition to other workplace policies for staff	Financial			Both		Non-financial	

#### **Lessons learned from implementation**

While not all organisations have a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), dedicated roles, or reconciliation strategies, it is important that Australian organisations show their commitment by implementing culturally appropriate initiatives, policies, and procedures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. Recognition of cultural contribution through additional remuneration is just one way this can be done.

It is difficult to assign a financial value to determine what cultural contribution is 'worth.' With this in mind, consider the following:

 An organisation-wide Reconciliation Action Plan can support developing initiatives.

- Co-design initiatives with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and stakeholders. Co-design is vital, and organisations can engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders in their network if not possible within the organisation.
- Focus more on recognition than reward-choose a mix of financial and non-financial initiatives that work for both the organisation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees
- Evaluate existing remuneration frameworks and the financial sustainability of providing remuneration

# **Tip sheet:**

# Developing policies to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's employment, retention and career development

This tip sheet will support human resources, people and culture, and diversity and inclusion teams in creating workplace policies on recruitment, retention and career development.

#### Why is it important?

Creating a robust policy to retain and develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women ensures that your workplace fosters inclusivity, cultural safety, and long-term opportunities. Developing a policy to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's employment is not just a compliance exercise. It is a vital step toward reconciliation, equity, and creating a culturally safe and inclusive workplace that empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and all staff to thrive.

## **Tip 1.** Foster cultural safety and inclusion

#### Acknowledge cultural identity:

- » Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women feel safe to express their cultural identity.
- » Introduce protocols such as Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country for key meetings and events.

# Provide cultural responsiveness training:

» Offer regular training tailored to understanding the unique challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, including intersectional racism and sexism.

#### Aim to create culturally safe workplaces:

» Develop safe spaces where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women feel supported in cultural practices, such as Sorry Business leave policies.

# **Tip 2.** Design culturally responsive recruitment processes

- Targeted recruitment: Implement programs like traineeships, cadetships, and graduate pathways aimed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Accessible application processes:
   Ensure culturally sensitive interview practices that recognise intersectional barriers women candidates face.
- Culturally safe onboarding: Provide a structured and supportive onboarding process that introduces women to workplace networks and culturally safe mentors.

#### **Tip 3.** Focus on retention strategies

- Mentoring and support networks:
   Establish formal mentoring programs with senior leaders and peer networks that address the professional growth and personal challenges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women face.
- Flexible work arrangements: Offer flexibility to accommodate women's cultural and family obligations, including caregiving and community events.
- Culturally responsive Employee
   Assistance Program (EAP): Provide
   EAPs tailored to the unique needs of
   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
   women, including support for navigating
   workplace sexism and racism.

# **Tip 4.** Develop career development opportunities

- Leadership pathways: Create targeted programs to identify and develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women for leadership roles.
- Skill development: Offer professional development tailored to the career aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, including culturally specific leadership workshops.
- Representation in leadership: Commit to increasing the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in senior positions, and include this as a measurable goal in your action plan.

# **Tip 5.** Establish governance and accountability

- Set measurable targets: in your action plan, include employment, retention, and leadership targets specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Leadership accountability: Ensure senior leaders actively support policy implementation and prioritise addressing intersectional barriers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women face.
- Review and update policies: Regularly evaluate the policy to address gaps, particularly those impacting women, adapt to workforce needs, and align with best practices.

# **Tip 6.** Build engagement and partnerships

- Community collaboration: Partner with local women-led Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and community groups to strengthen recruitment pipelines and build trust.
- Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs):
   Align policies with RAP commitments that address the specific needs of women.
- Procurement with Indigenous businesses: Partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-owned businesses through Supply Nation.

## Tip 7. Recognise and celebrate cultures

- Celebrate cultural events: Actively participate in NAIDOC Week, National Reconciliation Week, and other events, highlighting themes and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Recognise employee contributions:
   Highlight and celebrate the achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the workplace through newsletters, events, and promotions.

# Tip 8. Provide tools to monitor and improve

- Collect feedback: Regularly seek feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to identify areas for improvement.
- Measure outcomes: Track metrics such as retention rates, representation in leadership, and participation in development programs specific to women.
- Public reporting: Share progress in an annual diversity and inclusion report to demonstrate transparency and highlight the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

#### Additional resources

- Reconciliation Australia RAP
   Framework: Develop or strengthen your organisation's RAP.
- Supply Nation Directory: Find and engage Indigenous-owned businesses focusing on women-led enterprises.
- AIATSIS CORE Learning: Enhance understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories.

# **Tip sheet:**

# Culturally safe recruitment focussing on job advertisements and the selection process

This tip sheet is for human resources and people and culture teams who are tasked with facilitating recruitment.

#### Why is it important?

Many workplaces will comment that they don't have many (or any!) Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees because they simply don't apply. Accessing and attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander talent requires putting out offerings which are attractive to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Practising culturally safe recruitment demonstrates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jobseekers and the community that your organisation is reflective of an inclusive environment for all cultures and, therefore, welcoming and supportive.

Proactive Indigenous recruitment practices acknowledge cultural safety and allow all candidates to best demonstrate their capabilities, which will also help you to identify the best person for the role and build a more diverse workforce.



#### Tips

These tips will help set you up for success in attracting and gaining the best talent available.

#### Job advertisements

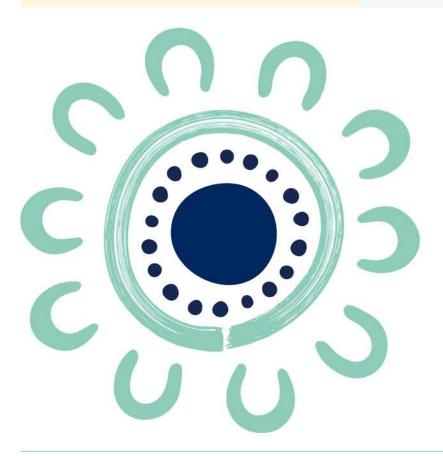
- Emphasise the responsibilities and required skills of the role instead of solely focusing on formal qualifications (which may not always be necessary).
- Consider if job qualifications listed as mandatory can be substituted with relevant life or work experience and practical knowledge.
- Provide information on your cultural remuneration pack.
- Reference your Reconciliation Action Plan or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement strategy if relevant.
- Clearly indicate if this is a targeted role.
- Include a statement encouraging Aboriginal people to apply, such as 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are encouraged to apply for this role.'
- Make sure advertisements are placed outside the mainstream channels. Explore local and Indigenous media channels, including Aboriginal radio and newspapers, or online platforms dedicated to Indigenous recruitment.
- Offer an information session (in-person or online). During this session, all interested candidates can be briefed on the role(s), requirements, and recruitment and selection process.

#### **Selection process**

- Include an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employee on interview panels. If there are no Aboriginal employees, consider remunerating an Aboriginal-led organisation to sit on the interview panel.
- Ensure all members on the interview panel have received cultural responsiveness and anti-racism training.
- Offer candidates flexible appointment options.
- Provide candidates with questions ahead of the interview.
- Reduce stress and anxiety by 'walking' candidates through the interview process.
- Ask all candidates, especially Indigenous candidates, 'situational' interview questions (providing candidates with scenarios they are likely to encounter in the workplace to understand how they would respond if encountering that scenario).
- Where possible, hold interviews in a less formal setting outside the office environment.
- Be mindful of differences in communication styles. Give candidates time to think through questions and their answers. Silence is not necessarily a sign that they do not understand.
- Include specific questions for non-Indigenous employees that help assess their awareness of their positionality and their willingness to engage in self-reflection and learning, which are essential for maintaining a culturally safe and respectful workplace.

 Table 1: Specific questions for non-Indigenous employees

Question	Purpose/Intended insight
How do you understand your identity and positionality within Australia's colonial history, and how does that influence your approach to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?	This question helps assess whether the applicant has reflected on their place in relation to the ongoing impacts of colonisation and if they have thought critically about their role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
Can you provide an example of a time when you actively challenged racism or cultural bias in your workplace or community? What did you learn from that experience?	This helps evaluate their practical understanding of anti-racism, whether they have taken steps to address discrimination in real-world scenarios and their capacity for learning and growth.
What steps will you take to ensure you are culturally responsive and respectful when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues or stakeholders?	This question explores their commitment to self- education and their readiness to be accountable for creating a respectful, culturally safe environment.
How can listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices be translated into action that supports cultural safety and equity? Can you describe an instance where you did this successfully?	This assesses their ability to navigate the line between listening and acting, ensuring they're not centring themselves but actively contributing to solutions.



# **Tip sheet:**

# Understanding and addressing racism, microaggressions and promoting anti-racism in Australian workplaces

This tip sheet is designed to help all employees foster respectful and safe workplaces by improving their understanding of racism, anti-racism microaggressions, and being active bystanders. Understanding these concepts is essential for creating a supportive environment for all employees, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The tip sheet also provides some actions that can help address racism and microaggressions in the workplace.

#### Why is it important?

Racism and discrimination can cause harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australian workplaces. Understanding and addressing racism involves promoting antiracism, recognising microaggressions and encouraging proactive responses.



#### 1. What is racism in the workplace?

Racism encompasses beliefs, actions, and policies that discriminate against individuals based on their race or ethnicity. It can be overt, such as using racial slurs, or covert, embedded within institutional policies and systemic structures. Racism operates interpersonally, institutionally, and systemically, perpetuating inequality and exclusion across various levels of society.

#### **Examples**

Interpersonal racism: An Aboriginal woman's way of speaking English is mocked or questioned during casual conversations, reinforcing harmful stereotypes about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Institutional racism: Professional development opportunities are designed without consideration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's caregiving responsibilities or cultural obligations, limiting their access to leadership pathways.

Systemic racism: Organisational data collection excludes gender and cultural intersectionality, rendering the unique experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women invisible in diversity and inclusion strategies.

# Some actions to address racism in the workplace

- Implement and enforce clear anti-racism policies that explicitly prohibit racial bias and harassment, with a focus on addressing the unique barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the workplace.
- Conduct regular training sessions that educate employees and leadership about the specific impacts of racism on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, including examples of interpersonal, institutional and systemic racism.
- Review and revise recruitment and promotion practices to ensure they are fair and inclusive and support the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (See <u>Tip sheet:</u> <u>Culturally safe recruitment focusing</u> <u>on job advertisements and the selection</u> process).
- Incorporate gender and cultural intersectionality into organisational data collection to ensure the unique experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are visible and addressed in diversity and inclusion strategies.



#### 2. What is anti-racism?

Anti-racism refers to policies, practices, and behaviours that actively oppose racism and promote racial equity. It involves recognising racism's existence and taking steps to eliminate it.

#### **Examples**

- Mentoring programs specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to support their career growth and leadership aspirations.
- Regular anti-racism training to educate staff and leadership about recognising and combating racism.

#### How to promote anti-racism

- Develop comprehensive antiracism policies and ensure they are communicated effectively.
- Encourage intersectional analysis of workplace practices, ensuring they account for the unique barriers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women face.
- Provide ongoing education and training on anti-racism and cultural competency.
- Encourage leadership to model antiracist behaviours and hold themselves accountable.

#### 3. What are microaggressions?

Microaggressions are subtle, discriminatory comments or actions that accumulate and negatively impact individuals from marginalised groups. They can be verbal, non-verbal, or environmental (artworks, environmental print such as Australia Day celebration paraphernalia).

#### **Examples**

#### **Racist microaggressions**

**Verbal:** Questioning an Aboriginal woman's qualifications or implying her success is due to affirmative action rather than merit.

**Non-verbal:** Failing to consult Aboriginal women in decisions directly affecting cultural matters or organisational diversity initiatives.

Avoiding or physically distancing from Aboriginal women in meetings or social settings, reinforcing a sense of exclusion.

#### **Sexist microaggressions**

**Verbal:** Assuming a female colleague is less competent, saying, 'You're too emotional for this role.'

**Non-verbal:** Assigning administrative tasks predominantly to female employees, reinforcing gender stereotypes.

#### Intersectional microaggressions

**Verbal:** Referring to an Aboriginal woman as 'aggressive' or 'intimidating' for voicing opinions in the workplace.

**Non-verbal:** Scheduling events or meetings without accommodating cultural or caregiving obligations often carried by Aboriginal women.

#### How to address microaggressions

- Provide training to help employees recognise and understand microaggressions.
- Encourage a culture of open dialogue where employees feel safe to discuss and address microaggressions.
- Implement clear reporting mechanisms and support systems for those affected.

#### 4. Who is an active bystander?

An active bystander is someone who actively intervenes or supports the affected individual when witnessing racism, sexism, microaggressions or discrimination. Active bystanders play a crucial role in fostering a supportive and inclusive workplace.

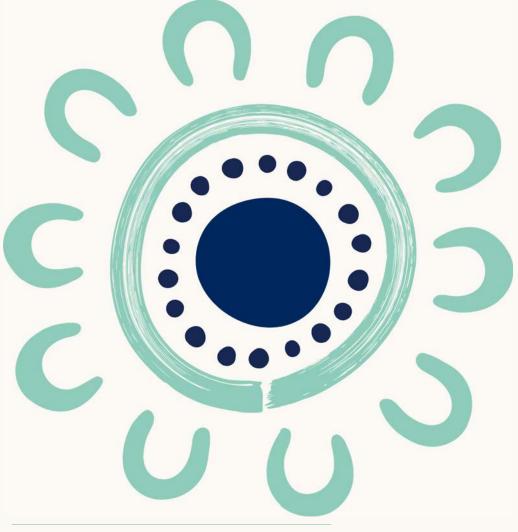
#### **Examples**

- Proactively raising issues about systemic barriers in workplace policies that disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, even if the affected individual hasn't explicitly flagged the issue.
- Offering support to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander employee who has experienced discrimination, such as accompanying them to report the incident.

 Encouraging employees to amplify the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in meetings or discussions where their perspectives are overlooked.

# How to promote active bystander behaviour

- Offer training on how to safely and effectively intervene in discriminatory situations.
- Create a supportive environment where employees feel empowered to act as active bystanders.
- Recognise and emphasise the importance of active bystander behaviour as a key aspect of fostering an inclusive and respectful workplace.



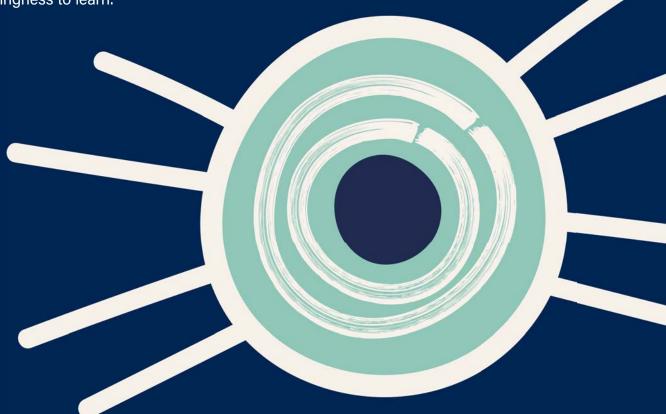
# **Tip sheet:**

# Building relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

This tip sheet provides step-by-step instructions for all employees to develop meaningful, respectful, and impactful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, employees, customers, and organisations.

#### Why is it important?

To avoid tokenism, which causes more harm, building respectful and meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, employees, and customers requires sustained commitment, cultural understanding, genuine engagement and a willingness to learn.



Tip 1.

# Approach relationship building with respect and cultural sensitivity

Building respectful relationships begins with recognising and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

#### 1. Research and understand local cultures:

- Identify the Traditional Owners of the land where your workplace operates.
- Read about local histories, languages, and cultural practices.
- Access resources such as the <u>Australian</u> <u>Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait</u> <u>Islander Studies</u> or local Aboriginal Land Councils.

#### 2. Acknowledge Traditional Owners:

- Include genuine and meaningful Acknowledgement of Country in meetings, events, and written communications.
- Organise a Welcome to Country from a Traditional Owner for significant workplace events.

#### 3. Consult Elders and cultural advisors:

- Reach out to Elders or cultural leaders for guidance on culturally appropriate practices.
- Establish a process for seeking advice, such as a formal consultation agreement or cultural liaison point within your workplace.

#### Tip 2.

## Engage with community members

Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is essential for understanding their needs and perspectives.

#### 4. Practice active listening:

- Set up meetings to hear directly from community members.
- Be present, avoid interrupting, and validate perspectives by asking follow-up questions.
- 1. Include communities in decision making:
  - a. Create advisory panels or committees with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives.
  - Ensure voices are central in decisions that affect their communities.

#### 2. Support community initiatives:

- a. Sponsor or participate in events such as NAIDOC Week, Sorry Day, or community festivals.
- b. Provide resources or volunteers for community-led projects.

Tip 3.

#### **Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees**

Creating a culturally safe and inclusive workplace is crucial for empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

#### 1. Foster cultural safety:

- Conduct a cultural safety audit to identify areas for improvement.
- Ensure policies explicitly address cultural safety and include clear reporting mechanisms for racism.

#### 2. Promote professional development:

- Offer mentorship programs led by senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals.
- Provide funding for employees to attend leadership programs or cultural competency training.

#### 3. Establish employee resource groups/ employee networks/employee allyship groups:

- Set up resource groups where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff can share experiences and ideas.
- Ensure groups have dedicated funding and access to leadership teams.

Tip 4.

## **Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers**

Providing culturally responsive services is key to building trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers.

#### 1. Train frontline staff:

 Offer cultural responsiveness training for customer-facing employees to ensure respectful interactions.

#### 2. Create feedback channels:

- Establish anonymous and accessible feedback systems for customers.
- Actively seek feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers and implement changes based on their input.

#### 3. Tailor services to community needs:

- Consult communities during product or service design.
- Ensure offerings reflect the cultural and practical needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers.

Tip 5.

Collaborate with organisations supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

#### 1. Identify partner organisations:

- Research local or national organisations focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Examples include Indigenous Business Australia and Our Watch.

#### 2. Collaborate on projects:

 Develop joint initiatives like mentoring programs or health and wellness workshops.

#### 3. Provide resources:

 Offer funding, expertise, or in-kind contributions to partner organisations.

# **Tip 6.** Commit to long-term relationships

Strong relationships require authenticity and sustained effort.

#### 1. Commit to long-term engagement:

- Develop multi-year partnership agreements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
- Review and renew these agreements regularly to reflect evolving needs.

#### 2. Ensure mutual benefit:

 Establish shared goals for partnerships that benefit your workplace and the community.

#### 3. Communicate regularly:

 Schedule regular check-ins with community partners and stakeholders to maintain trust and transparency.

# Tip 7. Support cultural events and recognition

Actively participating in cultural events demonstrates respect and commitment.

#### 1. Participate in community events:

- Encourage staff to attend NAIDOC Week, Reconciliation Week, or other local celebrations.
- Offer paid leave or volunteer hours for staff participating in these events.

#### 2. Celebrate cultures internally:

 Host workplace events to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, such as art exhibits or storytelling sessions.

#### 3. Educate staff:

 Use newsletters, webinars, or team meetings to share the significance of cultural events.

#### **Tip 8.** Implement ethical practices

Ethical practices are the foundation of respectful and meaningful engagement.

#### 1. Zero tolerance for racism:

 Develop and enforce anti-racism policies that include clear consequences for breaches.

#### 2. Ensure fair employment practices:

 Prioritise equitable hiring and promotion opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates.

## 3. Procure from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned businesses:

 Use Supply Nation to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses in your supply chain.

## 4. Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP):

 Work with Reconciliation Australia to create or update a RAP that outlines your commitments.

#### **Tip 9.** Provide training and education

Knowledge and understanding are essential for meaningful relationships.

#### 1. Mandatory training:

 Provide cultural safety and responsiveness training to all employees.

#### 2. Continuous learning:

Include Aboriginal and Torres
 Strait Islander history, cultures, and contemporary issues in regular professional development.

#### 3. Share knowledge across teams:

 Encourage staff to share what they have learned from community engagements or training sessions.

#### **Tip 10.** Reflect and improve

Continual reflection ensures progress and accountability.

#### 1. Evaluate efforts:

 Use surveys or audits to assess the impact of your engagement strategies.

#### 2. Seek feedback:

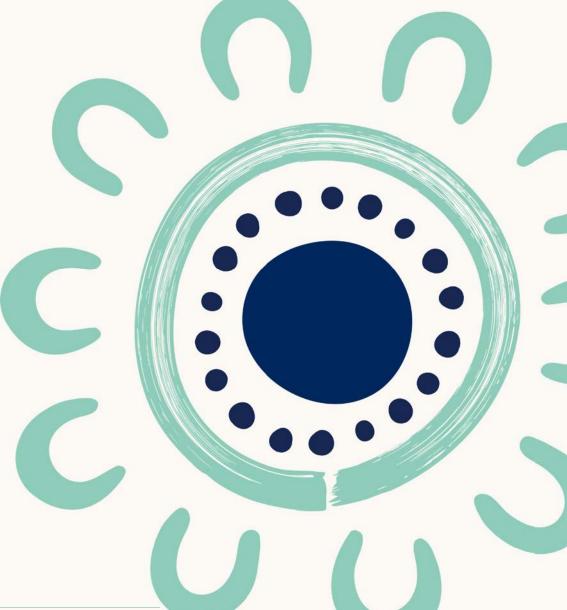
 Consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and staff to identify areas for improvement.

#### 3. Adapt strategies:

 Update practices based on feedback and changing needs.

#### **Additional Resources**

- Reconciliation Australia RAP
   <u>Framework:</u> Develop or strengthen your organisation's RAP.
- Indigenous Business Direct
- Reconciliation Australia:
   Reconciliation Action Plans
- Narragunnawali: <u>Building</u>
   Relationships with Community



# Tip sheet and checklist:

# Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers

This tip sheet is for employees who are tasked with procurement and those who wish to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned service providers.

#### Why is it important?

Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers can create meaningful partnerships and support the economic and social empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Authenticity, respect, and mutual benefit are essential when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers. Supply Nation, Australia's leading directory of verified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led service providers, provides guidance on doing this effectively.

#### Below are practical tips for Australian workplaces to develop respectful and effective relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led service providers.

#### Tip.1

# Understand the importance of engagement

- Support self-determination: Partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-owned service providers helps strengthen communities through economic opportunities.
- Cultural responsiveness: Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-owned service providers fosters better understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

#### Tip 2.

#### **Build genuine relationships**

- Long-term commitment: Build partnerships focusing on trust, respect, and mutual benefit, not one-off transactions.
- Regular communication: Maintain open and ongoing dialogue with service providers to ensure the relationship grows over time.
- Transparency: Clearly communicate your organisation's needs and expectations to ensure alignment.

#### Tip 3.

# Research and identify service providers

- Use <u>Indigenous Business Direct</u>: Connect with verified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned service providers through Supply Nation, prioritising women-owned service providers.
- Engage locally: Seek out service providers from the Traditional Owner groups of the land where your workplace operates.

#### Tip 4.

# Foster culturally safe engagement

- Cultural protocols: Be aware of and respect cultural practices and protocols, such as acknowledging Traditional Owners and respecting locations or areas of cultural significance.
- Cultural safety training: Ensure staff involved in procurement and engagement have completed cultural safety training.
- Consultation: Ask service providers, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-owned service providers, for input on culturally appropriate ways to interact and work together.

#### Tip.5

#### Prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned service providers in procurement

- Set targets: Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-owned service providers in your procurement strategy.
- Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP): Align procurement commitments with your organisation's RAP objectives.
- Preference local providers: Where possible, choose local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-owned service providers to support community development.

# Tip 6. Build capacity and share resources

- Collaborative growth: Work with service providers to develop long-term projects that allow for growth and sustainability.
- Mentorship opportunities: Offer to share knowledge, skills, or resources to support business development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and vice versa.

# **Tip 7.** Promote and advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers

- Amplify visibility: In internal and external communications, showcase your partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-owned service providers.
- Encourage referrals: Recommend service providers to other organisations and networks.
- Celebrate achievements: Acknowledge and celebrate the successes of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-owned service providers you work with.

# **Tip 8.** Evaluate and improve engagement practices

- Feedback mechanisms: Regularly seek feedback from service providers about your engagement practices and adjust accordingly.
- Measure outcomes: Track the impact of your partnerships, including economic and social benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and communities.
- Continuous learning: Stay informed about best practices for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanderowned service providers, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous women-owned service providers.



Do

# 1. Verify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership

Use Supply Nation's **Indigenous Business Direct** to confirm the service provider is at least 50% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander-owned.
Prioritise women-owned service providers when possible.

#### 2. Engage respectfully

Approach all interactions with cultural sensitivity, acknowledging and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocol, especially those relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

#### 3. Build genuine relationships

Invest in authentic, long-term partnerships instead of one-off transactions.

Take the time to understand the values and goals of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-led service provider you are working with.

#### 4. Support capacity building

Provide opportunities that contribute to the growth and sustainability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-led service providers, such as mentoring, collaborative projects, or co-design initiatives.

#### 5. Ensure fair contracting

Offer transparent, fair contract terms and ensure mutual understanding of all agreements.

Ensure contracting supports equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-owned service providers

#### 6. Promote supplier diversity

Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers in your procurement policies and supply chain, supporting economic diversity and inclusion.

Set specific targets for engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-owned service providers

#### Don't

#### 1. Be tokenistic

 Don't engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers solely to meet diversity quotas or for superficial reasons. Authenticity is key.

#### 2. Assume homogeneity

- Don't treat all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers as the same.
   Recognise and respect the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and practices.
- Understand the unique challenges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women-led service providers face.

#### 3. Engage in exploitative practices

 Don't impose unfair terms or undervalue the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers, especially those led by women.

#### 4. Neglect due diligence

 Don't skip verification processes.
 Always ensure the business is genuinely Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanderowned and operated.

#### 5. Ignore cultural safety

- Don't disregard cultural protocols or fail to acknowledge the importance of cultural practices in any interactions with service providers.
- Pay attention to protocols specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's leadership.

#### Remember:

Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander service providers is more
than a business decision — it is an
opportunity to support self-determination
and matriarchal leadership, promote
cultural understanding, and contribute
to reconciliation in Australia.

#### **Additional Resources**

- Supply Nation: Directory of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers.
- Reconciliation Australia: Guidance on RAPs and workplace reconciliation initiatives.
- Indigenous Business Australia: Support and resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies:
   Core is an innovative online course to strengthen your organisation's cultural capability.

# **Tip sheet:**

# Building organisational authenticity

This tip sheet will support organisations and businesses to promote organisational authenticity.

#### Why is it important?

Organisational authenticity means a genuine,

ongoing commitment to inclusivity and equity reflected in policies, leadership, and workplace culture. Authenticity builds trust, fosters cultural safety, and attracts and retains Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander talent.

#### For employers

#### **Tip 1.** Commit at the leadership level

- a. Ensure leaders champion inclusivity and are trained in cultural safety.
- b. Establish a diverse advisory group to guide policies and initiatives.

#### **Tip 2.** Develop inclusive policies

- a. Audit and revise workplace policies to eliminate systemic barriers.
- b. Incorporate intersectionality into diversity and equity strategies.

#### **Tip 3.** Measure and report progress

- Set benchmarks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation and inclusivity.
- b. Regularly report progress to staff and stakeholders.

#### **Tip 4.** Engage authentically

- Partner with Aboriginal and Torres
   Strait Islander-owned organisations
   to co-design initiatives.
- Avoid tokenism by embedding meaningful actions into everyday practices.

#### **Tips for employees**

- Provide constructive feedback to leadership on inclusivity initiatives.
- Seek opportunities to engage with advisory groups or committees.



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