



Pathway

Indigenous skills,
engagement and
employment Program (ISEP)

Response to Discussion Paper

September 2021



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Employment Branch
National Indigenous Australians Agency
Canberra ACT
Submitted by email: ISEP@niaa.gov.au

My Pathway is a social and economic development organisation delivering services from the Torres Strait to Tasmania. We have been developing people, connecting them to opportunities and helping communities to grow since 2007.

We currently employ more than 200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. We have established partnerships with local Indigenous organisations in five remote communities and assisted to establish more than 100 Indigenous start-up businesses. Our organisation is committed to creating sustainable employment and development opportunities for First Nations People.

We agree that reform is needed to improve economic, social and educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Also, that the Indigenous skills, engagement and employment Program (ISEP) should accommodate local approaches that will respond to community needs, draw on strengths and take hold of opportunities.

We are hopeful that a new Program will include simple application processes and efficient approvals so that opportunities are not missed. It should also complement other employment services and skilling programs.

Further queries about this submission can be directed to My Pathway Communications Manager,

[REDACTED]

We are hopeful that this discussion will provide the insight and feedback necessary to progress a more effective Program that will empower First Nations People.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

General Manager Remote Services

[REDACTED]

Overview

The new ISEP framework could enable funding to be directed to the people and the communities that will benefit most. Where work and skilling opportunities for Indigenous Australians are not adequately supported by existing employment and education programs, the ISEP may have the flexibility to bridge the gap.

The headline funding, when considered on a regional basis and especially for remote communities, is relatively small. Enabling existing employment service providers, schools, community organisations and individuals to engage in a simple and fast application process will assist to improve the impact of funding.

In addressing the specific Discussion Paper questions, My Pathway found four key themes, including:

- [Simple processes and clear scope](#)
- [Community-led decision making](#)
- [High impact activities with long-term effects](#)
- [Complementary supports](#)


Simple processes and clear scope

Overriding factors in the success of ISEP will be ensuring that eligibility is clear, the application process is simple, and funding is approved quickly. In our experience, funding applications can be protracted through several layers of approval, resulting in missed opportunities. The ISEP application process should be designed in a manner that allows individuals, schools, project managers, businesses, or employment services providers to focus on funding outcomes rather than inputs.

The scope of funding and individual eligibility requirements should be clear, simple and reflect local needs and community feedback. Understanding the gaps in current employment and skilling programs will help to build Indigenous capacity and create employment opportunities while avoiding duplicate funding. In remote regions, Community Develop Programme (CDP) providers will already have an informed view of local skilling needs and the individuals who may benefit from more support.

Community-led decision making

My Pathway supports the proposed model that would provide tailored, locally-informed investment to better suit local labour markets and respond swiftly to emerging skills acquisition and employment opportunities. Community-led identification of the key industries and skills that will benefit a region, especially in remote Indigenous communities, could assist in targeting funds for the greatest impact. Community Advisory Boards and employment service providers may play a valuable role in establishing local priorities and needs.



Beyond employment and training outputs, the success of ISEP should consider local enterprise development and capacity building that extends beyond a 26-week period. Sustained improvement to Indigenous employment outcomes will be influenced by a range of factors spanning personal development, cultural awareness, training, work experience and business growth.

High impact activities with long-term effects

My Pathway has been delivering the CDP since its inception and has officially partnered with local Indigenous organisations to deliver services. Additionally, we are involved in several workforce development projects across the Cape and facilitate multiple Skilling Queenslanders for Work projects each year. Consistently, we have found mentoring to be a key success factor, helping both workers and employers to establish sustainable partnerships. Mentoring services may be identified as a priority when setting the scope of funding, especially for regional and remote areas.

Supporting employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to build culturally appropriate work environments is a significant opportunity. Funding may be allocated to expert consulting on holistic business practices that would better support Indigenous employees. This could include cultural protocol, uniforms, health & safety, language barriers and Reconciliation Action Plan development. Improved working environments and conditions may assist employees to extend beyond the typical 26-week target.

Complementary supports

Beyond ISEP, other employment services and training programs, there are additional supports that could drive more effective Indigenous employment outcomes. First, a review and enforcement of Indigenous Employment Targets for business and projects in remote regions. The Indigenous employment rate ranges from 54% in major cities to 31% in very remote areas¹, highlighting the need to create local jobs for people in remote communities.

Second, activating funding and support for new enterprise development in remote Australia. My Pathway is currently developing a pilot program to foster and support enterprise development, targeted to regions where we deliver the CDP. Similar to New Business Assistance with NEIS, this program would assist new businesses to establish with a mix of training, financial support and mentoring. Enterprise development is a recognised opportunity to create new jobs in remote communities, but current approaches are yet to generate the desired outcomes.

¹ NIAA website, accessed 30 August 2021, niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/reports/closing-the-gap-2019/employment.html