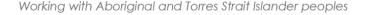# Children & Schooling Education Engagement & Attainment Initiatives

Operational Framework 2024

Early Years & Education Branch, Social Policy Group

(December 2023)

Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The EEAI Operational Framework at a glance

The EEAI aims to improve education outcomes for young First Nations people by:

- Improving relationships between First Nations parents and carers, families, young people and communities with schools
- Overcoming or addressing barriers to participating in education
- Helping communities value schooling and education
- Using solutions and approaches proposed and designed by communities
- Working collaboratively with other stakeholders including schools

Providers must design activities according to seven principles (section 2.2):

1. Community-led
2. Community-involved
3. School engagement
4. Strengths-based
5. Coordination, not duplication
6. Flexibility
7. Link to education outcomes

Providers should work with communities to ensure local EEAI activities are recognisable and encourage participation by:

- Developing a local name (consider a name in language)
- Developing local branding – colour schemes, logos etc.

Providers should consider how local activities can incorporate best practice elements (section 3.2):

- Local employment
- Governance committees
- Community mapping
- Semester Activity Plans (mandatory)
- Developing local staff
- Daily engagement services

The EEAI goals:

- EEAI activities aim to improve education engagement and attainment outcomes, not just attendance rates
- Providers should consider how to support participation in education, and education outcomes, not merely getting young people to school
- Activities that focus explicitly or solely on attendance without regard for engagement outcomes should not continue

The EEAI Operational Framework also includes a Service Menu (Appendix A):

- This is a list of possible approaches for Providers to discuss with communities
- Providers do not have to use or refer to the Service Menu
- Providers should discuss with communities to ensure Service Menu items fit local contexts and meet local needs

The EEAI Operational Framework also provides the policy context including:

- Policy rationale for an engagement-focused approach
- A working definition of engagement
- A working definition of attainment (see sections 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5)

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1.1	26/03/2024	SAPP Team	Second external release, amended with changes to improve accessibility.

Contents

1 Preface

1.1 What is the Children & Schooling Education Engagement & Attainment Initiatives Operational Framework?

The Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Children & Schooling (C&S) Education Engagement & Attainment Initiatives (EEAI) Operational Framework establishes the minimum requirements to establish, implement and manage activities funded through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy C&S EEAI sub-program. This sub-program replaces the Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS). This Operational Framework provides a resource to support Providers to deliver activities to improve engagement between First Nations families, parents and carers, young people and communities with schools and the education system in remote communities.

This Operational Framework includes:

- A brief policy rationale explaining the need to focus on engagement and attainment activities,

- What NIAA means by engagement and attainment activities,

- Requirements for establishing and implementing EEAI activities, including mandatory elements, and

- Guidelines and examples of practice for Providers to take into consideration.

Providers implementing EEAI activities funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (the Agency, or NIAA) should use this Operational Framework to ensure they deliver all requirements of C&S EEAI activities. The Agency will also use this Framework to help manage EEAI contracts and provide guidance to Providers.

This Operational Framework forms part of C&S EEAI Project Agreements along with the Head Agreement for Indigenous Grants and the relevant Project Schedule. This Operational Framework is not a stand-alone document and does not contain all the contractual requirements for Providers. It must be read in conjunction with the Head Agreement for Indigenous Grants and the relevant Project Schedule.

1.2 Glossary of definitions & terms

Term	Definition
IAS	IAS means Indigenous Advancement Strategy
IAS Guidelines	IAS Guidelines mean the Indigenous Advancement Strategy Grant Guidelines published on www.niaa.gov.au

Term	Definition
The Agency, NIAA	The Agency or NIAA refers to the National Indigenous Australians Agency
NO or NIAA NO	NO or NIAA NO means The National Indigenous Australians Agency National Office, located in the Australian Capital Territory.
Regional Office or NIAA Regional Office	Regional Office or NIAA Regional Office refers to relevant staff or areas of NIAA who work in locations across Australia with First Nations groups and grant recipients to ensure the delivery of IAS outcomes.
Service Menu, EEAI Service Menu	Service Menu or EEAI Service Menu refers to a list of 17 suggested activity items to support implementation of the C&S EEAI sub-program.
Service Menu Item	A Service Menu Item is one of the 17 items Providers could choose from the Service Menu.
Project Agreement	A Project Agreement includes the Head Agreement for Indigenous Grants, the relevant Project Schedule and any attachments to the Project Schedule (including this Operational Framework).
Project Schedule	A Project Schedule forms part of a Project Agreement (see above).
NIAA contact	The NIAA contact is the Agency's staff member that manages the relevant Project Schedule.
RSAS	RSAS means the Remote School Attendance Strategy.
Site, EEAI Site	Site or EEAI Site means an individual First Nations community where EEAI activities are implemented.
Provider, EEAI Provider	Provider or EEAI Provider means organisations contracted by NIAA to deliver EEAI activities.
Schools, EEAI schools	Schools or EEAI schools are schools located at EEAI sites that Providers are funded to deliver services in

Term	Definition
	collaboration with to support education engagement and attainment outcomes.
Engagement Team, Engagement Staff	Means all people employed by the Provider to deliver EEAI activities.
EEAI activities	EEAI activities refer to the projects implemented as per the relevant Project Agreement conducted in EEAI sites to improve education engagement and attainment outcomes.
EEAI sub-program	EEAI sub-program refers to the area of funding and associated guidelines under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy Children & Schooling Program that funds Providers to deliver EEAI activities. This replaces the RSAS program, which was funded to 31 December 2023.
Education Engagement & Attainment, EEAI	EEAI or Education Engagement and Attainment refers to a broad range of potential outcomes that improves a young First Nations person's readiness to go to school and learn, the relationships between First Nations people and schools, and the value First Nations communities place in education, with a view towards improving education outcomes sustainably and meaningfully over time.
Children & Schooling Program, C&S	C&S or Children and Schooling Program refers to the Indigenous Advancement Strategy program area 1.2 which provides funding to support and improve a wide range of early childhood and education outcomes for young First Nations Australians, including those funded under the EEAI sub-program.
First Nations	First Nations refers to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, culture, language or community in Australia regardless of location, cultural or linguistic background, personal experience or historical experience. It is used interchangeably with the terms Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Term	Definition
	In the context of the EEAI sub-program, it usually refers to First Nations people or communities located in remote or very remote locations as the majority of relevant sites are located in these areas.

2 Education Engagement & Attainment Initiatives Overview

2.1 What is the Education Engagement & Attainment Initiatives Sub-Program?

The EEAI sub-program is a stream of funding under the IAS C&S Program that invests in ways to support engaging (or re-engaging) young First Nations Australians with schooling and education, with the aim of improving their education outcomes.

2.2 Principles

There are a broad range of ways EEAI funding can be used to improve education engagement and attainment outcomes. However Providers should ensure the following principles are used to guide the design and implementation of EEAI activities regardless of location or approach:

- **Community-led:** designing approaches and making decisions should involve local First Nations people – not just community leaders and representatives of organisations, but parents and carers, families, and young First Nations people themselves. Providers should be able to demonstrate when and how they have included First Nations people in the way they design their activities and how First Nations people are involved in decision making. Providers should always ask community members what will work, what approaches they should attempt, and what barriers need to be addressed.

- **Community-involved:** involving local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of all ages, genders, and positions of cultural seniority in the implementation of the project is important. Implementing EEAI activities should not be a process of "consult, set and forget". For example, one way of ensuring community involvement is employing local people, however this is not the only way. Providers are encouraged to speak to local people – parents and carers, families and young people, not just community leaders and representatives of organisations – regularly about how the activities are implemented, how things can be improved, and how to increase community involvement.

- **School engagement:** activities that encourage engagement with the education system and support education outcomes require genuine input from school staff and leadership. Any activity that involves work on school premises, or with school staff, must be approved by school principals. However, this does *not* mean that Providers should take direction from schools. Providers are accountable to communities for their outcomes, not schools. EEAI activities should not be used as a way to replace (in full or partly) any resource or activity that should be funded or performed by schools as part of their role in delivering education to communities. On the other hand, EEAI Providers should not expect teachers and school staff to deliver what EEAI Providers are funded to deliver.

- **Strengths-based:** EEAI Providers should recognise and utilise the strengths and opportunities of First Nations communities and people to support engagement and impact, and to find solutions and

implement them – while remaining realistic about likely barriers to success and outcomes. Many definitions of strengths and opportunities have a particular Western-centric basis, or are defined on the ability of people to operate within systems rather than systems operating to serve people. An obvious example is language – many young First Nations people face difficulty at school because English is not their first language, yet outside of school many speak more than one First Nations language.

- **Coordination, not duplication:** activities funded by the EEAI sub-program should not use the same approach or use the same methods as other programs funded in communities, regardless of where those other programs are funded from. This applies to services that are the core responsibility of state and territory governments, and other services delivered by governments or non-government organisations. However EEAI activities can be used to support these activities if it means their impact or scope will be increased. For example EEAI activities should not establish a new sporting program if these already exist in a site. However an EEAI Activity could be used to encourage a different cohort of students to participate in the program, or to help make the connection between that program and re-engaging the targeted students with school.

- **Flexibility:** communities vary a great deal in their history, circumstance, strengths and challenges. So do young First Nations people, families, carers and parents. EEAI activities should therefore be designed to suit local circumstance, meet local needs and address local priorities. Providers should be ready to adjust the way they deliver activities or change approaches (including during school terms) to maintain a flexible approach. Providers must implement different approaches to meet the needs of different groups of people, particularly First Nations students and student-age people.

- **Link to education outcomes:** Investment should support young First Nations people participating meaningfully in schooling and education, and achieving at school, in the short, medium or long term. The EEAI sub-program can be used to fund a wide range of activities in communities, with a broad definition of engaging or re-engaging young people. In doing so, Providers must be able to demonstrate a link to schooling and education can be made, and that this remains the primary outcome of the activities. In other words, achieving an engagement output (e.g. improved child-teacher relationships, students enjoying school more, families becoming more familiar with school routines and expectations) is valid if Providers can articulate its link to an education outcome (e.g. the child's attendance rate improves because they like their teacher, students are achieving better results in weekly tests because they enjoy school more, more young people are enrolled because families are more familiar with how school works). Providers should be clear to all stakeholders, including First Nations people, that this is the goal.

2.3 Why engagement and not just attendance?

NIAA's experience with attendance-focused programs, along with other evidence, suggests that a narrow focus on improving the attendance rate at the exclusion of other outcomes will not deliver sustainable improvements. Evidence also suggests that approaches that seek to support families and young people to overcome barriers to education, engage them to develop solutions, and are tailored to individual and community circumstances will deliver better results in the long term.

Improving school attendance remains a desirable outcome, however there is evidence supporting the view that attendance is only part of the solution. While important, the attendance rate does not tell us if students are learning anything meaningful in class, whether they value their experience and learning at school, and whether they are supported by schools, families and communities to learn. In other words, while improved engagement should lead to improved attendance, the reverse is not necessarily true – yet it is engagement, along with attendance, that is essential to ensure young people are receiving the quality education that is their right.

Focusing on engagement means taking a broader approach that works with all stakeholders and communities to make sure everyone is invested in the desired outcomes. Rather than asking communities "how can we improve the attendance rate?" the question becomes "what will help your children do better at school and enjoy school more, and how can we work together to achieve this?"

2.4 Defining engagement

Defining the terms "engagement" and "attainment" is difficult because the concepts are broad. This is deliberate. The EEAI sub-program is intended to fund a flexible range of approaches with a wide range of potential outputs that link to improving the way young First Nations people relate to and value education, and achieve better outcomes at school. A narrow definition cannot capture the extent of the possible approaches and outputs.

Defining engagement is also difficult because we often use the term "engagement" to mean a process or way of working (e.g. "engaging with community to develop solutions") but also an outcome (e.g. "one of the benefits was developing better relationships with families, leading to better engagement"). Both are valid – but it is important for Providers to remember that the ultimate purpose of EEAI activities should be improving education outcomes, not "engaging for engagement's sake".

For the purposes of discussing, designing and implementing activities with communities, NIAA suggests using the following definitions.

Engagement as a **process** means:

- Working in **genuine collaboration** with First Nations communities, and using communities' ideas to overcome barriers and determine approaches,
- Using **strengths-based approaches** as a way to improve the likelihood of success and to broaden the appeal of an activity or approach,
- **Involving First Nations people** in the delivery of approaches or activities,
- **Regular feedback from First Nations people** to determine what's working, what's not, and why,
- **Involving and coordinating with other services** in communities – including, most importantly, the school and its staff and leadership.

Engagement as an **outcome** means:

- **Improved relationships** – especially between young First Nations people, their parents and carers, their families, and communities on one hand, and the school, teachers, staff and leadership on the other hand,
- Young First Nations people **looking forward to going to school** more, and **enjoying time at school** more,

- Young First Nations people feeling **more supported at school**, and **supported by their families and communities** to go to school,

- **Young First Nations people being prepared and ready** for school,

- **Schools being prepared and ready** to educate young First Nations people,

- First Nations families **feeling safe about sending their children** to school, and young First Nations people feeling that **school is a physically and culturally safe place**,

- First Nations **families, parents and carers feeling welcome** at school,

- First Nations young people, families, parents and carers **feeling like they have a say** about how the school works, what young people are taught, and how, and that **their views are valued**.

The above should be taken as a guide, not an exhaustive list of concepts that mean "engagement". First Nations people, Providers and schools may wish to expand on the descriptions above.

2.5 Defining attainment

NIAA has chosen the term "attainment" in the context of EEAI activities to link it to target and outcome 5 under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement):

- **Outcome 5:** *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential.*

- **Target 5:** *By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent.*

Under the National Agreement, "attainment" is clearly linked with completing Year 12. However NIAA understands that for most young people supported through EEAI activities, this is not an immediately relevant milestone. Therefore, for practical reasons, NIAA suggests the following "working definitions" of attainment for Providers to consider and use when discussing, designing and implementing activities with communities.

Attainment means:

- Completing a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, or

- Completing a milestone that will lead to completing Year 12 over time, for example:

  - Completing another school year, particularly recognised transition years – early childhood education/pre-school to transition/prep/kindergarten; transition/prep/kindergarten to year 1; years 6 to year 7; year 10 to year 11.

- For young First Nations students who have been highly disengaged in the past, completing an entire term or semester of schooling.

Providers should be cautious about utilising attainment as a measure of success however, given progress from one year of school to the next does not necessarily mean improved participation or achievement at school, or greatly improved attendance. Providers should work with schools to understand students' progress, whether students will proceed from one year to the next, and whether this equates to meaningful improvement in attendance, participation and achievement at school.

3 Designing and delivering EEAI activities

3.1 Local naming and branding

As a first step, Providers should engage with communities to determine a name for local EEAI activities that reflects the aspirations, priorities, cultures and languages of community residents. There are no rules for this, provided it is achieved through community consultation, is meaningful to communities and it is likely to encourage local recognition and participation in the EEAI activity.

Similarly, a set of local emblems, visual motifs, logos and so on should be developed so that communities have a way of identifying with their local EEAI activity.

3.2 EEAI elements of best practice

EEAI activities are intended to encompass a broad range of potential approaches to improve engagement and participation, with few compulsory aspects to permit innovation and responsiveness to community ideas and needs. Most good activities will nonetheless incorporate the elements of best practice described here. Providers should not treat these elements of best practice as mandatory steps or building blocks (except semester plans – see below), but rather a set of good techniques that, when appropriate for the approaches Providers design with communities, should help deliver the best possible services for a greater likelihood of sustainable outcomes.

Suggested areas of best practice include the following:

- **Local employment** – employing local First Nations people is an excellent way for Providers to demonstrate their commitment to local communities, involve local First Nations people in delivering activities, engage with families and young people, and obtain feedback from communities. Local employment is therefore considered a positive element. Providers should prioritise employing First Nations people, preferably people from the community where the EEAI activity is being delivered. However, Providers should consider the best level and structure of local employment to suit the local activity, and keep in mind employing staff is not essential if the activity does not require local people to deliver it. The EEAI is *not* an employment program. Employment generated by EEAI activities should be because it supports the activity and is considered beneficial by communities.

- **Governance committees** – as described in section 2.2, meaningful community involvement in activity design and delivery is a key principle of the EEAI. However the particular method of involving community in activity design and delivery can vary, and local EEAI activities may benefit from the advice and oversight of a permanent or semi-permanent governance committee of reference group. This is a good way of formally obtaining community views and endorsement – provided the governance committee has a representative membership. However other methods can be used, e.g. regular community forums, focus groups, or planning workshops. Providers are also encouraged to utilise existing governance or decision-making bodies where they exist, and where that body is ready and willing to take on EEAI activities along with pre-existing responsibilities.

- **Community mapping** – EEAI Providers are expected to have a detailed knowledge of communities, including language groups, culture, demographics, seasonal patterns of mobility, persons in position of leadership and/or cultural seniority, and history. How this is recorded and represented is up to the Provider. A community map is one way of recording and demonstrating a Provider's knowledge and familiarity with community attributes, and also demonstrates engagement with community to develop and record this knowledge.

- **Semester Activity Plans** – unlike the other best-practice elements described here, Semester Activity Plans (SAPs) are mandatory and also have a defined structure and set of requirements. EEAI Providers are required to provide plans to NIAA at the start of each semester (i.e. start of terms 1 and 3) to demonstrate the approaches they have developed with communities to improve education engagement and attainment outcomes. NIAA will provide a template that outlines the required planning elements. That said, the most important thing about the Plan is developing them via meaningful collaboration with communities – a template is simply a tool to capture the planning process and outcomes.

- **Development of Local Staff** – providing meaningful support and development opportunities to staff demonstrates a commitment to local people and builds the positive reputation of the Provider and the EEAI program. This goes beyond the Provider's obligations as an employer under relevant State/Territory and Commonwealth legislation. Providers should also ensure all people employed by the EEAI activity obtain their Working with Vulnerable People clearance as applicable in the relevant State or Territory.

- **Daily Engagement Services** – Providers should consider regular and frequent engagement with families, parents and carers, and young First Nations people as this aligns with the principles described in section 2.2 and will support other program outcomes. EEAI Providers should continually assess daily activities and determine, in collaboration with communities, if they are having an impact on the quality of engagement between families, parents and carers, and young First Nations people with schools. This should realistically assess if it improves engagement or merely provides short-term improvements to attendance with no likely improvement to a student's engagement with school and learning, or improvement to their achievement at school. While improving attendance is a valid goal, activities that simply encourage students to enter school with no ongoing support or follow-up should be reconsidered.

In addition to using the above elements of best practice as guidance, Providers should ensure they use the principles described in section 2.2 of this document to guide the way they consult, design and implement EEAI activities. While these elements are a good summary of best practice that Providers can consider when developing their approaches and activities, they should be considered in light of what Providers have developed with the guidance of communities, and reflect the context of communities and its needs.

3.3 The EEAI Service Menu

The EEAI Service Menu is a list of suggested services that Providers may use to help design how their EEAI works on the ground, i.e. what it will do, how it will respond to community needs, how it will engage or re-engage First Nations young people, families, parents and carers with schooling and education, and how that work will link to improved participation at school and sustainable education outcomes in the future.

Using the Service Menu is not mandatory. Providers may consult about, design and implement their services without reference to the Service Menu, provided they adhere to the principles described in section 2.2. However these Providers may still want to refer to the Service Menu as it lists a range of possible approaches that can be proposed to communities. Many of the items on the Service Menu are examples of approaches that may support education engagement outcomes, or provide ideas for these activities.

If EEAI Providers want to use the Service Menu, Providers should ensure that:

- Communities (families, parents and carers, young First Nations people – not just leaders and representatives of organisations) are involved in reviewing the Service Menu items, and provide feedback on their likely impact and effectiveness, and how they can be changed to suit local contexts,

- Service Menu Items selected can be linked to improving education outcomes in the short, medium or long term, rather than merely provide short-term improvements to attendance.

The EEAI Service Menu is attached to this Operational Framework at Appendix A.

3.4 Budgeting

EEAI Providers must provide a detailed budget for acceptance by the Agency. Budgets should be submitted to NIAA contacts as agreed in Project Schedules. The budget should itemise and outline what activities the Provider will deliver as part of the Semester Activity Plans and the projected cost of each selected item.

Where Providers deliver EEAI activities in multiple sites, budgets can be combined but must be itemised so it is clear how much funding is being used for each site and which activities are being delivered in each site. Funding cannot be moved across sites without written permission from the Agency.

3.5 Semester Activity Plans

Semester Activity Plans (SAPs) are the plan for delivering EEAIs at each site. Providers must develop two SAPs each school year for Semester 1 (Terms 1 and 2) and Semester 2 (Terms 3 and 4). They may change the activities in the Semester 1 Activity Plan, remove activities, or implement new activities, by providing these details in the Semester 2 Activity Plan if changes are being made. If no changes are made, Providers will be expected to demonstrate on what basis they judge an activity has been successful.

SAPs must include details of:

- What EEAI activities will occur,

- When they will occur,

- What their expected outcomes are,

- How these outcomes will help improve education engagement and/or attainment,

- How the activity will support improved education outcomes,

- How the Provider involved community members in the design and planning of the activity,

- How community members are involved in the delivery of the activity,

- How the Provider defines "success" in relation to the activity, and

- How the Provider will monitor and review the activity.

NIAA will provide a template to guide Providers when developing their SAPs.

3.6 Reporting

3.6.1 Progress Reports

Providers are required to submit progress reports after Semester 1 (Term 2), and after Semester 2 (Term 4) as outlined in the relevant Project Schedule. Each progress report is an opportunity for Providers to describe progress, successes and challenges in their own words for the previous semester. The details required in the Progress Reports are:

- EEAI activities implemented in the previous semester,

- Whether the activity was successful or not,

- What their outcomes were,

- How they supported improved engagement between First Nations families, parents and carers, and young people with schools,

- How the activities connected to or supported improved education outcomes or achievement in school,

- How community members were involved in the delivery of the activity,

- Local employment (if any),

- Whether the Provider will continue to implement the activity next semester, or not, and why,

- Good news stories and examples of best practice.

NIAA will provide a template for Providers to use when submitting their six-monthly Progress Reports.

3.6.2 KPI Reporting

EEAI Providers are also required to submit performance reports against IAS Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as outlined in the relevant Project Schedule. This is a separate report to the EEAI Progress Report detailed above. Please speak to your NIAA contact to obtain more details about KPI reporting.

3.7 EEAI design and delivery considerations

3.7.1 Inside the school gate, outside the school gate

EEAI activities can be delivered on school premises or in the community. There is no distinction from a program perspective whether activities happen on school grounds or not. Providers should focus on what communities suggest will have a likely impact, then consider where the approach should be implemented for best outcomes.

Permission from the school principal is absolutely essential for services implemented on school grounds, or that occur anywhere else that involve school staff. Providers should seek opportunities whenever possible to establish relationships with school principals and develop ideas collaboratively – particularly if they involve delivery on school grounds, with school staff, or using school resources. Similarly, Providers should ensure their planned activities do not place an unexpected or onerous burden on school staff, teachers or resources.

3.7.2 Highly disengaged young people

This operational framework often refers to "young people" or "young First Nations people" rather than "students". This is because EEAI activities are not limited to targeting or supporting young people enrolled at school, nor are they limited to supporting young people in the immediate context of going to school or engaging in classroom activities.

Many young First Nations people are disengaged from education to varying extents, and for many reasons. It is therefore appropriate for EEAI activities to target these young people to improve their engagement with school, and help address barriers preventing their engagement.

Providers should be careful not to plan any activity that targets highly disengaged young people, and seeks to re-establish regular attendance and participation at school, without also ensuring schools are also committed and resourced to supporting the re-engagement of highly disengaged young people. Providers should also consider how schools can be supported to engage young people who have not attended school or participated in classroom activities for a long time. EEAI Providers may consider utilising program funds and resources to do this. Providers should also encourage collaboration with other service Providers to support schools. Re-engaging highly disengaged young people is often incredibly challenging and will likely require coordinated action across a range of service Providers, not just the school and the EEAI Provider.

3.7.3 Families, parents and carers

Although EEAI activities ultimately aim to support improved education outcomes, this does not necessarily mean they must always target or support students or other young First Nations people. Families, parents and carers play an important role in ensuring young people are ready for school and supported to participate at school. Activities that support families, parents and carers to support young people to participate in schooling in turn can therefore be supported via EEAI activities.

3.7.4 Transport services (bus runs)

Providers should reconsider the need to provide a transport service i.e. daily bus runs, and regularly assess whether they are required. Providing transport to schools for students is typically a service provided by states and territories in many non-remote settings. Purchasing, maintaining or leasing vehicles is an expensive commitment that requires sound asset management and administration capability, and diverts funds from other possible uses.

When reconsidering the need for a transport service, Providers should ask:

- *Is the transport service being provided to students who could otherwise walk to school?* If yes, the Provider should reconsider the need for the transport service. When considering this, Providers could determine if students regularly walk to other services, facilities or activities in community. If students or

student-age First Nations people regularly walk to the shop, sporting events, or services, and the distance is roughly equivalent to the distance to school, this suggests a transport service may not be required.

- *Is there another transport service operating in community?* If so, is there a need for an EEAI activity to provide one?

- *Are there community-specific factors that may no longer apply?* For example a Provider could reconsider the need for a transport service in the dry season, when the heat is less intense or heavy rainfall does not occur. Or, if a bus service was provided to help young people get to school without being bothered by cheeky dogs, but an effective animal management program has been implemented in the meantime, a Provider could reconsider the need for the service.

- *Is a transport service essential to improved education outcomes in the short, medium or long term?* In other words, does a transport service genuinely foster a sense of engagement and improved relationships between students with schools that is likely to lead to improved learning and greater classroom achievement, or does it merely get them to the school gate?

While NIAA encourages Providers to reconsider the need for transport services, it also acknowledges communities often value bus runs, and the bus environment can provide an opportunity for Providers to engage with young First Nations people and their families, or meet a need not met by any other service. For clarity – the above considerations do not require Providers to end transport services. However Providers should regularly assess the need for such a service and be prepared to demonstrate why it is required if requested by NIAA.

Appendix A: the EEAI Service Menu

Overview of the Service Menu items

The Service Menu items are:

- Specialist Staff
- Youth and Community Summits
- Culture and Language Projects
- School Support
- Mentoring
- Communications
- Family Engagement
- Youth Engagement
- Early Childhood
- Transition Support
- Targeted Girls and/or Boys Activities
- Enrolment Strategy
- Mobility Strategy
- Boarding School Support
- Community Events
- Breakfast and/or Lunch Programs
- Rewards and Recognition

Providers are not required to use or refer to the Service Menu items when designing their local EEAIs, and are encouraged to be innovative when proposing and designing local activities. They may however wish to refer to the Service Menu for ideas for implementation. When using the Service Menu, Providers should use the items as the starting point for consultation with communities, schools and other stakeholders. Providers should not treat the Service Menu as a set of deliverable services that can be automatically implemented in each community without regard for local context, the views or ideas of communities, or other services being delivered. Providers should adhere to the principles set out in section 2.2 of the EEAI Operational Framework when considering, discussing and designing any local EEAI activity including any services derived from the Service Menu. Finally, when developing Service Menu items, Providers should aim to deliver fewer, more effective services rather than a greater number of services that spreads resources thinly i.e. Providers should aim for quality over quantity.

Specialist Staff

This refers to engaging or employing people in specialised positions to deliver targeted and specialist services that support families and students. They could employ a range of different specialist staff, including but not limited to social workers, case managers, trauma specialists, counsellors, trainers/educators, or facilitators. Depending on community need, specialist staff can be employed on a full or part time basis, or they could be employed to deliver a targeted and time-limited program or project. Examples of services that could be delivered include, but are not limited to:

- Short term family/parental courses delivered by experienced educators,
- Counsellor services to support students with specific needs,
- Case management services for families with specific needs.

Community Summits

Community Summits are a formal meeting or event focussed on achieving particular outcomes relating to school or education. Summits should bring a range of people together to focus on specific issues, discuss their views, suggest ideas, work on problems together and have their voices heard. Summits might be held as one-off events or at regular intervals. They may be arranged in response to a particular issue (for example, a sudden increase in anti-social behaviour or to welcome a new school principal). Whatever the reason, summits provide a forum for people to learn, share, meet, generate ideas, plan and collaborate around that issue. Because summits focus on a particular issue or purpose, they should focus on a set agenda that is agreed with stakeholders beforehand. Providers can also utilise summits as a means to inform future planning, develop relationships and obtain feedback about their EEAI activity.

Culture and Language Projects

This refers to a service that bring culture and language into the classroom and support local community culture and language programs for young First Nations people. They utilise local cultural knowledge and strengths as a means of improving engagement and reaffirming the value of First Nations culture with families and young people. The importance of culture extends to schools and classrooms, where culture and language activities can play a key role in making classrooms safe and welcoming and keeping students interested in learning. Students are less likely to participate at school if they feel like their culture and language is not valued. There are many different ways that EEAI Providers can lead or become involved in culture and language projects, including:

- Setting up culture and language events, such as a morning tea for the school, Elders and other community members to come together to talk about education,
- Working with the school to have Elders and senior community members speak at assemblies, special events or in the classroom,
- Running school holiday or after-school culture and/or language programs.

Providers should ensure that any cultural project has the agreement of local First Nations people with the correct cultural authority or seniority.

School Support

This refers to a service where EEAI employees work in schools or classrooms to support engagement, participation and education outcomes. This may be appropriate at the start of term, or when there is an influx of students, or when students from a mobile family who have recently come to community newly attend. It may also be helpful where young people experience hard times or complex issues and could benefit from seeing familiar faces in the classroom and from having someone they can trust and talk to, particularly if they have been disengaged for some time and are returning to school after a long break.

EEAI Providers can therefore provide short term support for schools by working within classrooms or elsewhere in the school to help students engage or re-engage. This may include offering behavioural support, student mentoring, supporting culture and language, activities in the classroom, supporting family engagement days or parent teacher interviews, or simply offering help with classroom operations when there is influx of students.

School support should not be indefinite. Providers should remember that people employed under EEAI activities are not teachers or specialists in child welfare or behavioural case management, and they cannot perform the role of these professionally trained positions.

Finally, no school support should be implemented without the agreement of the school staff and principal.

Mentoring

Mentoring refers to a service where a young person is supported through a formal relationship established to provide support in a particular setting or with particular aims – in this case, to support young people engage with education and/or achieve more at school.

Mentoring can be done many different ways, but it generally supports young people to develop their skills, work towards their goals and take control of their own learning. It lets students know there is someone outside of their families or friendship circles who notices them, will look out for them and help them to understand and reach their potential. It can also improve social skills and help young people manage negative behaviour.

A mentor can be anyone who can be a positive role model and provide guidance, advice, support and feedback to a young person. Many people can be mentors for students, including EEAI employees, senior community members, teachers and sometimes even other students. When matching a young person with a mentor, it is worth considering interests, hobbies, age, gender and cultural needs of the mentor and mentee, to make sure they are a good match. However, mentoring is a real commitment that requires regular contact and investment of time. Potential mentors should understand the level of commitment before agreeing to be a mentor.

Communications

This refers to any effort to communicate positive messages to support good engagement with education. It can be achieved via a variety of media or methods. A local communication strategy can help families and the community understand why school is important and how EEAI activities support families, parents and carers, and young First Nations people. Locally developed communications can be popular and influential, and collaboratively developing local communications can be a great way to engage students and their families in EEAI activities. Communications strategies could include:

- Developing and delivering flyers, posters, or social media posts and videos in collaboration with young people, targeting families about the importance of education, and what local EEAI activities do for parents, families and young people,
- Delivering information/brochures to families at critical times of the year,
- Working with other service Providers to develop their own school positive messages.

Family Engagement

This refers to sustained and targeted engagement with families that require additional support or encouragement over time. A family engagement service should involve more than daily engagement activities (although this will likely form part of an engagement service) and should be more targeted or designed to address particular issues a family may encounter.

Families are the first teachers, and for many children, they will remain the only constant teacher throughout their schooling. Evidence shows that their efforts (along with the efforts of teachers) will be more influential than anyone else's in improving education outcomes. Students with parents or carers who are involved in their schooling earn higher grades, get better test scores, often have better social skills and show improved behaviour.

Some families may experience complex social issues. Although EEAI Providers can and should offer support to families during these times, for some families, it may be very difficult to see schooling as a priority until they have dealt with other issues. In these cases, it is likely families will require a range of support services from different service providers with specialised skills. In these cases, EEAI Providers can best help by offering a referral to the specialist support needed.

Transition Support

This refers to a service that helps young First Nations people adapt to changes in their schooling environment, usually when transitioning from one year to the next, or from one school to another school, or even from a highly disengaged scenario to a situation involving regular attendance at school. Students are more likely to stop going to school during times of change. This includes starting school for the first time, changing schools, going to boarding school, moving from primary to secondary school or moving to other education opportunities. Students may stop going to school because of a range of reasons both within school and outside of school. Transition support allows EEAI Providers to target efforts to support students and their families before, during and after these types of changes occur.

Transition points may impact different students in different ways, so individual approaches may be needed. However, there may be certain groups that are at higher risk than others or different patterns which occur in a particular community. For example, sometimes boys or young men may be more at risk of leaving school, if they think that school is not suitable for them after a certain age or after certain cultural milestones. Or, girls and young women may have caring responsibilities in the home, which can impact their engagement.

Mobility Strategy

A mobility strategy is a service or program that supports young people and their families to stay engaged with education when they travel to another community, or supports families and young people who are visiting from another location. Mobility strategies support families while they travel while also promoting and supporting ongoing engagement with school. Families may travel for a range of reasons including cultural business, royalty meetings, and sports carnivals, or to access services such as medical appointments and pre-natal care. Different strategies may be required for different circumstances.

A mobility strategy may include:

- Working with the school to make a 'return to school plan' for when students are away for long periods,
- Developing a community mobility strategy with the school, families and community members,
- Have a staff member take on a mobility coordinator role to monitor student movements and communicate these to schools, and to assist new families and students visiting communities,
- Facilitating strategies between schools in different communities where there are known patterns of travel,
- Connecting students to EEAI Providers in the community they are travelling to so they receive support.

Youth Engagement

This refers to sustained and targeted engagement with young people that require additional support or encouragement over time. A youth engagement service or program should involve more than daily engagement activities (although this will likely form part of an engagement service) and should be more targeted or designed to address particular issues young people may encounter.

If there is a need in their communities, Providers may wish to introduce prevention strategies which focus on keeping young people engaged with school. A good prevention strategy may need to focus on issues inside and outside the school gate. Activities might focus on working with the school to offer more diverse learning activities and extracurricular activities so that more young people want to go school, feel supported and are engaged in their education. Youth Engagement may also focus on ensuring young people who are at risk have access to services outside of school, to address any other issues which may be impacting on school attendance.

Young people who have already stopped going to school, and have been away for some time, may need more intensive support to help them reengage in learning. EEAI Providers can work with these young people to build resilience and gain the skills and strategies they need to return to and stay in school.

Targeted Girls and/or Boys Programs

This refers to a service that targets the particular needs of young women, young men, boys or girls. They are targeted to encourage education engagement in the context of particular expectations placed on young men or young women. Educational aspirations, attitudes, barriers and outcomes can sometimes differ between boys and girls, young men and young women. Their experiences at school can be influenced by a range of factors, including cultural roles and responsibilities, expectations of family, community and society and opinions of social groups.

Beliefs and attitudes about school, as well as barriers to engagement, also change for students over time. Changes may occur differently for boys, girls, young men and young women depending on their age and individual circumstances. For example, generally speaking girls and young women are more likely to attend school and graduate. However, they may be more likely to have caring responsibilities. Boys and young men are less likely to go to school regularly, starting from a very early age. Boys are less likely than girls to be enrolled in preschool, or other early childhood service, and therefore are more at risk of starting school already behind.

Boarding School Support

This refers to a service that helps a young person transition to a boarding school outside of the community, helps them remain engaged with their families and communities while staying at boarding school, and supports them to return to boarding school after a long break.

There are a range of ways EEAI Providers can provide support to help students and families manage the challenges of leaving home to attend boarding school. This includes helping families to make choices about schools to attend, supporting families to apply for financial assistance (such as ABSTUDY or a scholarship) and helping students to organise travel to and from school.

Boarding school support might include:

- Supporting families to complete paperwork and prepare students for a move to boarding school,
- Helping students and families to access ABSTUDY and ABSTUDY Fares Allowance,
- Developing plans with families to come up with strategies if students get homesick, for example helping families access technology that can support them to keep in regular contact with their children,
- Supporting young people to attend orientation sessions so they are prepared for boarding school,
- Supporting families to make sure children have had a medical check-up, and received any supports and services they might need, before attending boarding school.

Early Childhood

This refers to a service that helps young children and their families get ready for, and transition smoothly into, school. This may involve working with young children attending an early childhood service or not. It also involves working with families with young children of pre-school age to encourage them to engage with and use early childhood services in their communities.

There are many benefits for young people who attend early childhood programs. They are more likely to:

- Learn critical school skills like sharing, listening, following instructions and focussing on tasks,
- Become familiar and comfortable with school routines,
- Find the transition to school easier,
- Enjoy school.
- Attend school regularly,
- Do well in the classroom.

The benefits of early childhood programs also extend to families, and supports their ability to help their child transition into school, understand school routines and requirements, and identify health and other issues that might make learning difficult for their children at an early age.

Enrolment Strategy

An enrolment strategy refers to a service that targets young people who are not enrolled at school. EEAI Providers may wish to develop strategies to increase the number of children enrolled in school and supporting families and students through the enrolment process.

Any enrolment strategy should work closely with the school, to ensure that the school is aware a new student is planning to enrol, and can prepare to support the students to return to the classroom, including addressing any special needs they may have.

Community events

Community events bring people together to connect, share knowledge, share information, celebrate and/or reward achievements. These events tend to be less formal and structured than community summits and mainly aim to get more people engaged and participating. Examples include:

- Back to school family fun days to welcome new teachers and get families involved with the school,
- Youth camps to reward attendance achievements or to support disengaged kids,
- Cultural learning events to share and celebrate culture and promote the importance of education,
- Career days to provide information about career pathways and promote education,
- Sports carnivals to engage students.

Breakfast and/or lunch programs

This refers to a service that provides healthy meals to students or young people to encourage engagement and participation at school. While anecdotal evidence suggests concentration and learning improves when children have been provided with meals, EEAI Providers must be careful not to replace the role of parents in providing for their children. If there is a real need for a breakfast or lunch program, Providers should consider how parents and carers will contribute to the program (for example, donations of money or goods, parents volunteering to assist). Breakfast and lunch programs must not duplicate services offered under the School Nutrition Projects (SNP) in the Northern Territory, or any other equivalent service.

Providers must carefully consider the need for any food program and consider the medium-to long-term dependencies that may arise if they implement a breakfast and/or lunch program. Providers should consider other ways they can support students without taking on a role that might create dependence. For example, they may implement a family nutrition skills program or support the school to deliver cooking classes for families.

Rewards and Recognition

Rewards and Recognition are services that offer various forms of incentive to improve participation and educational achievement by recognising a student's efforts and encouraging a sense of accomplishment. Rewarding small improvements can have a big impact. EEAI Providers can reward students, families or the whole community when goals are achieved. Rewards and recognitions programs should recognise improvement as well as achievement, so students can see and work towards achievable goals.

It is important to communicate what rewards will be offered, and how they can be earned. If people feel that rewards are not applied fairly, or are not achievable, rewards and incentives can have unintended consequences. Finally, rewards and recognition programs should never be promoted as a payment. In other words Providers should be careful not to set an expectation that a reward will be regularly provided without commensurate progress, improvement or achievement.