



# AILC Submission to the Indigenous Skills, Engagement and Employment Program

10 September 2021

Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre RTO 88105

## Introduction

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) recently released an Indigenous skills, engagement and employment Program discussion paper that called for submissions to assist with informing the Government regarding about future investment in Indigenous-specific employment programs through the IAS.

On 11 May 2021, the Australian Government announced in the 2021-22 Budget a commitment to develop a new Indigenous Skills, Engagement and Employment Program (ISEP) to replace the Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTEC), Tailored Assistance Employment Grants (TAEG) and Employment Parity Initiative (EPI) from 1 July 2022.

The Australian Government states that it is committed to strong and sustained economic recovery and creating quality engagement and long-lasting jobs to increase economic participation for all Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Supporting individuals to achieve their employment aspirations creates financial and economic security, self-determination, and purpose.

The Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre submission has 6 recommendations that examine how a probably resourced and enhanced targeted training program can best create economic opportunity for more Indigenous Australians.

## Background about the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre

Established in 2001, the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre (AILC) is a not-for-profit company, owned and controlled by Indigenous Australians, [www.ailc.org.au](http://www.ailc.org.au). The AILC is the peak body for Indigenous leadership, committed to embedding cultural and traditional values in Indigenous leadership practice. Our comprehensive, culturally safe leadership pathways are complemented by innovative support networks and tools.

AILC remains the only nationally accredited Registered Training Organisation (RTO) 88105 delivering accredited training in Indigenous Leadership. As an RTO the organisation has built an outstanding profile as one of the nation's leading Indigenous education training providers.

The AILC has extensive experience in the delivery of culturally safe, place-based learning that leads to proven employment progression. We have a network of more than 3,500 Alumni and have trained thousands of First Nations people over the last two decades. Our Alumni are emerging Indigenous leaders seeking to 'make a difference' through their work in their local communities. They go on to be mentors across the nation spreading the benefit of their course knowledge further than just for themselves but their entire community.

Australia's **First Peoples** are now seen to be leading, connecting and influencing positive change for the benefit of all Australians through new federal government initiatives.

AILC CEO [REDACTED], the Chair [REDACTED] and Board members are committed to develop leadership, cultural values, knowledge and wisdom to **empower Australia's First Peoples**. However, while AILC has been proficient in engaging and recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff over the last two decades it often has been under resourced and not fully utilised by federal and state governments.

The AILC should continue to be funded to maintain and enhance outcomes-based partnerships that deliver skills development programmes which lead to higher-level accredited qualifications for Indigenous Australians. After all the next federal Census results will reveal that Australia is home to 1 million First Nations people. There are approximately 798,365 Indigenous Australians, representing about 3.3% of Australia's total population. It is known that Indigenous Australians tend to be younger, have a higher fertility rate, and represent an increasing source of labour supply for the economy.

According to the ABS, Indigenous Australians had labour market participation rates 19.9 percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous population in 2016 (57.1% versus 77.0%). The unemployment rate of Indigenous Australians was 18.4%—almost three times higher than the non-Indigenous Australian unemployment rate of 6.8% in 2016. In 2016, the labour market participation rate of Indigenous Australians stood at 57.1%. Unemployment for Indigenous Australians stood at 18.4% in 2016, which was almost three times the non-Indigenous rate of 6.8%. In 2021, Australia's unemployment rate was 4.9% and Youth unemployment stood at 10.2%. As at, 31 March 2021 there were approximately 180,000 Indigenous job seekers accessing government financial support through employment programs.

#### What Works Well

What we know is that enhanced Indigenous employment opportunities have existed for decades but largely were underfunded, poorly resourced, and not staffed to become an efficient and effective workforce. For 21 years AILC have assisted the federal government in trying to reach its labour training targets and be an effective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service sector advocate for enhanced training resources.

While some Government services have tried to hire and train in-house labour, we have trained almost 4,000 and there is no doubt that more training could and should be done to meet the expectations of future workforces. Our training protocols and **practices work well. We provide training that is unique and tailored to an individual's** circumstances and is culturally appropriate. The work AILC have done is effective, sustainable and vital to future labour outcomes for all government jurisdictions.

It is not just government facing labour workforce training issues. Currently for example Indigenous managers working for community organisations often struggle with layers of bureaucratic red tape paperwork that is time consuming, costly and inefficient use of their time just to justify current market conditions rather than ask for new resources to enhance training programs.

While some educational institutions also offer training it is often not as successful as it could be, for example, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the APS continues to decline below the 3 per cent threshold. Curiously the failure to reach this target has inspired the Labor federal opposition to suggest an increase in the threshold to 5 per cent by 2030.

It is acknowledged by academics that Indigenous people with higher levels of skills have better labour market outcomes. Areas of employment opportunities that should improve in the future are in literacy, numeracy, and digital problem-solving skills. The federal Government should continue to encourage training programs and providers like the AILC in these sectors.

An example of what works well is with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services which had 145 members and employed over 6,000 staff in 304 health settings across the nation. What they discovered was that what works best; is when governments consult and engage with Indigenous people. They provide culturally appropriate comprehensive primary health care services to the First Australians. Ironically one of the largest employers in rural and remote Australia are not mining companies but in these health settings. The vast health network provided a different working model for governments devolving decision-making power to the people directly affected.

Research reveals that the network is significantly more effective at improving Indigenous health outcomes than the mainstream medical system. This health business model of care could be used as a template and evidence of a practical management solution to other departmental issues of concern around service delivery, training and roll out of future government programs.

One way of increasing employment outcomes is through business entrepreneurship. The AILC seeks to increase opportunities to promote Indigenous entrepreneurship. Like those health services our place-based model works well, and we have offices based in Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin and Melbourne with expansion planned in 2022 to add Perth.

Currently more Indigenous children are deciding to further their education and are seeking more opportunities. The number of Indigenous Australians at universities increased to over 16,000 while those holding Certificate III and IV level qualifications rose from 28,200 in 2006 to 70,900 in 2016, an increase of more than 150%. AILC and its network is part of the reason for this educational success and the courses we offer.

#### AILC Course Descriptions

- 10785NAT Certificate II in Indigenous Leadership
- 10786NAT Certificate IV in Indigenous Leadership
- BSB40220 Certificate IV in Indigenous Leadership and Governance
- 52880WA Certificate IV in Leadership and Mentoring
- Also, we offer non-accredited courses.

Students attending AILC courses come from a diverse range of backgrounds and in applying to join the course must show how this opportunity will benefit their communities. Most, if not all, course participants are attempting to find ways of improving the situation of themselves and their communities: in other words, they are located at the interface between Indigenous communities and governance.

Also, all AILC trainers and assessors have a minimum of Certificate IV qualifications in training and assessment in order to comply with the requirements for RTO service delivery.

There is little doubt that innovative ways of working with Indigenous Australians are needed to improve their employment prospects, especially as many work in jobs that are most likely to be impacted by digitalisation and automation in the future. **Australia's network of employment services**, like Jobactive, aims to connect jobseekers, including Indigenous Australians with employers but will this be enough by 2030?

Indigenous Australians represented 9.5% of the overall jobactive caseload in 2015, whereas in the first quarter of 2019, this has increased to 11.5%. The Indigenous caseload has been rising as non-Indigenous job seekers are leaving the caseload quicker than Indigenous job seekers. So, more training is required and fast!

We must also increase the number of organisations that can have training provided **and this can be achieved as the Australian Government's own Indigenous Procurement Policy** has revealed almost 20,000 contracts were awarded to 1,750 Indigenous businesses by the end of 2022. Work with relevant NGOs, peak bodies, state and territory administrations will develop more opportunities for cultural training, resources and educational learning sessions for staff to comply with their jurisdictional responsibilities.

New Indigenous-specific employment investment is required. After all, The National Agreement on Closing the Gap commits governments, including the Australian Government, to a new way of working in partnership with Indigenous communities through a co-design process. Outcome 6-7 impact directly on the work AILC provides and we will continue to increase the number of people being trained.

AILC make the following recommendations:

#### Recommendation 1- Increase AILC workforce and skillsets

The government should take a more ambitious and proactive approach to workforce needs, changes and shortages. AILC have capacity constraints that impact on our ability to provide more training opportunities to meet these various issues. An enhanced AILC with increased resources and workforce skills will create new training innovations, opportunities and strengthen the overall Indigenous labour economy.

The aspirations and demands of local Indigenous communities have become more complex and management requires a greater skill set than ever before. AILC will assist in new pathways by gearing training opportunities to sectors facing future

employment shortages, such as in public administration, health care and education. The research proves that to sustain workplace employment over the long term, qualifications must be durable and transferrable. To this end AILC will work with local communities to identify existing and emerging engagement and employment opportunities.

Currently AILC is limited to a small group of nine dedicated staff that impact on our ability to deliver more services. By increasing the size of our workforce, we can double or triple the number of training options available. The ability to scale up our workforce quickly and efficiently will have an impact in the sector and our new training targets (300-750) are both achievable and durable.

AILC recommends increased investment to double our workforce in the 2022-2023 federal budget allocation. AILC will connect Indigenous Australians to jobs, targeted skills acquisition and career advancement opportunities.

#### Recommendation 2 - Build up Indigenous leadership culture

Indigenous leadership culture matters. Indigenous culture imparts a respect for legitimacy based on who, rather than what, you are, and for the profound importance of leadership as a vehicle for mutual respect and listening, rather than domination. These leaders gained influence by being there, waiting patiently in the background, and demonstrating their deeper interest in both the material and spiritual welfare of the community.

Indigenous Australians have extended family, social obligations, and cultural responsibilities around Aboriginal culture, stories, languages, that many mainstream workplace managers do not always understand.

We offer a co-ordinated approach and can fill the gaps in the sector. Local barriers and opportunities to local engagement, employment and career advancement for Indigenous Australians still remain across the nation and need to be removed. Indigenous leaders must find ways to create leadership by gaining acceptance in communities on the one hand, while learning to operate effectively in numerous and complex non-indigenous systems of governance.

Work situations, priorities, and personalities matter in organisations and how they relate to government requests. Often stressful deadlines for jurisdictional data requests take time and create endless frustrations. Our graduates help liaise between Indigenous communities or clients and government bureaucracies. The training increases their confidence and community standing. AILC is part of the solution and should have increased resources to continue this vital work training.

#### Recommendation 3 - Enhancing the AILC Alumni network

AILC maintain and enhance a strong focus on coaching, training and peer learning. The AILC Alumni network often leads to higher level qualifications, such as advanced diplomas/degrees, bachelor degrees, graduate diplomas/degrees, and postgraduate diplomas/degrees for our graduates.

This is achieved through our various workshops, website, social media, information sharing, newsletter, webinars, functions and events, set speeches, casual networking and Alumni mentoring conversations. AILC alumni, mentor, peer share and absorb knowledge that will help them learn how to engage with consultants, bureaucrats and politicians.

AILC Alumni will continue to encourage career and job mobility among Indigenous Australians. They will be skilled in the following concepts: Advocacy, Leadership Pathways and Mentoring. Our emphasise will both strengthen and promote our network and its results.

The Alumni network will help NIAA to identify barriers to employment at the regional and local levels. **They will also protect graduates' intellectual property.** Resources will also be made available permanently online for free on our website. This valuable resource will have additional material placed on the platform over the next few years to enhance the learning and training outcomes of our graduates. AILC seeks increased resources to continue to fulfill these important activities post training.

#### Recommendation 4 - Future training requirements for government

Innovative ways of working with Indigenous Australians are needed to improve their employment prospects, especially as many work in jobs that are most likely to be impacted by digitalisation and automation in the future. State, Territory and Federal government require additional culturally competent front-line staff who are either Indigenous or have the relevant capacity and training to assist Indigenous Australians achieve their employment aspirations. The constraints, responsibilities, and demands remain a focus of future training options as demand from jurisdictions for clear lines of management responsibility intensity as 2030 targets approach.

**The Commonwealth's Indigenous Procurement Policy has seen more than \$4.2 billion** awarded to hundreds of Indigenous businesses since 2015. It is anticipated that this trend will continue as all Commonwealth portfolios have set new targets to implement more growth in this sector. It has been noted that the estimated value of the Indigenous Asset Base is just under \$6 billion in Australia, and this will continue to support supply chain participation for First Nations people.

One example of future workforce labour needs and skillsets is within the aviation sector. Currently there is limited scope in industries such as aviation. With airports playing a driving role in local community job growth and personal advancement. This results in higher-than-average community wages and takes people off welfare and provides access to better quality housing and overall health outcomes. Lifting productivity performance in the aviation sector for Indigenous people will assist the sector improve performance, safety, and compliance with new regulations.

AILC will assist with the diversification of the Indigenous economy by training graduates in this new field. This will result in long-lasting impacts got local communities.

## Recommendation 5 - Indigenous Youth Leadership

We know that the median age of Indigenous Australians is 23 years old compared to 37 years for the rest of the Australian population. AILC is expanding our course offerings and range of delivery like accredited courses in Indigenous Entrepreneurship, Government (Compliance) as well as accredited short courses or skillsets. AILC is working to establish a relationship with the Canberra Institute of Technology dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educational Centre of Excellence, Yurauna.

Aboriginal education is largely based on informal learning through observation and listening, rather than through verbal instruction, oral or written. An important learning strategy is learning through personal trial and feedback, as opposed to verbal instruction accompanied by demonstration of real-life performance rather than through practice in contrived settings.

Face-to-Face learning and online platforms work well. Learnings from our current program have identified that targeted courses, utilising a place-based methodology leads to better outcomes for our graduates. We know that these training courses work as an independent KPMG review of AILC programs and outcomes found that:

- 60% of graduates of the AILC accredited programs earned a promotion after completing their course
- 79% said they had taken on an enhanced leadership role after finishing the course
- Average incomes of the AILC graduates rose almost \$14,000 after graduation and
- 95% said they felt they were better leaders after completing an AILC course.

By 2031, AILC will assist to align the organisation to the government priority areas and assist to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67 percent and those aged 25-64 who are employed to 62 per cent (Target 7 and 8). The AILC youth leadership skill sets create an environment for dealing effectively with other mainstream organisations and are learnt through education, training, and experience working in public and private enterprises.

## Recommendation 6 - New Data and evidence resources

AILC will create a new data capacity to enhance engagement with the Australian Public Service. This will be achieved by conducting a literature review of over 150 departmental or agency annual reports for the year 2020-2021.

It is important that the retention and advancement of Aboriginal employees is essential to build a meaningful Indigenous employment base within the Commonwealth public sector. The current turnover is too high, the public sector loses around 16 per cent of Indigenous recruits after their first year of employment alone, and the public service continue to lose them at a faster rate than they can



recruit them which is not ideal. Indigenous employees today are most frequently employed at the APS 4 level and the number employed is risible.

Now, as in the past, the APS has identified and promised that 3% of all public service positions will go to Aboriginal people from 2018. As our Aboriginal population increases to one million people by 2030 we will require more employment opportunities to be created. To date this target has not been achieved.

For example, The Department of Veterans' Affairs has 1,614 staff but only 21 identify as Indigenous staff, also the Department of Infrastructure has 972 staff but only 22 are Indigenous. It should be noted that almost no agency meets the 3 per cent suggested rate of Indigenous employment and several list zero for that category or oddly do not report any statistic in the annual report to Parliament.

### Conclusion

Few professional public servants seek an entire career at the coalface of Indigenous policy advice. We must all try and improve the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across the APS and in private enterprise. We must value First Nations people and articulate our vision for them to consider staying and having a long career in the APS and other industries.

Let us together build on our leadership skills, capacity and corporate knowledge. Representation of Indigenous employees at the Executive and SES levels will rise once we inspire and mentor a new generation of Aboriginal leadership in the APS and private enterprises.

Despite the ongoing impact of the coronavirus pandemic and its various strains AILC will continue to train as many people as it can. The AILC has proven an extensive experience in delivery of Indigenous leadership programs at a range of locations across Australia. As an Indigenous organisation, staffed by a majority of Indigenous staff, the AILC is experienced in negotiating issues of access and cultural sensitivity in order to deliver successful and relevant Indigenous leadership programs.

AILC's destination is an Australia where Indigenous leaders at all levels have the knowledge, skills, confidence and shared vision needed to lead communities, organisations and the nation.

For more information or to contact AILC please call or email:

████████████████████  
████████████████  
██