Indigenous Employment in the Australian Rail Industry
Best Practice Guide
# Table of Contents

*Introduction* ................................................................................................................. 1

*Key Success Factors for Indigenous Employment in the Rail Industry* .......................... 3

**Focus Area 1: Organisational Commitment** .................................................................. 4
  - Case Study: Transfield Services ..................................................................................... 4
  - Case Study: BHP Billiton ................................................................................................. 5
  - Case Study: RailCorp ...................................................................................................... 6

**Focus Area 2: Partnerships** .......................................................................................... 7
  - Case Study: Alice Springs to Darwin Rail Project ......................................................... 7
  - Case Study: Public Transport Authority of WA ............................................................. 8
  - Case Study: Indigenous Owned Contracting Businesses ............................................. 8

**Focus Area 3: Recruitment Strategies** ......................................................................... 10
  - Case Study: Indigenous Employment Coordination ................................................... 11
  - Case Study: Promotional Material ................................................................................. 11
  - Case Study: Employee and Contractor Induction Programs ..................................... 11

**Focus Area 4: Retention Strategies** ............................................................................. 13
  - Case Study: Employee Networks .................................................................................. 13
  - Case Study: Sub-contracting Security Services ............................................................ 14
  - Case Study: Overcoming Racism with Cultural Awareness Workshops .................... 14

**Focus Area 5: Education & Training** .......................................................................... 16
  - Secondary School Programs ......................................................................................... 16
  - Apprenticeships and Traineeships ............................................................................... 17
  - Tertiary Programs .......................................................................................................... 17
  - Work-Ready Programs .................................................................................................. 18

*Government Financial Assistance* .................................................................................. 20
  - Wage Assistance ............................................................................................................ 20
  - STEP Program ............................................................................................................. 20
  - National Indigenous Cadetship Program .................................................................... 21
  - Corporate Leader for Indigenous Employment ............................................................ 22

*Useful Publications* ........................................................................................................ 23
Introduction
The Australasian Railway Association (ARA) is the peak body representing the interests of all rail operators, both private and government, track owners and managers, manufacturers of rolling stock and components, and other aspects of the rail industry in Australia and New Zealand. The ARA represents more than 150 member organisations. The fundamental purpose of ARA is to create an environment that will permit the Australian rail industry to prosper. One of the key issues identified by ARA that inhibits this outcome is rail skill shortages.

Employment in the Rail Industry
More than 40 000 people are employed in rail throughout urban and regional Australia in diverse operations and professional occupations. Many more people work in support industries providing goods and services to the industry.

Although the turnover of employees in rail is generally low, employees in the rail industry are older than the average workforce and during the next five to ten years there will be more workers retiring than new entrants. Many of those leaving the industry have knowledge and skills not easily replicated or purchased in the market. In addition, turnover of new recruits is up to five times higher than for any other group of workers in the industry.

The rail industry and the general working environment are in a state of transition. The workforce that has dominated the past decades is now nearing retirement. The work preferences and expectations of new entrants to the workforce are distinct and conflict, in some aspects, with the preferences of the existing workforce.

Rail Skills and Careers Council
The ARA established the Rail Skills and Careers Council (RSCC) which focuses on the human resources of rail, overseeing the efficient development of projects such as the Attraction and Retention Research Project, the Graduate Program and the School Based TAFE and Employment program.

The ARA, through the RSCC, is taking a strategic approach to lessen the risk of the rail industry not having a skilled workforce in the future by advancing industry-wide focused programs relating to:

- Attractive image – that will engage stakeholders, customers and workers of the future
- Skilling rail strategy – establishes clear guidance about training requirements and workforce planning
- Workplace relations – that ensures valuable employees remain in the rail industry
- Data collection – for monitoring the impacts of change initiatives and predicting future issues.
The Workforce Development Strategy being developed by ARA focuses on the implementation of a strategic project approach to employing the following target groups of employees:

- Women returning to the workforce
- People with disabilities
- Mature job seekers
- Indigenous Australians.

**Indigenous Employment Strategy**

The Australasian Railways Association (ARA) has received Australian Government funding for an Indigenous Employment Strategy for the Australian rail industry. The purpose of the project is to allow ARA to develop strategies which when implemented will lead to alternative forms of labour supply for the Australian rail industry.

The case studies outlined in this document are a result of research conducted of ARA Member Companies involved in Indigenous employment initiatives. Information was collected using the following primary and secondary research methods:

- Company websites
- Annual reports and other company publications (such as media releases)
- Journal articles and research reports
- Face-to-face and telephone interviews.

Information was collected from the following ARA member companies:

- Ansaldo STS
- Arup
- BHP Billiton
- Centre for Excellence in Rail Training (CERT)
- Downer EDI
- Fortescue Metals Group
- John Holland Group
- Laing O’Rourke
- Public Transport Authority of WA
- Queensland Rail
- RailCorp
- Rio Tinto/Pilbara Iron
- Sinclair Knight Merz
- Skilled Services
- Transfield Services
Key Success Factors for Indigenous Employment in the Rail Industry
There are many ways in which organisations can increase the number of Indigenous Australians employed in their businesses. A key objective of the Indigenous Employment Strategy is to identify and document the practices of organisations with significant rail interests that have successfully recruited and retained Indigenous Australians in all levels throughout their business. Throughout this document case studies of organisations involved in the transport and resources sectors have been used to highlight initiatives they are using to increase Indigenous employment across their operations.

The key success factors have been grouped into five focus areas:
1. Organisational commitment
2. Partnerships
3. Recruitment
4. Retention
5. Education and training

The final section contains a list of resources to assist organisations with developing and implementing their own Indigenous employment strategies.
Focus Area 1:  Organisational Commitment

_When operations give the same commitment to Indigenous employment initiatives as other business activities, good outcomes can be achieved in relatively short time frames._ ¹

Achieving sustainable improvements in Indigenous employment begins with commitment. Companies with successful Indigenous employment strategies have an executive leadership team that has publicly committed to improving Indigenous employment outcomes and backs this commitment by providing adequate financial and human resources. Companies communicate their commitment to staff, contractors, suppliers and shareholders through statements, policies, strategies and reconciliation action plans.

_DOWNER EDI M I N I N G W I L L E N H A N C E I T S C O M M I T M E N T T O I N D I G E N O U S P E O P L E B Y:
- Sustaining and strengthening its relationships with the Indigenous community
- Increasing and enhancing the existing Downer EDI workforce by embarking upon specific recruitment, educational and career development programs
- Acknowledging and respecting Indigenous culture and values
- Increasing awareness with the wider Downer organisation of Indigenous culture and values
- Promoting new business ventures and supporting the existing activities with Indigenous people._ ²

Ultimately the strength of an organisation’s commitment is measured by the number of Indigenous people employed within the organisation. Consequently successful organisations have processes that allow staff data to be collected and reported on. These organisations also determine Indigenous employment targets appropriate for their business and region.

Case Study: Transfield Services

During the past two years, Transfield Services has taken a number of steps to engage with Indigenous communities and Indigenous people including:

- Developing and implementing a company-wide Indigenous Relations Policy
- Becoming a signatory to the Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment Program
- Establishing the Transfield Services Indigenous Advisory Board
- Appointing an Indigenous Advisor who also chairs the Indigenous Advisory Board.

In early 2006, Transfield Services released its Indigenous Relations Strategy. This 12-month plan provided the tools and guidance to establish a foundation on which they could build a comprehensive Indigenous Participation Strategy. During 2007, Transfield Services launched

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¹ CSRM (2007) Indigenous employment in the Australian minerals industry
² Downer EDI Mining (2007) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy
the Transfield Services Indigenous Participation Strategy for 2007 to 2009. This strategy aims to boost employment, education and training opportunities for Indigenous Australians and raise awareness of Indigenous culture throughout the Company.

The Indigenous Participation Strategy outlines how Transfield will undertake a feasibility study:

... to identify the issues involved in establishing a company-specific approach to Indigenous employment and training. As part of this process, we will implement improved measures to record the number of Indigenous employees we have across our business and on each contract. We will use this information to develop target numbers for Indigenous employees.3

Case Study: BHP Billiton

According to Reconciliation Australia, BHP Billiton is a national leader in reconciliation.4 Through ongoing consultation and involvement of local Indigenous communities, organisations and key Indigenous people, each of BHP Billiton’s businesses have developed programs to meet the needs of both the business and Indigenous people. Together, these programs form the Reconciliation Action Plan.

In the 2007 Reconciliation Action Plan each business unit has set medium to long term employment targets for both their operations and their contractors based on a number of criteria including:

... how many Indigenous people versus others are living in the local and regional area, the level of unemployment, employment requirements by other employers in the region including community based organisations, government agencies and private sector organisations, and the potential number of Indigenous people that are either work ready or can receive training to make them work ready and how long this may take.5

The setting of targets is an important step in realising BHP Billiton’s vision to “help secure a better future for Indigenous people so that they are able to fully participate in and equally enjoy the benefits provided to other Australians.”

In 2000/01 BHP WA Iron Ore (Pilbara region) set a target of 12% Indigenous employment by 2010. A target of 12% was set because Indigenous people make up 12% of the Pilbara population.6 In just six years the Indigenous employment rate has increased from about 3% to more than 8% (at June 2007). Nickel west and Olympic Dam have similar targets and timeframes based on local demographics and other factors.

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4 Reconciliation Australia (2007) www.reconciliationaustralia.org
6 BHP Billiton Aboriginal Employment initiatives www.bhpbilliton.com
BHP Billiton business Indigenous employment targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WA Iron Ore</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nickel West</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympic Dam SA</td>
<td>15 people</td>
<td>end 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 people</td>
<td>June 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case Study: RailCorp

RailCorp collects Equal Employment Opportunity data through an annual survey and publishes the results in annual reports. RailCorp has set a benchmark of 2% for employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (the NSW Indigenous population is 2.1% of total population). At June 30 2006, RailCorp employed 308 Indigenous people representing 2.3% of RailCorp’s workforce.

Trends in the representation of RailCorp’s EEO groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EEO Group</th>
<th>Benchmark or Target</th>
<th>2004/05</th>
<th>2005/06</th>
<th>2006/07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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7 ABS 2001 National Regional Profile: NSW
Focus Area 2: Partnerships

The other huge advantage of the partnerships approach for Indigenous people is that it gives them a voice in planning for the future. Instead of being the passive recipients of programs that others have deemed beneficial to them, Indigenous people become partners in decision-making processes that affect their future.9

Companies are finding that it is often more efficient and effective to meet Indigenous employment targets in partnership with the Indigenous community and organisations. In addition, some companies are contracting out part of their operations to commercially run Indigenous-owned businesses.

Case Study: Alice Springs to Darwin Rail Project
The 1 420 km rail line from Alice Springs to Darwin was completed on September 17 2003. Design and construction was completed by ADrail, a joint venture between Halliburton/Kellogg Brown & Root, Barclay Mowlem, John Holland Group and McMahon Holdings. A Local Industry and Aboriginal Participation Plan resulted in the training and employment of 275 Indigenous workers (about 15% of the project’s workforce) on the Alice Springs to Darwin rail project.

John Holland Group Managing Director, Bill Wild said:

Indigenous employees worked on all areas of the railway, from civil plant operations, track laying, bridge construction and administration to construction camp operations, sleeper manufacturing, culvert construction and quarrying. Experience gained through both employment and training on the project helped Indigenous Territorians obtain future employment and broadened the skills base for Indigenous people generally in the area.10

Northern and Central Land Council, Centrecorp and the Northern Australian Aboriginal Development Corporation implemented the employment and training strategies for the rail project. Project Officers dedicated to maximising Indigenous participation in various employment activities, such as site clearance, track-laying, sleeper production and construction camp and catering services, were employed. To ensure that employment opportunities

9 CSRM Indigenous employment in the Australian minerals industry
10 John Holland Group Media Release 7 July 2005
continue, the Northern Land Council has now developed a database of Indigenous people available to work in locations across the Top End.\textsuperscript{11}

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**Case Study: Public Transport Authority of WA**

PTAWA is developing partnerships with schools with significant numbers of Indigenous students. In particular, PTAWA is developing partnerships with Sevenoaks Senior College in Perth. Sevenoaks caters for senior secondary students (Year 11 and 12) and in 2007 the College had 54 Indigenous students representing 13\% of the student population.\textsuperscript{12}

Seven Oaks College runs Aboriginal School Based Traineeships (ASBT) with college staff (Aboriginal Liaison Officers and Aboriginal Islander Education Officers) providing on-going support for the student and the employer. PTAWA intends offering work placements for ASBT students in Semester 2, 2008. PTAWA view this as an important way in growing relationships with Aboriginal students, their families and communities. PTAWA is also investigating the Adopt-A-School program and running tours of their facilities for Year 11 and 12 students.\textsuperscript{13}

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**Case Study: Indigenous Owned Contracting Businesses**

Established in 1995 by Aboriginal businessman Daniel Tucker, \textbf{Carey Mining} provides two main services: a full range of mining services and it recruits, trains and supplies labour. In both instances the company helps its clients build local stakeholder relationships. Carey Mining has substantial contracts with major companies. For example Main Roads WA contracted Carey Mining to train and employ Indigenous people to work on the metro rail project.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Ngarda Civil & Mining} provides earthmoving, civil engineering and contract mining services in the North West of WA. Ngarda is dedicated to the employment, training and total integration of Indigenous people in its operations. Ngarda employs 160 Indigenous people (total workforce is 200). The company’s client list includes BHP Billiton Iron Ore, Boodarie Iron, Pilbara Iron, Woodside, Newcrest and Aditja Birla. Last financial year Ngarda turned over just under $50M.

\textbf{CDE Capital}, an Indigenous civil and mining contractor, has more than 30 years experience delivering construction projects throughout Australia. About 80\% of CDE’s permanent workforce is Indigenous. CDE Capital provides meaningful training and employment

\textsuperscript{11} Journal Article 2003 \url{www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AILR/2003/1.html#Heading385}

\textsuperscript{12} Sevenoaks Senior College, Schools On-Line, Education Department of WA

\textsuperscript{13} Robin Austen, Access & Equity Officer, PTAWA, personal communication 19 March 08

opportunities for the local communities in which they work and on some projects have recruited up to 50% of the workforce from the local Indigenous community.\textsuperscript{15}
Focus Area 3: Recruitment Strategies

Modern Human Resource practice is based on systems, procedures and practices that treat all people the same and produce standardised information. However, all people are not the same and traditional recruitment practices are primarily geared towards non-Indigenous urban dwellers. Consequently traditional HR systems and processes can create barriers and, often inadvertently, discriminate against Indigenous people seeking to enter the mainstream workforce.

Leading companies in the Australian minerals industry have been successful in recruiting Indigenous workforce by adapting their recruiting programs. These adaptations include:

- Focusing more on face-to-face rather than written communication with potential applicants
- Using selection centre workshops to identify individual skills and abilities
- Adopting flexible strategies to manage problems with drug and alcohol use
- Providing cultural awareness training for all recruits, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, as part of the induction process.

The following table summarises the difference between the mainstream approach and good practice Indigenous recruitment processes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Mainstream</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertise/promote</td>
<td>Advertise in mainstream newspapers</td>
<td>Utilise Indigenous networks for advertising (incl Indigenous newspapers, organisations and employees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advertise internally</td>
<td>Work with local Indigenous organisations to identify potential applicants &amp; organise community visits to talk about the company, the jobs and how to apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post ads on company websites and on-line recruitment sites</td>
<td>Post ads on notice boards in the community and Indigenous organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utilise large HR companies based in capital cities</td>
<td>Utilise companies that specialise in Indigenous employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications/resumes</td>
<td>Applicant submits in hard copy or electronically</td>
<td>Prepared in hard copy or electronically Provide assistance with completing forms/resumes Collect applications during community visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-list</td>
<td>Assess applications and resumes</td>
<td>Assess applications and resumes Reference checks, local knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telephone interviews, reference checks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>Final short list drawn up</td>
<td>Selection centre workshops to determine short list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview by HR officer and relevant manager/supervisor</td>
<td>Interview to also include Indigenous staff member or community representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychometric test</td>
<td>Culturally appropriate psychometric tests</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 CSRM Indigenous employment in the Australian minerals industry
Medical, drug & alcohol tests
Best candidate chosen

Medical, drug & alcohol tests that includes appropriate feedback and follow up
Use affirmative action policies to allow Indigenous people who meet a range of acceptable levels for the role to be selected, rather than just the ‘best candidate’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offer of employment</th>
<th>Successful applicants informed in writing</th>
<th>Successful applicants informed in writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unsuccessful applicants informed in writing</td>
<td>Unsuccessful applicants are briefed and supported appropriately as required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Induction | Induction covers policies & procedures, rights & responsibilities, reporting requirements, OHS etc | Induction program also includes cultural awareness and, where appropriate, Aboriginal heritage issues |

Adapted from CSRMI Indigenous employment in the Australian minerals industry (2007)

Case Study: Indigenous Employment Coordination
Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM) offers Indigenous Employment Coordination on major infrastructure projects to clients in the minerals, petroleum, heavy industries, water, rail and road sectors.

Indigenous Employment Coordination includes providing Indigenous training and employment guidance and advice on:

- Indigenous cadetship, traineeship and apprenticeship policies and strategies
- Indigenous employment policies and strategies
- Utilising local/and or regional Indigenous businesses
- Identifying positions that may be filled by Indigenous employees
- Mentoring programs for Indigenous employees
- Cultural awareness training for office and site personnel
- Application and engagement of government indigenous programs

Case Study: Promotional Material
RailCorp are developing a range of booklets to showcase their staff and occupational groups. The first booklet features Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and will be followed by a series of others including both occupational groups and young people under 30.

Case Study: Employee and Contractor Induction Programs
Cultural awareness is included in new employee induction programs at the majority of BHP Billiton’s business operation sites. Often the programs are tailored to meet the specific needs of sites and individuals.

17 SKM website www.skmconsulting.com/Markets/Indigenous_Services/Employment/employment.htm
18 RailCorp Annual report 2006/07
**Employee orientation.** For all new employees. Aboriginal Affairs Department and Human Resources staff presentation on employment, contracting and education strategy, as well as cultural heritage compliance, commitments and protocols

**Aboriginal heritage induction.** For all new employees and contractors. The objective is to promote traditional rights of Indigenous people and valuing cultural heritage through protection and management of heritage sites.

**Indigenous employee workshops.** The 2-day workshops are attended by Indigenous employees and supervisors of Indigenous employees. Presenters are Indigenous people (consultants) and the focus is on employee and employer obligations, standards and commitments, financial planning, cultural obligations, differing values and priorities.
Focus Area 4: Retention Strategies

Our statistics show us that our employee retention, Aboriginal employee retention, is better than non-Aboriginal retention. People said to us, “You can’t rely on Aboriginals, they go walk about”. But that’s not what the statistics show. The statistics show that they stay longer than other employees do. Incidentally, turnover is normal. We have greater than 15% turnover on all our mines in northern Australia. It is normal for people to leave a job and go and work somewhere else.\(^{20}\)

The factors influencing Indigenous and non-Indigenous turnover rates include economic conditions, job characteristics, personal factors and social and cultural factors. For Indigenous employees, personal, social and cultural factors have a greater impact than economic factors or job characteristics. Within the minerals industry, successful retention strategies implemented to reduce staff turnover, especially in the first 12 months, include:

- Provision of ongoing mentoring and support networks
- More flexible work rosters
- Provision of career development opportunities
- Provision of family support
- Addressing racism and prejudice in the workplace.\(^{21}\)

Support programs are especially important for Indigenous people who have a lack of prior experience in the mainstream workforce. Developing the necessary knowledge, skill, experience, confidence and self esteem in Indigenous people to want to participate in the mainstream workforce has been achieved with work readiness programs and mentoring. Career development opportunities and addressing racism in the workplace contribute to a more supportive work environment, encouraging more Indigenous employees to stay. Successful retention initiatives are generally implemented in partnership with Indigenous organisations.

Case Study: Employee Networks

From 1999 RailCorp had an Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Network Committee (ATSINC) which provided a support network for Indigenous employees. The Committee met monthly to

\(^{20}\) Bruce Harvey (c2005), Rio Tinto Chief Advisor, Aboriginal and Community Relations cited in the ‘The Corporate Citizen’ Vol 5 (2)
\(^{21}\) CSRM Indigenous employment in the Australian minerals industry
work on Indigenous employment and workplace issues, as well as particular projects such as the annual conference for Indigenous employees and NAIDOC events.\textsuperscript{22}

In 2006/07 RailCorp established five Diversity Networks including one for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The ATSI Diversity Network continued to provide ongoing support for Indigenous staff including an annual ATSI Employee Conference. Representatives from each Diversity Network and the operational groups form the ‘Equity and Diversity Steering Committee’. The Steering Committee advises the CEO on potential barriers to equity and strategies to overcome these barriers.\textsuperscript{23}

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**Case Study: Sub-contracting Security Services**

Indigenous people are a major client group for the Public Transport Authority WA as they are regular users of passenger trains throughout WA, especially in non-peak periods. PTAWA has engaged Chubb Protective Services to provide six Aboriginal Liaison Officers who work full-time on the urban railway lines in Perth. The ‘arms-length’ relationship of the ALOs can assist in alleviating potential problems with clients as the staff are not direct employees of PTA. However, as employees of Chubb the ALOs are not included in PTA’s Indigenous participation rate.\textsuperscript{24}

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**Case Study: Overcoming Racism with Cultural Awareness Workshops**

Promoting cultural awareness amongst employees, contractors and other key stakeholders is a key focus area for BHP Billiton. Cultural awareness workshops and training provides the basis for improving understanding and relationships with Indigenous communities along with helping to facilitate better outcomes for Indigenous training, employment and business development. The cultural awareness training that BHP undertake also has an important role to play in increasing the general awareness of their employees, contractors and others of the significance of cultural heritage and the need for its proper management.

**BHP Billiton WA Iron Ore** – since 2000 more than 2,700 employees, contractors and invited community representatives have attended the 1-day cultural awareness workshop. These workshops are delivered under contract by Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre, in conjunction with relevant Indigenous custodians.

**Nickel West** – all employees and long-term contractors attend a half-day cross cultural training awareness course facilitated by traditional Indigenous people from the region. In addition Nickel West also conduct a course for staff at Manager level and above and employees who’s

\textsuperscript{22} NSW Public Sector Making it our business. Improving Aboriginal employment in the NSW public sector and RailCorp Annual report 2004/05

\textsuperscript{23} RailCorp Annual report 2006/07

\textsuperscript{24} Robin Austen, Access & Equity Officer, PTAWA, personal communication, 19 March 08
roles are identified as being critical to the Indigenous Participation Strategy and who largely interact with the Indigenous community. The 2-day course incorporates a day on country with traditional Indigenous people building on the foundations of the one-day session.

**Groote Island Manganese Company** (GEMCO) – cultural awareness training in partnership with Anindilyakwa Land Council for employees, contractors, service providers and partners. Specific Courses include 1-day course for staff, 2-day course for staff at the level of Supervisor and above and 1-day Reverse cross-cultural course for Indigenous employees.

GEMCO also run a number of other awareness programs including:

- **Team Building Leadership Camp** - All Aboriginal employees and direct supervisors and some of the management team go on country for a 2-day team building and leadership program.
- **Community Awareness Sessions** - Provides community members with an overview of the importance of the relationship with the Aboriginal community and the obligations and legal responsibilities of the individual community members. These sessions are designed for partners of GEMCO and contractors who live in Alyangula.
- **Management Awareness** – all staff at supervisor level and above attend a 2-day corporate ‘cultural survey’ that incorporates Indigenous elements. Takes place on country.
Focus Area 5: Education & Training

*I've heard once before nobody up here is willing to work. I mean, that's not true. A lot of other companies, if they really worked hard instead of spending all their money training up people in the Philippines, put a little bit more energy into what we've got around us, Australia would be a different place.*25

With record unemployment and a national skills shortage, organisations are taking a greater and more active role in skilling their workforce by:

- Up-skilling and retaining current employees, and
- Improving the pool of potential employees.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to increasing the Indigenous workforce participation rates, especially in regional and remote areas, is poor education levels. However, this disadvantage is being overcome at many levels (schools, TAFEs, universities, workplace) through strategic partnering with Indigenous organisations, governments and education and training providers.

Secondary School Programs

**Gumala Mirnuwarni** A programme providing intensive educational support and mentoring for Indigenous secondary school students based in Karratha and Roebourne. Delivered as a partnership between government education departments, Rio Tinto Iron Ore and Woodside.26

**Aboriginal School Based Traineeships** ASBTs provide the opportunity for senior secondary students to start a traineeship whilst also completing Year 11 and 12. The Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) run a school based traineeship program for Aboriginal students in regional NSW and WA. AES report a 90% success rate for completion of the traineeship due to the mentoring support they provide to both the trainee and the host employer.

The program fulfils a business need by providing the host employer with a source of young and enthusiastic employees. On leaving school many of the trainees go on to full-time employment with the same employer.27 Rio Tinto and BHP also employ school based trainees.

**Indigenous Australian Engineering Summer School** Established by Engineering Aid (a non-profit organisation), IAESS is an annual 5-day live-in Summer School that gives 20 Indigenous Year 11 and 12 students a taste of engineering as a university course and career. Since this program began in 1998, at least 23 students from the program have gone on to study engineering at university. IAESS is fully sponsored by a range of government departments, private donors and

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25 Damien Ardagh, VTEC Training Manager, Fortescue Metals quoted in SBS Living Black 15 September 2007
26 www.riotintoironore.com/ENG/careers/183_indigenous_employment.asp
private companies. ARA member companies who have supported the IAESS include Arup, Rio Tinto, Sinclair Knight Merz, Parsons Brinckerhoff and Transfield Services. 28

Apprenticeships and Traineeships

Investment in Aboriginal Relationships Program In 2000, BHP introduced a pre-apprenticeship program because Indigenous people appeared not to be applying for apprenticeships and traineeships. The Company assumed that local Indigenous people were either not interested in applying for positions or thought they would not be able to pass the initial selection process. However, that assumption was challenged in the first year of the program as a number of local Indigenous applicants were successful in gaining apprenticeships in their own right, without needing to do the pre-apprenticeship program

For applicants who miss out on gaining an apprenticeship, the one-year program helps them develop their ability to succeed in the following year’s intake. As a consequence, Indigenous apprentice and trainee numbers rose from about 2 in 2000 to 55 in 2004. Aboriginal people are undertaking apprenticeships at BHP in engineering, mechanical and electrical trades and traineeships in clerical and mine production roles. 29

Tertiary Programs

National Indigenous Cadetship Project The NICP is an Australian Government program that aims to improve the professional employment prospects of Indigenous Australians studying a Diploma or Bachelor degree. In 2006/07, 234 cadets commenced under the project, bringing the total number of commencements since 1999 to more than 1,290. 30

Rio Tinto NICP Signing up in 1999, Rio Tinto was one of the first private sector organisations to support the NICP. Rio Tinto provides opportunities for university students studying many disciplines including:

- Engineering (eg civil, mining, chemical, mechanical, electrical)
- Science (eg. metallurgy, chemistry, geology, archaeology, environmental)
- Other degrees (eg. anthropology, human resources, IT, accounting, business)

Since 1999, 11 Rio Tinto cadets have graduated and gained employment including six who have taken up graduate roles with Rio Tinto. Seven cadets are currently undertaking cadetships with Rio Tinto. In addition, Rio Tinto Iron Ore provides scholarships for Aboriginal students in the Pilbara to study at the university of their choice. The scholarships cover all major expenses associated with tertiary study. 31

Sinclair Knight Mertz NICP The Indigenous Cadetship Program (ICP) is a signature project for SKM. Currently SKM supports 15 cadets in their Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and

28IAESS www.newcastle.edu.au/faculty/engineering/events/indigenous-summer-school/
30 Department of Employment & Workplace Relations Annual report 2006-07
31 www.riotinto.com/careers/221_australian-national_indigenous_cadetship_project.asp
Adelaide offices. Five of the current cadets are studying an engineering discipline; the other 10 cadets are studying law, commerce, architecture, town planning and human resources.

In addition to the paid work placement, SKM offer their cadets training, workplace rotations, mentoring and an annual ICP Conference when all cadets come together. For the 12-week work placements, cadets work within relevant areas of SKM and also with client companies. Jack Pearson said ICP has been very successful because the cadets are fully supported by SKM staff throughout their study. Jack also said the annual cadet conference was well received by cadets and was important for peer support and networking. With the support of participating organisations for work placements, SKM would like to build its cadet numbers up to 100.\(^\text{32}\)

**Arup** Joining the NICP program about 10 years ago, Arup has trained 10 Indigenous students studying engineering. The cadets are placed in teams and mentored by a qualified engineer. The cadets usually work on projects within their discipline of engineering but they are allowed to rotate through different fields of work if they wish. Arup use the NICP program to link with Indigenous Australians.\(^\text{33}\)

**Work-Ready Programs**

**RailCorp Pre-employment Program** In partnership with TAFE, RailCorp is currently piloting a pre-employment program for Indigenous Australians. Recognising that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience educational, economic and social disadvantages, this program helps participants to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to compete for customer service assistant positions through the usual recruitment process. Job offers to successful candidates of this program will be made in 2007-08.\(^\text{34}\)

**Ashburton Work Start Program** This initiative is a result of a partnership based in Tom Price and Paraburdoo between SKILLED, Rio Tinto Iron Ore, Shire of Ashburton, Job Futures/North West Jobs, Pilbara Gascoyne Population Health, Pilbara TAFE and Ashburton Aboriginal Corporation. Launched in September 2006 the program is designed to provide the local Indigenous communities with training and skills to secure full time employment specifically within the mining industry.

Currently there are 12 people in the program which offers educational support such as reading and writing, as well as a 12-week job ready course that assists with submitting resumes and attending job interviews. Those who complete the course are employed by SKILLED as Haulpak operators and storespeople for Pilbara Iron, the Shire of Ashburton or found suitable local work.\(^\text{35}\)

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\(^{32}\) Jack Pearson, Practice Leader Indigenous Engagement, SKM personal communication, 02 April 08  
\(^{33}\) Engineers Australia (2007) Attracting more Indigenous Australians to engineering  
\(^{34}\) RailCorp Annual Report 2006/07  
\(^{35}\) SKILLED’s Pilbara partnership wins state award December 2007
**Vocational Training and Employment Centre** Jointly funded by Fortescue Metals Group (FMG) and the Australian Government, VTEC provides training and education for Aboriginal participants, as well as a guaranteed offer of employment for successful trainees. VTEC boasts a retention rate of at least 60%.

In 2007, the Centre for Excellence in Rail Training (CERT)\(^{36}\) provided training in tracklaying for 25 Aboriginal people at VTEC. The 20 graduates were subsequently employed by project partner Laing O’Rourke to lay FMG’s new railway line in the Pilbara region.

VTEC manager Damien Ardagh said employers valued the program for taking the legwork out of the training process and for providing a ready talent pool of workers, while trainees and their families had expressed appreciation that others were taking the time to try and understand where they were coming from and treating them as individuals rather than as statistics. “These people are important,” he said. “They’re not just here to make up the numbers and they’re not just about employment targets.”\(^{37}\)

\(^{36}\) Stuart Pottinger, RTO Manager CERT, personal communication 08 April 08

\(^{37}\) Damien Ardagh, VTEC Training Manager quoted in SBS Living Black 15 September 2007
**Government Financial Assistance**

The Australian Government’s Indigenous Employment Policy provides flexible packages of assistance including:

- Wage Assistance.
- Structured Training and Employment Projects (STEP).
- National Indigenous Cadetship Project (NICP).
- Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment Project.

**Wage Assistance**

Wage Assistance is a payment given to employers as an incentive to employ Indigenous Australians on an on-going basis. Wage Assistance is used mainly by small private sector businesses and is available for apprentices and trainees as well as other employees. It is also available to public and community sector employers.

Wage Assistance offers salary subsidies to employers of up to:

- $4,400 for full-time work or
- $2,200 for ongoing part-time work of at least 15 hours per week.

**STEP Program**

The Structured Training and Employment Projects (STEP) Program provides flexible funding for packages of tailored assistance to help employers give long term jobs to Indigenous Australians. The level of funding depends on the type of organisation and services needed to ensure ongoing employment. It takes into account the job readiness of the applicant, the type of training received and training to be given, the duration of the job and where it is located.

STEP funding can cover the following:

- training, including apprenticeships and traineeships, on the job training, school based apprenticeships and cross-cultural awareness training
- development of an Indigenous employment strategy
- mentoring
- help with employment costs.

Numerous businesses have accessed STEP funding for different projects including the following ARA member organisations:

**RailCorp** - train and offer ongoing employment to 15 Indigenous Australians as customer service attendants and presentation service attendants in Sydney.

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Queensland Rail (QR) - initiate the QR Indigenous Employment Strategy by recruiting eight Indigenous Australians as apprentices and two Indigenous Australians as trainees within a variety of QR business units.

Transfield Services - undertake a feasibility study to identify current and future employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians across the company’s operations.

Rio Tinto Services - provide pre-employment training, apprenticeships and traineeships with the company, its subsidiaries and sub contractors for 80 Indigenous Australians in various sites across Queensland and NSW. Rio Tinto Services Ltd will employ and train 60 Indigenous Australians as trainees/apprentices at Comalco Aluminium Ltd’s Weipa operations.

John Holland Group - employ 100 Indigenous Australians in the roles of apprenticeships, traineeships and other general roles across Australia. The company will also employ an Indigenous Employment Coordinator to develop and ensure the success of the company’s Indigenous Recruitment and Employment Strategy.

BHP Billiton Iron Ore - provide employment for 50 Indigenous Australians recruited at its mining operations in the Pilbara region of WA.

Pilbara Iron Company (Services) - provide training and employment for 61 Pilbara based Indigenous Australians with the aim of increasing the rate of employment of Indigenous personnel to 15%.

Fortescue Metals Group - provide employment for 80 full-time and 40 part-time Indigenous Australians at its mining operations in the Pilbara.

National Indigenous Cadetship Program
The National Indigenous Cadetship Project (NICP) aims to improve the professional employment prospects of Indigenous Australians studying a Diploma or Bachelor degree. The Government provides employers with payments to cover administrative costs as well as an allowance to be paid to the cadet while they are studying.

Companies recruit cadets from a discipline that will benefit them. The employer then provides the cadet with a 12-week paid work placement for each full year of the cadetship, ensuring that the work duties complement the cadet’s course of study.

Employers have found the project very useful in exposing their company to prospective employees. Once students complete their university degree they often gain employment with the employer who gave them the cadetship.
Many ARA member companies have signed up with the NICP including Arup, Baulderstone Hornibrook, BHP Billiton, Fortescue Metals Group, Leighton Contractors, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Rio Tinto, Sinclair Knight Merz and Thiess.

**Corporate Leader for Indigenous Employment**

The Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment Project encourages private sector companies to generate job opportunities for Indigenous Australians. It allows them to use elements of the Australian Government’s Indigenous Employment Programme to develop and tailor their Indigenous employment strategies to meet their business needs.

Companies become part of a team of innovative private sector organisations who have access to the best Indigenous employment strategies and practices. Other benefits include:

- expanding your talent pool by tapping into a growing Indigenous workforce
- enhancing your reputation as a good corporate citizen
- developing a workforce which better reflects your customer base
- accessing to networking forums and targeted resources
- opportunities for public recognition in the annual Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment Awards.

A flexible package of funding is available to all Corporate Leader organisations. The funding can be tailored to your business needs and may assist you develop and implement a strategy that could, for example, include assistance for pre-employment training, mentoring or cross-cultural awareness training.

ARA member companies that have already signed up to be Corporate Leaders include Baulderstone Hornibrook, BHP Billiton, John Holland Group, Laing O’Rourke, Leighton Contractors, Rio Tinto, Thiess and Transfield Services.
Useful Publications


This publication highlights some partnerships between the resources sector and Indigenous communities in WA. Contributing companies including BHP, Rio Tinto, Downer EDI and Newmont, describe how they have achieved success in Indigenous employment, business development, education and training, cultural awareness training and community projects.


A key finding of this study is that when operations give the same commitment to Indigenous employment initiatives as other business activities, good outcomes are achieved in relatively short time frames. This paper explains the factors that lead to lower workforce participation of Indigenous people and implications for employers (the Indigenous diversity challenge). This paper is full of good practice examples including organisational commitment, culturally appropriate recruitment and retention strategies and contractor issues.


These guidelines provide a framework to assist Indigenous Contracting Businesses understand BHP Billiton Iron Ore’s approach to identifying and assessing business opportunities that are available to them. Iron Ore’s desire is that its Indigenous contracting opportunities will enable Indigenous Contracting Businesses to grow and become autonomous, profitable businesses that can sustain their commercial operations by servicing a range of customers.


This handbook provides guidance for resource developers on how to work effectively with Indigenous communities. This handbook provides case studies to illustrate how companies have engaged successfully with Indigenous communities in a range of contexts.