



Contents

WHY

Why engage with Indigenous communities and organisations?	2
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WHAT

What is networking?	2
What types of partnerships and networks are there?	3
What motivates your network partners?	3
What are some dos and don'ts of networking and building partnerships?	4

HOW

How do you form a partnership with your local Indigenous stakeholders?	5
How do you get the right people on board?	7
How do you maintain your partnerships and networks?	7
How will you build your own Indigenous networks and partnerships?	8

Start by learning from others - Case Studies

'School Pathways into the Mining Industry'	9
Midwest Training Group – Indigenous Building Program	9
WorkCo – Building an effective partnership	10
Kimberley Group Training – Partnership in mining	10
ESOs essential in Indigenous Communities	11

TOPIC C3 – Engaging Indigenous communities and organisations through collaboration

'Partnerships usually involve change; seeing things from other people's point of view, respecting other people's ways of doing things and changing your own. This can be threatening, but it can also be enormously creative. It can be painful, but it can also be fun. Either way it takes time, which is why creating partnerships should be seen as process, not a structural fix.'

Why engage with Indigenous communities and organisations?

Working closely with Indigenous organisations and communities is the only way to improve the participation of Indigenous Australians in Australian Apprenticeships. The problems and challenges involved are complex and only by working together, sharing ideas and addressing common barriers will substantial progress be achieved.

The role of many people working in Indigenous services can be likened to that of a consultant. You have expertise and resources that can be applied in a range of ways to promote Indigenous training outcomes. Your challenge is to build your professional alliances with other players in the field who have complementary skills to provide a foundation for making use of the skills and knowledge you have to offer.

The key to building effective networks and partnerships is to demonstrate the ability to help your clients or stakeholders solve problems. They will not see any point in building partnerships with your organisation if there is no benefit to them.

What is networking?

Networking involves building alliances and professional relationships between individuals and groups of key people for the purpose of undertaking activities for mutual benefit. Networkers share information and then use it to achieve their own goals.

Your networks will:

- provide information to help you plan and deliver your Australian Apprenticeship services more effectively
- allow you to tap into the specialised knowledge and expertise of Indigenous organisations
- provide you with the contacts you need when you are facing new challenges and intractable problems
- raise your profile and sphere of influence within Indigenous communities and organisations, and that of your organisation's training services and programs.

When done poorly, external networking can do more harm than good. If you are not prepared to offer a two-way flow of information and benefits, and follow-up on your commitment, you may damage the reputation of your organisation and encounter difficulty when renewing those contacts in the future.

What types of partnerships and networks are there?

You will already have some established networks involving people from:

- education and training providers
- other Australian Apprenticeship service providers
- businesses and business associations
- government departments
- organisations with particular professional expertise and interests.

These networks may be formal or informal:

- **Formal networks and partnerships** – are usually comprised of people who are representing their organisation and have a work-related role in the issues of interest to network members. The contact may be infrequent, unless the network is focussing on a pressing task that is shared between the participants. The relationship may be formalised using an MOU, Alliance Agreement, or the like.
- **Informal networks** – usually involve participants who interact out of friendship, shared values, family ties and so on. Contacts among informal networks may be more regular, particularly in the run-up to making a decision. Informal information is often valued to test the reaction of people to particular ideas.

Both formal and informal networks have their place. They both need to be nurtured as they complement each other. For example, the informal network may be a valuable source for 'shaping' an issue, while the formal network will be used to gain commitment to the proposal in its final form.

What motivates your network partners?

Networks and partnerships will not survive unless they benefit ALL the partners. There must be a 'win-win' outcome.

There is a large body of literature and research about the things that motivate people. However, from the perspective of networking, two findings are particularly important. They are that people are:

- not all motivated by the same things
- typically driven by one (or more) of three needs:
 - the need to achieve (to succeed at a task)
 - the need to affiliate (to work with others)
 - the need to exercise power (the need to control).

Recognising that people have different motivators will be helpful as you seek to develop and maintain your networks and partnerships. They may also explain why some of your networks work extremely well and others are affected by conflict (ie. too many controlling types) or loss of direction (ie. too many people who are there simply to socialise).



What are some dos and don'ts of networking and building partnerships?

Networks and partnerships are not automatically successful. They require constant effort and monitoring if they are to realise their potential benefits.

To be a successful networker, you will need to:

- **recognise that the other partners have an existence outside of any shared activity.** Typically, Indigenous organisations have many roles and networks with other providers. It is crucial that common goals, objectives and boundaries are very clear and agreed to by all partners.
- **establish a mutual commitment to the importance of the shared activity.** Otherwise, you will encounter problems of lack of commitment and resourcing, as well as an undervaluing of the alliance.
- **establish a clear understanding about the terms of a collaborative relationship,** especially when the arrangement is seen to favour you more than the others. For example, when one partner commits more resources to a joint project than others do, it is important that all partners in a mutual project are clear about the value they derive from working together.
- **set up ground rules for communication and for working together that are acceptable to all partners.** Without effective communication and controls, the quality and responsiveness of services could be threatened.
- **recognise that there will be important differences in 'culture' between your organisation and your Indigenous partners.** These can be sources of great creativity and innovation, as well as possible threats to your objectives if handled insensitively.



See **PART C TOPIC C2 *Developing cross-cultural awareness and understanding***

Some of the traps are:

- an individual focus on task or position rather than purpose (*'this is my work and I don't need to know what anybody else is doing'*)
- a tendency to find blame externally when things go wrong, instead of realising that everyone is a part of the system and looking at the system structure to solve problems
- the illusion of 'taking charge', which is often done through making inappropriate and over-reactive decisions which usually only serve to make the problem worse
- the existence of unclear, hidden or incompatible agendas
- a fixation on events rather than processes, so that the mechanisms of networking are only used to solve immediate issues, rather than to gain a picture of the larger and longer term goals of the partnership
- an inability to perceive slow change. The important gradual shifts which are likely to have the greatest impacts in Indigenous relationships may be ignored.

How do you form a partnership with your local Indigenous stakeholders?

Effective partnerships are built on knowledge, familiarity and equality among the partners. They are also built on good communication, understanding of roles, effective negotiation, consistency and stability. Every partner has a role to play in ensuring they work.

Partnerships with Indigenous people are likely to be complex and affected by factors about which, despite your best efforts, you are not totally conversant. For example, there may be signs, symbols and histories that are understood as important by some participants and not by others. These can be located in language, arrangements and time, place, and social climate.

Accommodating these issues begins with a genuine smile, enquiring of the other partners what they'd like and what that means to them, explaining what you're up to, and honestly and openly figuring out together what suits and what can work.

Get to know your Indigenous stakeholders. That is the foundation of an effective partnership. Try developing a profile for each.



See PART B Section B1 *Developing a profile of your local Indigenous communities and organisations*

Focusing on your liaison and interviewing skills

Staff who are in contact with Indigenous communities must have high levels of liaison and interviewing skills.

These skills will include:

- listening attentively to people
- showing interest
- testing understanding through paraphrasing or asking further questions
- being open to the ways of communicating to Indigenous clients
- showing sensitivity to communication barriers which Indigenous clients may perceive
- being patient, particularly in explanations to culturally diverse clients
- demonstrating personal understanding and acceptance of differences in people.

Attitudes which facilitate interaction with culturally diverse clients and which must be addressed in training programs include:

- a sincere interest in people and a genuine desire to provide quality customer service (not to be a pseudo-social worker but to focus on their needs as a customer)
- a flexible approach to meeting client needs
- awareness of one's own biases, prejudices and stereotypes (ie. of one's own cultural background) and the ability to modify behaviour appropriately when dealing with clients.

Note that some issues may require handling with high levels of sensitivity. Get advice and help from an Indigenous staff member or community representative in regard to the right protocols.

Ask your Indigenous partners about their preferences for ways of liaising and maintaining regular contact on issues related to your mutual interests. It is sometimes unrealistic to expect Indigenous people to participate in Western-style meetings. The level of formality (derived from cultural conventions) may be off-putting, or it might be that, in some locations, contact is preferred through Elders. The best advice is to find out what the preferences of your local community are.

How do you form a partnership with your local Indigenous stakeholders? (continued)

Using an Indigenous 'champion'

If you feel that you need help in getting the message across to your Indigenous stakeholders about the benefits of partnership, try using an Indigenous mentor or 'champion'. This person needs to be an Indigenous Australian who has standing and credibility in their locality. They would need to:

- understand the community's way of thinking and have a good understanding of traditional ways
- be someone with the ability to traverse both cultures
- have local knowledge and connections and have an orientation to the employment and training field
- have awareness of the local politics between family and other indigenous groups
- be available and committed
- be aware of not breaching confidentiality and not to be a gossip
- know when to say they don't know and not claim to 'know it all'.

Preparing for rejection

An important issue is that acceptance by Indigenous community leaders will usually take considerable time and effort. You may face rejection in your early contacts – which may be communicated in a passive or aggressive manner. The rejection is unlikely to be personal; it may just be a bad time to make contact or a reaction to previous contacts by 'government' people.

An important message in this situation is to avoid being judgemental if your approaches are not being well received. No matter how good your preparation is, you will inevitably view the world from the perspective of your cultural beliefs and values. You should also acknowledge that there is a 'risk' for Indigenous communities when they engage in mainstream education. Your contacts are unlikely to have your background and experience of mainstream education and employment.

You should avoid approaching our Indigenous stakeholders with the 'perfect' solution. View the relationship as a true partnership in which your Indigenous partners will be instrumental in coming up with solutions that will work best in their situation. Like other communities, the Indigenous communities are very diverse – in terms of their aspirations, appearance, education, employment status, political views, family links, socio-economic status, etc.

Overall, be *persistent* and *consistent* with your message. Your challenge is to somehow take the Indigenous community with you.



See PART C TOPIC C2 *Developing cross-cultural awareness and understanding*



How do you get the right people on board?

Developing your networks is not just about getting the numbers. You have to make sure that you attract the right people into your network. How often do you go to the trouble to arrange a network meeting, only to find that a key stakeholder organisation does not show up or has sent the *wrong* person?

Your challenge is to engage the right people, who are often senior and busy people. Think beyond government people; Indigenous leaders have many demands on their time. If you want to gain their respect as an equal, you have to earn it! They have to deal with service providers across all aspects of their community's activities.

To ensure that your networking method and techniques are effective, it's important to implement a systematic approach to establishing the *right* network contacts.

Here's a six-step approach to assist you in building your list of key contacts:

- **Step 1:** Identify stakeholders and potential target organisations. Make a list of your target organisations and the relevant personal contacts. These are organisations and the key contacts that you would like to work with and who are likely to have a use for your organisation's services and programs to promote Indigenous training. One of the aims of the networking process is to engage the 'right' person in each of your target organisations.
- **Step 2:** Prepare your story and objectives. You will need to think of what to say to the contacts who know you and your current role, and what to say to introduce yourself and your objectives to those who are not so familiar. Remember that each contact needs to be convinced of a 'win-win' outcome. Work on a two-minute self-introduction. Perhaps use a script until you are comfortable and learn your introduction by heart.
- **Step 3:** Get the appointment – a face-to-face meeting is essential to get your contact on board. The telephone may be a starting point to source information quickly and effectively. Sometimes it may be difficult to get past a screener or 'gatekeeper'. Always be courteous and use the opportunity to practise requests that can be answered positively. Be sure to make a note of the name of anyone with whom you speak in trying to reach your contact, so that you can use the person's name comfortably on your next call.
- **Step 4:** Prepare your agenda. To retain your contact's interest and make the most of your contact's time, you must have a well thought-out agenda for each interview that you arrange. You will only have a short time to share information, so try to use each minute wisely.
- **Step 5:** Have the meeting. Think about attitude, body language and energy level. With your Indigenous contacts, ensure that your approach and demeanour are culturally sensitive. (Perhaps seek help from someone who has a successful record of dealing with Indigenous organisations). You want to present your best image and draw out the best in the contact. Perhaps agree on an agenda and time allocation to help build rapport and start off the meeting. Remember, this interview is to collect information to assist you with your work. The contact shouldn't feel under pressure in any way.
- **Step 6:** Do a post-analysis and follow up. Analyse your performance after the first few interviews and refine where necessary. You must always promptly follow up with your contacts after a meeting or a significant phone discussion. A simple thank-you note is often enough – warm and to the point. If you promise to send something, make sure you do. So often Indigenous communities are promised things, only to be let down by a lack of follow up. This will reinforce a positive recollection of you and will strengthen the person's willingness to find ways to help you.

How do you maintain your partnerships and networks?

You have done the hard work. You have built your networks and contacts. Where to from here?

Maintaining your networks requires regular contact. Analyse which method of communication your networkers respond to most effectively and follow them up.

Pay attention to your individual networkers. Consider ways – even personal ways – to recognise them.

Here are three useful steps to help you maintain the network contacts:

- **step 1** – look at your list of networkers again
- **step 2** – make a note beside each one as to their preferred communication style
- **step 3** – record important dates or events that may warrant a call or a note.

How will you build your own Indigenous networks and partnerships?

We suggest that you use this Resource Kit to prepare a strategy for building your networks or developing a new partnership with your Indigenous clients.

Step 1 – Start by analysing your existing partnerships and networks. Do they provide you with the contacts and links that you need to build your Indigenous Australian Apprenticeship business?



See **PART B Section *Developing a profile of your local Indigenous communities and organisations***

Step 2 – Make sure that you are familiar with the protocols and cultural sensitivities that should be observed to develop effective working relationships with Indigenous communities and organisations.



See **PART C TOPIC C2 *Developing cross-cultural awareness and understanding***

Step 3 – Identify a new network member (or organisation) that you would like to engage with. You will possibly need to identify several, to cover the diverse range of interests.

Step 4 – Prepare a plan for engaging these new contacts as members of your network. In planning your approach you will need to:

- define the goal and purpose of the network
 - that is, 'prepare your story'
- identify the likely interests and needs of each party
 - that is, ensure there is a 'win-win' outcome
- map out a strategy for bringing the key contact person on board.
Think about:
 - What are the appropriate 'protocols' for approaching this person?
 - What will be your communication channels?
 - Is there an Indigenous person who can arrange an introduction?
 - Do I need an interpreter when dealing with members of remote communities?
 - What is in it from the contact's perspective?
 - What will you talk about at your first contact (ie. the agenda)?
 - How will you convene and manage the contact or meeting?
 - What are the likely risks of not achieving your goal and how can you prepare for them?
 - What is your strategy for dealing with a rejection?
 - What are some alternative approaches to achieving your goal?
- have a longer term strategy in mind to acknowledge that progress may take time and test your patience. (That is, be persistent, consistent and patient.)

You can formalise the relationship into a partnership in the future if there are mutual benefits from doing so.



See **PARTS B & D for more about building your business case and developing tools to help you.**

CASE STUDIES

'School Pathways into the Mining Industry'

This initiative is part of a broader strategy of the Catholic Education Office – Townsville, called 'Journey of Success' which aims to work collaboratively with key stakeholders to:

- support the retention of Indigenous students to complete Year 12; and
- provide active and sustainable post-school pathways to further education, training and employment.

A cluster of eight Catholic schools have engaged 176 Indigenous students in a program of case management to support their needs through to Year 12 and beyond.

The 'School Pathways into the Mining Industry' involves a partnership with:

- mining and associated companies (Australian Apprenticeship and cadetship places)
- government departments and service agencies (support services and programs)
- university (cadetships)
- chambers of commerce (employer networks)
- Indigenous communities (community capacity building opportunities)

The marketing component was launched through the convening of a workshop involving all interested stakeholders. The workshop showcased some innovative programs already in place with a major local mining company.



www.ceo.tsv.catholic.edu.au (look under the 'Indigenous Education' tab)

Midwest Training Group – Indigenous Building Program

MTG Builders is a registered business name of Midwest Training Group in Western Australia. The Group runs an Indigenous building program in Geraldton which involves a partnership with the Department of Housing and Works (DHW) and the local CDEP Management.

With STEP and CDEP support, the program has completed over 16 Indigenous traineeships and apprenticeships in carpentry and joinery and other construction occupations. The program is designed to develop Indigenous people who can work with the Department of Housing and Works to maintain houses within Indigenous communities.

An independent report on the project concluded that the high retention rates achieved were assisted by:

- the fully site-based training model in which the trainees are accelerated through the learning program
- use of Aboriginal coordinators/mentors
- a mix of young and older trainees to provide initial support and to help develop confidence and self-esteem.

In 2003 MTG Builders won a prestigious Housing Industry Association award for one of its DHW projects.



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CASE STUDIES

WorkCo – Building an effective partnership

The Victorian Horsham-based group training organisation, WorkCo, has a partnership with the City of Port Phillip Council in Melbourne and the local Indigenous Community to provide Indigenous trainees to work in various parts of the Council's operations. The objective is to provide six trainees per year over a six-year period. This arrangement includes a Memorandum of Understanding with the local Indigenous community, incorporating a commitment to addressing the Council's particular service needs in a culturally appropriate manner. The memorandum also sets clear targets for Indigenous employment across most areas of the Council's operations, including:

- social development
- childcare
- parking
- corporate services

Trainees who successfully complete the Australian Apprenticeship are offered ongoing positions with the Council.



www.workco.com.au

Kimberley Group Training – Partnership in mining

Argyle Diamond Mine and Kimberley Group Training have established a strong working partnership in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia that has resulted in 60 trainees and apprentices currently being employed. The partnership is based on an Indigenous employment and training strategy and approximately 90% of participants are Indigenous.

The New Program marked the beginning of Argyle's journey towards local employment as opposed to a majority 'Fly In-Fly Out' workforce.

Partnering with Kimberley Group Training has created a solid link into the East Kimberley community. The total number of apprentices and trainees is expected to grow to approximately 85 during 2005.



www.kgt.org.au



CASE STUDIES

ESOs essential in Indigenous Communities

Group Training NT in partnership with NT Power Water, Charles Darwin University and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) is managing a program of formal training to enable Indigenous people to obtain qualifications as Essential Services Officers (ESOs) in their local community.

38 Trainees in 18 Communities are undertaking the Indigenous ESO program (Essential Services Officer Certificate II Traineeship) jointly delivered by Group Training NT (GTNT), Power Water and Charles Darwin University. ESOs previously had no practical way of becoming qualified for the work they do. Now, thanks to the program, Indigenous Australians are receiving vital training and qualifications without leaving their communities.

ESOs play a vital role in the health and wellbeing of communities by maintaining the power, water and sewerage services. As owners of the infrastructure, NT Power Water places high importance on developing local, enthusiastic and qualified officers.

The hard work has already started to pay off, with one Indigenous ESO completing his Certificate II and another soon to follow. It is expected that there will be 24 completions by the end of 2005.

This program is supported by DEWR through the STEP funding scheme and presents an excellent model for remote training delivery. It demonstrates what can be achieved through partnerships, careful planning, tailored funding and dedication.



www.gtnt.com.au

