



17 September 2020

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Re Indigenous skills, engagement and employment Program (ISEP) Discussion Paper

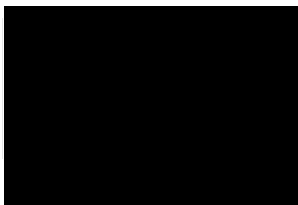
Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this discussion paper and for the extension until the 17th September 2021 for lodging this submission.

The Kimberley Regional Group (KRG) is an alliance of the four Shires of the Kimberley, being the Shire of Broome, the Shire of Derby West Kimberley, the Shire of Halls Creek and the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley. Collaboratively the group seeks to support outcomes for the region through improved social, economic and cultural outcomes.

It is recognised that the Indigenous skills, engagement and employment Program (ISEP) is one of a suite of initiatives which are being implemented as part of a new approach, including changes to the CDP program which were funded in the Federal budget for implementation in 2022.

This submission provides some insight into initiatives and opportunities in the Kimberley which could be informative within the process of shaping programs and opportunities to maximise skills development and employment outcomes.

Yours sincerely



Chair Kimberley Zone and
Kimberley Regional Group

**SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS AGENCY:
INDIGENOUS SKILLS, ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (ISEP)
DISCUSSION PAPER JULY 2021**

How should the Indigenous skills, engagement and employment Program (ISEP) work alongside the new employment services model and the new remote engagement program to build work-ready skills and connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to rewarding, sustainable jobs?

NIAA is interested in stakeholders' views on whether Indigenous-specific employment investment should target specific cohorts, transition points, regions, industries, barriers, etc.

There is no doubt that Indigenous specific employment investment should be targeted relevant to place and time, however in regions such as the Kimberley that have poor job prospects, a high proportion of Aboriginal residents, poor school attendance and high levels of disadvantage, the determination of what to target can be challenging.

From the experience of Shires in the Kimberley, there are several key success factors:

- School attendance for young people in locations such as Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing is dipping down to 30 percent in upper high school. With a combination of COVID and subdued motivation due to the highly constrained job opportunities, transitioning school leavers into the work environment should be seen as a priority. Initiated by the Shire of Halls Creek, some local governments in the Kimberley are implementing programs to offer any year 12 graduate a 12-month traineeship to support the transition from school into the workplace to break the cycle of immediate welfare dependency which can become lifelong. The attractiveness of the school leavers to future employers increases significantly noting there are very few part-time casual employment opportunities in some locations for young people during their years at school to gain the required workplace understanding.
- Importantly in remote areas, local governments are likely to have extensive roles in the community, from road construction to the management of the post office, airport, library and other functions delegated by the State and form the backbone of accessible and supportive employment in some locations. This can be leveraged to improve outcomes.
- It is critical that programs associated with addressing the barrier of not having a passenger vehicle driver's licence continue to be funded.
- In remote areas, many of the skills are transferable between industries and can be built upon to become more specialised into the future, for example the ability to drive a grader in road construction may provide a pathway to a mining job. Whilst there is a need to recognise broad sectors, tailored job outcomes are unlikely to return significant results as it narrows the field of opportunity. This is likely to be different in more urbanised areas.
- Training barriers, whether they be sequential competency requirement or qualification hurdles, need to be addressed to create tailored local pathways. By way of example, the delivery of simple hairdressing services can be beneficial for both remote communities and for the local person seeking to establish a basic service – however the time-served and the required sequential order of training delivery can act as a barrier. Whilst not needing to



unpack this for all training recipients under the Training Package, tailored short courses approved for specific regional practice could be extremely useful for unlocking opportunities in remote locations. This may also apply to some entry level maintenance skills (vehicle, construction, landscaping etc) that may be included in a Training Package. It is acknowledged that the current Training Package framework may not be consistent with this outcome and opportunities for tailoring requirements for remote locations should be considered. By separating basic tasks that could be delivered to encourage small business/employment outcomes, a commitment to further training and the achievement of higher order qualifications is more likely over time.

How could IAS investment be designed to be more flexible and responsive at the regional level, and better meet the needs of the community for Indigenous job seekers and employers?

NIAA is interested in stakeholders' views on more flexible investment that builds on success factors and leverages partnerships and other investment at the local level, including partnerships and opportunities for co-investment with industry.

In the regions there are many projects where co-investment could serve as useful opportunities for skills development and work experience leading to sustainable employment. For example, the upgrades to the Tanami Road, a major connection route between Alice Springs and the north west of Australia, has a program intent of a ten-year roll out to enable crews to develop transferable skills, for Aboriginal businesses to invest in equipment to subcontract and to facilitate flow through of employees into other – often higher paying positions in the private sector. Key success components include the duration of the program, noting that an accelerated program of four years would have constrained local skills development and employment opportunities. The investment by the Shire of Halls Creek into the construction equipment such as trucks and graders and the combined investment in the road upgrade by the State and Federal Government were the other critical success factors.

Another example of a potential opportunities includes the replacement of agricultural fencing along major transport routes such as the Great Northern Highway at the end of the wet season to reduce the road safety risk of cattle on the roads. The private sector and Main Roads made a commitment to fencing improvements a number of years ago however seasonal damage has seen some of the previous gains eroded. There is an opportunity to combine the state and private investment with targeted labour force skills development to both improve road safety and to provide practical fencing experience which could lead to permanent jobs within the pastoral sector.

As a matter of first principle, "what is not being done that should be done in the best interests of the community" should be identified and targeted. Where barriers exist that could be overcome with investment in labour force development that leads to transferable skills and jobs creation in the region, these barriers should be addressed as a matter of priority.



How should results of the new ISEP program be measured, monitored and evaluated to ensure investment contributes to closing the gap in employment outcomes?

NIAA is interested in stakeholders' views on how Indigenous-specific employment investment should be monitored and meaningful data collected and made accessible to demonstrate clear outcomes.

The goal of employment programs was traditionally to ensure that sustainable employment was realised, with three, six and 12-month retention milestones the major indicator and funding trigger. Whilst recognising the limitations in remote locations, sustainable jobs should remain a priority. To support the achievement of this outcome, two other factors should be considered being the nurturing of transition opportunities such as those offered by the Shire of Halls Creek, and the identification of barriers to employment, particularly those associated with government policy noting the important role government investment plays in remote locations.

By gathering the evidence in relation to barriers, government policy can be modified to improve outcomes. For example, large community maintenance contracts under a head contractor model may source skills from outside of the region and in some cases, outside of the state with no practical obligation for local skills development, work experience or employment of local people. Practical obligations should include agreed local content/Aboriginal employment/skills development targets. A price should be put on failure, not necessarily through penalties but could include bonuses if targets are met.

Conversely, contracts which are overseen/coordinated by a larger entity/agency but are founded on local subcontracting models are much more likely to lead to local employment outcomes. A good example of how this can operate in practice is the Broome Cape Leveque Road project which was coordinated by Main Roads WA, achieving 55% Aboriginal participation by working hours, with 88% of those being local. Participation of Aboriginal men and women was also important, with 36% of the road crew female and approximately 90% of those women Aboriginal. Equally important was intergenerational participation with role models being created, enhanced and reinforced within communities.

Policy and practice barriers within government agencies should be monitored and resolved to unlock meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities as they represented one of the largest investors into regional jobs.



How can we embed shared-decision making in community-based workforce planning?

NIAA is interested in identifying the opportunities for partnerships with appropriate stakeholders in the employment space, and how shared decision-making can be best facilitated, for example through community-based workforce planning.

The following are observations and should not be interpreted as comprehensive analysis, rather opportunities that could provide for further discussion during policy development.

Shared Decision Making

Shared decision making is essential in remote areas but must be seen as part of a broad movement towards self-determination rather than decision making in isolation. It must also be recognised that the experience in remote areas is not homogeneous. In Broome, for example, Nyamba Buru Yawuru represents the traditional owners of the land and have a multi-faceted organisational structure with sophisticated understanding of investment and the capacity to apply that knowledge to access grants and funding. The same is true in the East Kimberley with MG Corporation representing the Miriwung and Gajerrong people. Whilst the Shires engage with these entities, including an MOU between the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley and MG Corporation, the need for on the ground practical support is limited compared to some other locations.

The Shire of Halls Creek Initiative Olabud Doogethu - nothing about us without us - is noteworthy. The Shire of Halls Creek is a critical part of the decision making and Aboriginal community development process in their region. The area has multiple families including recognised traditional owners as well as families suffering from historical displacement. Whilst Aboriginal Corporations are constituted, they are not necessarily in the position to attract significant investment funding and coordinate solutions in the short to medium term. Olabud Doogethu was developed from 550 voices from eleven Aboriginal Communities, government agencies and service delivery partners in the region. It currently has a range of programs being delivered with further programs planned.

Starting as a Justice Circuit Breaker, which included the Youth Engagement Night Officers, Family Support (case intervention), Olabud Doogethu currently employs 40 local Aboriginal staff and is progressing other initiatives such as Mibala (Alternative Education) as well as Kutjungka (Community Navigators) and the Men's Tribal Centre. Olabud Doogethu is a practical, ground up approach that delivers employment role models in jobs that have community respect. In Derby there are a range of leadership groups and the Shire of Derby West Kimberly has a role in bringing them together to provide a pathway forward.

The reason Olabud Doogethu, MG Corporation, Nyamba Buru Yawuru and the Derby initiative have been included in this paper is that co-design must be coupled with co-responsibility and a respected process/entity must be included. Funding to support multi-faceted organisations provide leadership should be available to support community workforce planning because, in isolation, individual processes are likely to fail.



Building Blocks for Decision Making.

There is very little information in the public arena that provides details of current, emerging and future skill requirements in sufficient detail to support for the development of workforce planning, making shared decision making more likely to be reactive or simply replicate status quo. The Small Area Labour Markets (SALM) data is useful for the purposes of monitoring but does not allow for casting forward. The National Skills Commission Projections, which would be useful, are published with only two geographical categories for Western Australia – Greater Perth and Rest of WA noting that the CDP program has five regions in the Kimberley alone.

Noting that in the Kimberley many people of Aboriginal descent are closely connected to country and family, opportunities in other regions across Western Australia are likely to be of less interest. This means a clear understanding of what the future opportunities are in the Kimberley, and its subregions, is essential.

The four Shires in the Kimberley have resolved, through the KRG, to undertake a current and future skills needs assessment to fill this information gap. This will be foundational research which will enable discussions and shared decision making to occur based on solid and transparent information. This is not just relevant for Aboriginal people, rather it is about an integrated planning process for skills development within a region to avoid a Fly-In-Fly-Out response by government and private sector interests. If “local” becomes a priority, both the 50% Aboriginal and the 50% non-Aboriginal will benefit for the betterment of all.

With the appropriate information base, government agencies, including local governments, can work with local service providers to become a pathway to private sector employment. In Halls Creek, the establishment of the Certificate III in Construction, combined with job pathways through the Shire’s road maintenance and construction crew, means that adequate skills and experience are obtained by individuals to enable job choice into the future. The Shire plans and budgets for the ongoing stream of workers that move into employment within a supportive environment and then transition into further employment opportunities. This is a very different model from “attract and retain” but comes with its own costs that should be recognised.

There is also a need to reflect on how contracts in regional and remote areas are prepared and the impact on local communities. Historically communities were able to organise works using a local workforce however the introduction of the head contractor model and the lack of home ownership has seen tradespeople being flown in to do maintenance work. Some of this work, which would otherwise fall into the home owner/handyperson remit, could reasonably be done locally with basic skills development. We have seen Aboriginal men requesting to be able to mow the lawns and reduce dry grass that can create a haven for snakes, but this is also being outsourced in some cases creating a participation barrier. Whilst these “tasks” may not necessarily equate to a full time job, they can become a pathway as more experience, improvement of personal confidence and importantly the communities are responsively, rather than reactively, improved.

In a nutshell, community based workforce planning is critical, but must start with accurate data building blocks and engagement of respected leaders and delivered through known, respected and agreed pathways that are locally focused.



How can the ISEP encourage potential employers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to provide safe and culturally appropriate work environments? How can employers better value the skills and perspectives of Indigenous employees?

NIAA is interested in understanding how all employers, including Indigenous employers and SMEs, can be supported to further employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

One of the key strategies to provide safe and culturally appropriate work environments is to provide specific practical examples for employers and to promote those examples to enable better understand strategies. These examples should be identified and promoted, not just in literature, but in accessible forms such as video interviews and online seminars. Two examples from the Kimberley are provided below.

1. Recognise that the physical design of space is important for cultural purposes – Yara Yungji Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation (YYMS).

The YYMS has purpose built facilities which recognise key cultural imperatives including the separation of certain family members through designed spaces. Family decision making is recognised in larger consultation rooms. Historically, physical safety and organisational efficiency have been the key drivers of building design. The early awareness of the design of physical space to accommodate cultural needs leads to practical outcomes that make a culturally safe workplace easier to implement. A literature search found that most of the advisory materials focused on training, awareness and policy rather than the design of spaces. Whilst these are valuable tools, understanding of physical space will assist and support the development of culturally appropriate workplaces, which in turn support employment outcomes.

2. Strive to ensure a workforce reflective of population – Halls Creek Case Study.

The Shire of Halls Creek has a population where 68 percent of the population identifies as Aboriginal. Two years ago, the Shire had forty employees of whom only 32 percent were Aboriginal. The Shire has expanded their workforce by 150 percent through diversifying funding streams and bringing in-house activities such as road maintenance and construction. Now, of the current 100 strong workforce, 64% are Aboriginal. Whilst a population reflective Shire employment profile was a strategic goal, it was achieved through the expansion of the workforce, which is critical to enable a greater diversity of opportunities to better match the skills available in the area, and those attractive to the local workforce. By now increasing the number of Aboriginal people in the workforce from less than 13 to 68 people, the cultural needs of the workforce become normalised and an integral part of day-to-day operations. This demonstration of a safe and culturally inclusive workplace enables employees, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to experience this approach, then share the expectation of inclusiveness when they move on to other employers. The supply chain of the Aboriginal workforce, and the influence on future employers, should be recognised and promoted.

