



Australian Government



Jobs and Skills Australia

Jobs and Skills Australia

First Nations Workforce Strategy

2025–28

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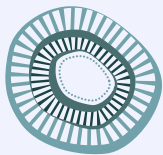
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Jobs and Skills Australia First Nations Workforce Strategy 2025–2028



Acknowledgement of Country

JSA respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, waters, and community. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures, and the Elders past and present, including within JSA, in our communities and among those we collaborate with to deliver our work.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are advised that this document may contain links to images or names of people who have passed away.

Appreciation of support

It takes many voices to develop the JSA First Nations Workforce Strategy 2025-2028 (the strategy) and JSA appreciates the expertise, advocacy, experience, and guidance that has, and continues to be provided by Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, leaders, networks, champions and representatives.

We look forward to continuing our yarns and connections to progress our cultural development journey and to improve JSA's approaches in the attraction, recruitment, development, and retention of First Nations peoples.

Terms used

JSA respectfully uses the terms 'First Nations', 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' and 'Indigenous' within the strategy to refer to the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. We acknowledge that other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural names may be preferred.

About the artist and artwork

Bec Salcole is a Wiradjuri artist who seeks to tell the story of Murtu Yayngiliyn (Walking Together) of how government, guided by the cultural advisory panel, can work in genuine partnership with communities.

The artwork is not just a visual piece but a reflection of our commitment to building relationships based on respect, collaboration, and shared purpose. It stands as a testament to the power of co-design and the importance of walking together to create meaningful outcomes.

The artwork is a representation of our work and connections to community, government and Country. Her representation is significant as every element has meaning and is an important part of Jobs and Skills Australia's (JSA) commitment to working with our stakeholders to integrate, and respect First Nations cultures through all that we do.



Commissioner's foreword

It is with pleasure that I present the JSA First Nations Workforce Strategy 2025–2028. As the executive champion of this strategy, I am honoured to stand alongside our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues, communities, and partners in our shared journey toward equity, inclusion, and reconciliation.

This strategy is more than a document - it is a reflection of our values, our aspirations, and our unwavering commitment to creating a workplace where First Nations peoples feel seen, heard, and empowered. It lays out a clear and purposeful path for the next three years, one that is grounded in cultural respect, genuine partnership, and meaningful action.

We are proud to align our efforts with the broader Commonwealth approach to improving employment outcomes for First Nations peoples, and with Priority Reform Three of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap - transforming government organisations to better serve and reflect Indigenous communities.

In concert with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Closing the Gap Strategy 2024–2027 and Reconciliation Action Plan 2025–2027, our strategy is a call to action: to uplift cultural capability, to strengthen pathways for First Nations employment and leadership, and to ensure our workplace is a place of belonging.

We know that reconciliation is not a destination - it is a journey. And while we have much more to do, I am proud of the steps we have already taken. Initiatives such as the Murtu Yayingilyyn (Walking Together) Project, the Intersectional Labour Market Analysis Community of Practice, and the inclusion of an EL2 First Nations staff member on our Executive Committee are powerful examples of our commitment in action.

We are also advancing important work through the First Nations VET Workforce Paper, the First Nations Research Program Scoping, and the Insecure Work Project, alongside the implementation of the Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data (GID) and the development of the Indigenous Atlas Tab. These efforts are supported by the establishment of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Working Group, which continues to drive change across JSA.

As we move forward, I invite each of us - individually and collectively - to reflect on the impact we can have. Let us ask ourselves: *How are we walking together with First Nations peoples? How are we listening, learning, and leading with respect and humility?* Because the work of reconciliation belongs to all of us.

Let us continue to walk together - with purpose, with compassion, and with a shared commitment to justice and opportunity for First Nations peoples.



Professor Barney Glover AO
Commissioner
Jobs and Skills Australia

Our commitment

We recognise the rich and essential contributions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples bring to our workforce and commit to supporting and growing our First Nations workforce through:

- building our cultural capability and responsiveness and ensuring a supportive and safe environment for First Nations peoples to feel comfortable in their identity and culture
- ensuring commitment is embedded and demonstrated through leaders' deliverables and business-as-usual work
- committing to achieving a trusted reputation as an employer of choice for First Nations peoples
- having meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and networks and walking together to achieve positive outcomes
- improving our practices and approaches relating to the attraction, recruitment, development and retention of First Nations peoples
- increasing JSA's First Nations employee representation from 3.4% (30 September 2025) to at least 5% by 2028.



Background

Who we are

JSA engages, advises and assists the Australian Government and other stakeholders in decision-making on the current, emerging, and future skills and workforce needs of the Australian economy. This includes regional, rural, and remote Australia, and the development of new industries and technologies.

We provide high quality data, analysis, and insights to better understand Australia's skills and labour shortages across the economy and engagement is central to the way we work and achieve our priorities.

We are an independent secondary statutory body within the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) where we have access to a variety of corporate services and work closely with DEWR colleagues on many aspects of our work.

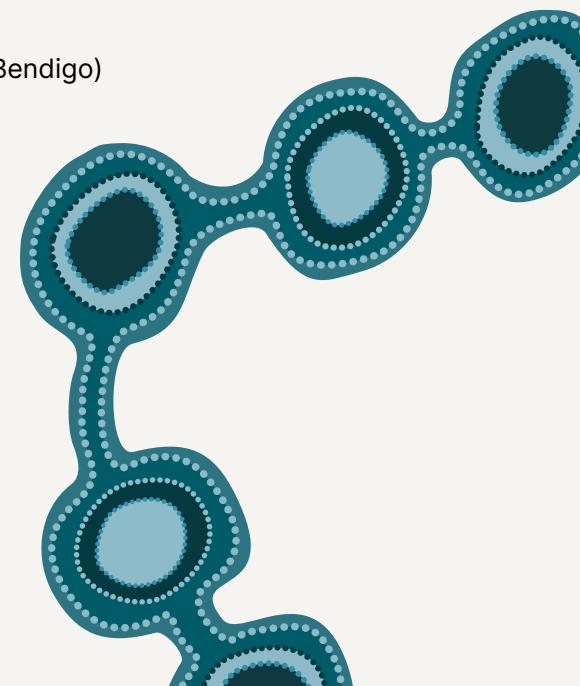
Where we are

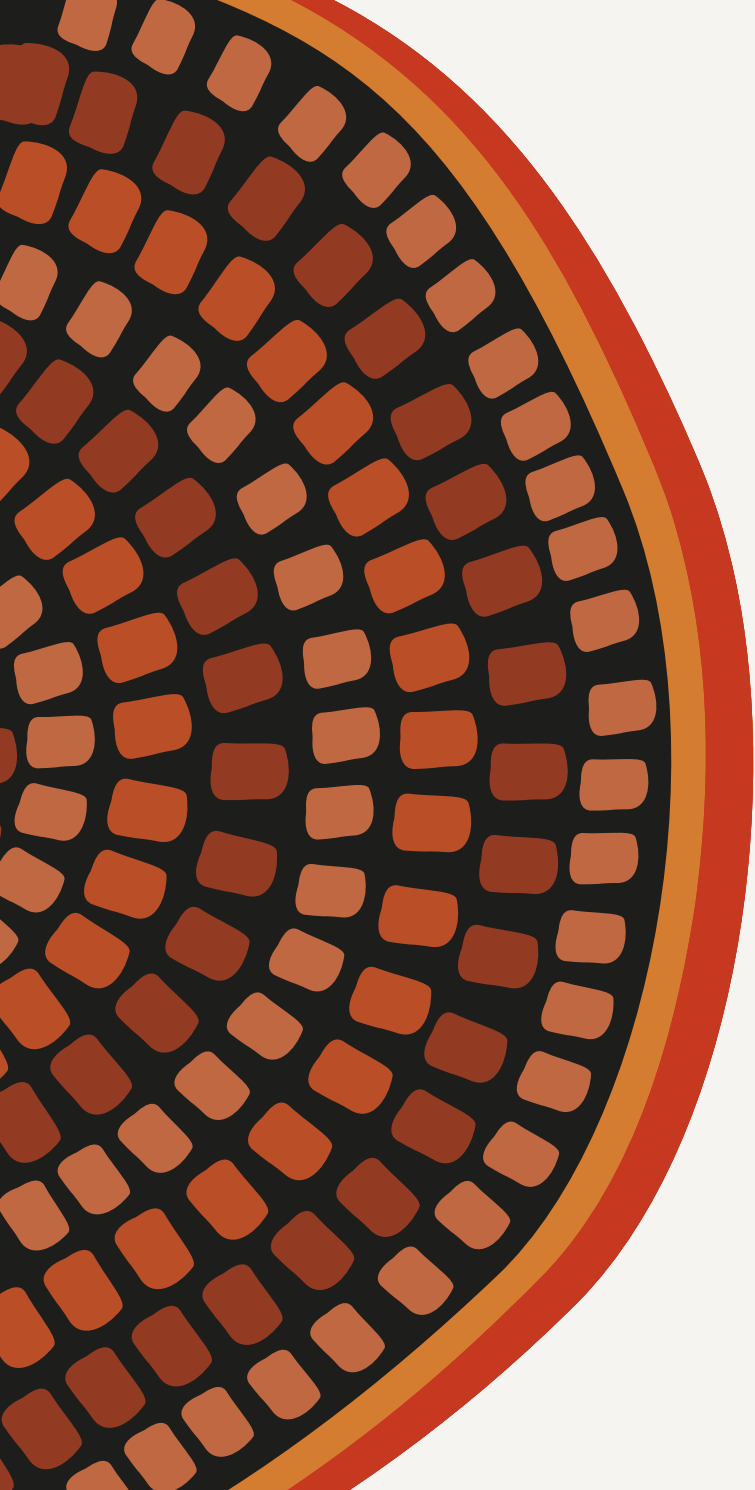
Our broad national footprint is critical for us to work closely with our stakeholders and to attract diverse talent from across urban, regional, rural, and remote locations. We value our First Nations employees being able to work and be connected to Country.

We acknowledge that the use of traditional place names for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can be based on language, people and places. We use these names interchangeably to best pay respect to Country and mob.

As of 30 September, we have 208 staff (including contractors) working across all Australian states and territories, with offices in:

- Boorloo, Whadjuk Noongar Country (Perth)
- Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung, Peoples of the Kulin Nation (Bendigo)
- Gulumoerrgin, Larrakia Country (Darwin)
- Gurambilbara Wulgurukaba and Bindal Country (Townsville)
- Meanjin/Magandjin, Yagara and Turrbal Country (Brisbane)
- Muloobinba, Awabakal & Worimi Country (Newcastle)
- Naarm, Lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong Boon Wurrung Peoples (Melbourne)
- Nipaluna, Nipaluna Country (Hobart)
- Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country (Canberra)
- Tarndanya, Kaurna Country (Adelaide)
- Warrane, Gadigal Country (Sydney).





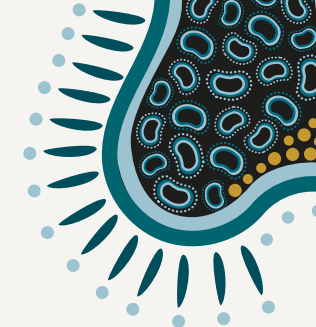
Diversity and Inclusion

We are committed to improving inclusive practices and approaches to ensure that staff from diverse and different backgrounds, perspectives and abilities feel welcomed, safe, supported, and are valued. We have established the following initiatives which includes members from across JSA staffing levels and branches:

- JSA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Working Group
- JSA Staff Leadership Dialogue
- JSA Intersectional Labour Market Analysis Community of Practice.

Staff are also members or play lead roles in many of DEWR Networks (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, Dis/Ability and Carers, First Nations, Gender Equity, Neurodiversity, and Pride). We recognise and appreciate our staff's contribution to the groups and networks, and this will continue to be encouraged and supported by leaders.

The strategy



Purpose

The purpose of the strategy is to create a strong foundation and action plan with input and guidance from a variety of First Nations staff and stakeholders to be delivered and reviewed over a three-year period across the following focus areas:

1. Cultural inclusion and safety
2. Leadership accountability and responsibility
3. Talent attraction and recruitment
4. Retention
5. Careers, development and growth.

Actions against these focus areas will assist us to:

- uplift cultural capability across JSA and be recognised as a culturally safe and inclusive place to work
- improve approaches with attracting, developing and retaining existing First Nations staff by embedding appropriate culturally safe recruitment practices for Affirmative Measure exercises, workplace practices, support systems, and development opportunities to ensure we can monitor progress, identify gaps, and celebrate achievements in creating a workplace where First Nations staff feel valued, supported and empowered to thrive
- increase the representation of First Nations employees across JSA.

Strategic alignment

The strategy and actions align with:

- Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy 2020-24
- Strategic focus areas, targets and outcomes within the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including Priority Reform Three: Closing the Gap in Partnership – Transforming Government Organisations
- APS Reform: Priority Three – An APS that is a model employer – The APS sets the standard for First Nations employment and cultural competency
- DEWR Closing the Gap Strategy (2024-2027) – principles of engage, embrace and evolve
- DEWR Reconciliation Action Plan (2025-2027) – pillars of relationships, respect, and opportunities
- APSC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework – becoming culturally capable through knowing, doing, being
- JSA Strategic Plan 2024-2027 and annual Work Plans.



Considerations

Our approach needs to reframe the view of ‘cultural load’ to ‘cultural responsibility’ and ‘colonial load’ and shift mindsets and actions to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are embedded in our work and not framed as a problem to be fixed, but a source of richness, wisdom, strength, and resilience¹.

We recognise that further growth and maturity is needed to successfully attract, recruit, develop, and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. We need to walk with and listen to their voices to help build cultural capability and responsiveness. Our actions cannot simply be an overlaying or tweaking of business-as-usual practices.

Overall, the strategy has been developed to address imbalances, understand the ‘why’ before the ‘what’, support JSA to be a culturally safe and welcoming workplace, and increase representation and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

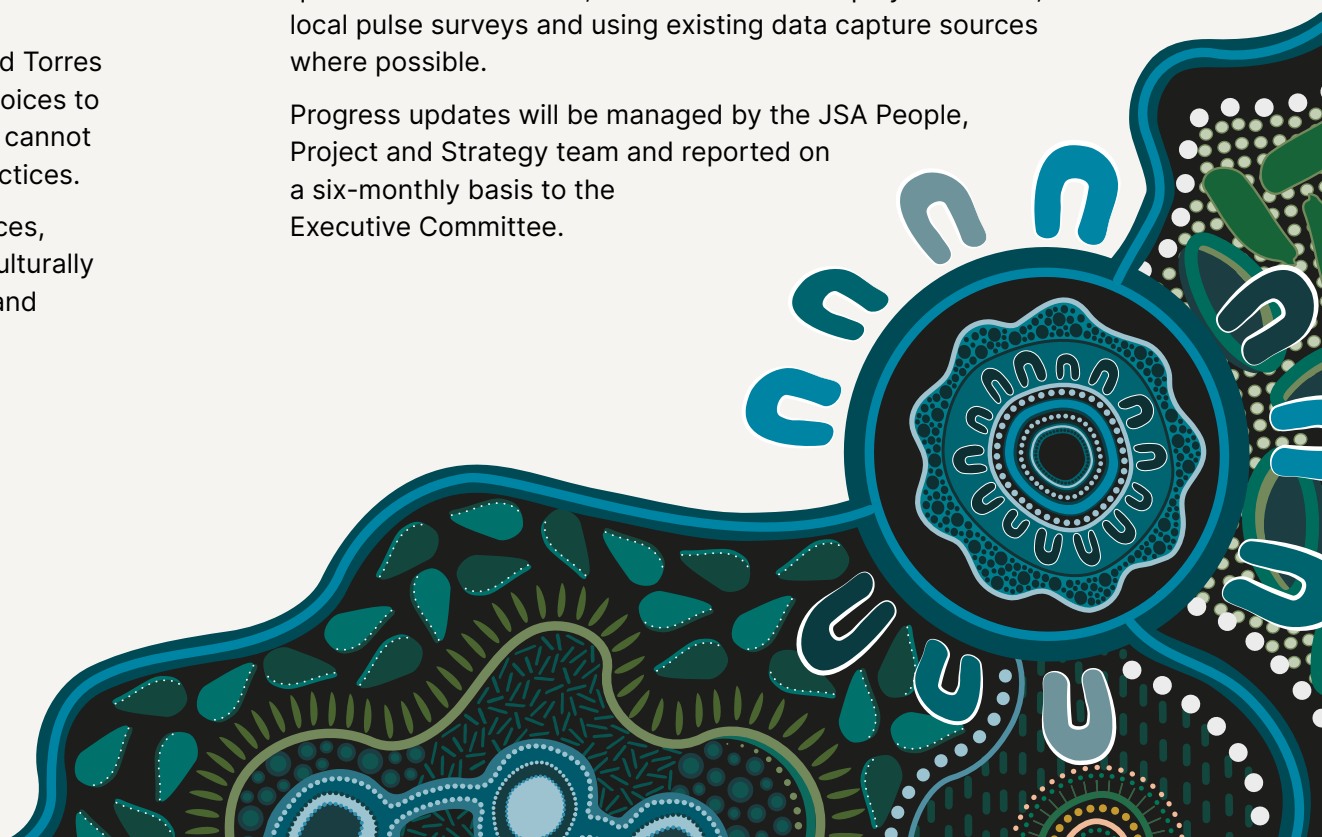
¹ [Colonial Load, Not Cultural Load: My Culture is Not the Problem.](#)
Shawn Andrews

Evaluation and monitoring

The strategy will operate until 2028 and during this time it will be reviewed regularly to check that initiatives and actions are being delivered or adjusted to meet its aim and commitments.

Progress will be measured through a range of quantitative and qualitative mechanisms, such as the APS Employee Census, local pulse surveys and using existing data capture sources where possible.

Progress updates will be managed by the JSA People, Project and Strategy team and reported on a six-monthly basis to the Executive Committee.





Action plan

The following actions will be delivered, reviewed and monitored over a three-year period, until 2028.

Cultural inclusion and safety

We build cultural inclusion and capability across JSA where First Nations staff feel safe, and their cultures are acknowledged, valued and respected.

Desired State

- JSA is striving to improve and embed the understanding of First Nations cultures across the workplace and build cultural capability.
- Staff are building their cultural awareness through training, attending events, connections and networking.

Actions	Who	When
1. Integrate Welcome to Country and meaningful Acknowledgement of Country in relevant events, meetings, and gatherings and research the offering of workshops designed to teach a respectful delivery of Acknowledgement of Country.	All staff	Ongoing
2. Commission Indigenous artwork that can be incorporated in related documentation, visual displays such as signature blocks, banners, MS Teams backgrounds (especially during recruitment interviews) to display commitment to a culturally safe and inclusive workplace.	People, Projects and Strategy	Completed
3. Monitor staff completion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Awareness mandatory training.	People, Projects and Strategy	Bi-annually
4. In consultation with the JSA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Working Group, encourage staff at all levels to complete Unconscious Bias Training.	People, Projects and Strategy Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Working Group	Commenced March 2025 and ongoing

Actions	Who	When
5. Work with JSA leaders to: – encourage uptake of First Nations cultural training and immersion programs (EL1 and EL2 levels initially) in line with budget availability – set the expectation that staff at all levels include cultural capability building initiatives into performance agreements and other relevant training such as CORE Cultural Learning modules and APS Footprints – encourage staff to participate in First Nations events and take opportunities to learn from Country, its history and cultural significance – encourage staff attendance, participation and networking at external First Nations seminars and activities, including conferences and events where JSA representatives are invited as keynote speakers – promote and encourage participation in DEWR First Nations Employee Network and other DEWR networks of interest and attendance in DEWR Closing the Gap Communities of Practice.	People, Projects and Strategy EL1s, EL2s and ASs	Ongoing
6. Communicate availability of cultural and NAIDOC leave, including leave for community obligations and Sorry business.	People, Projects and Strategy All staff	Ongoing
7. Work with DEWR Capability team/APSC Jawun team to promote and support the Jawun Secondment Program (including Empowered Communities secondments) and share learnings from the participants.	People, Projects and Strategy	Annually
8. Explore the option of JSA funding its own Jawun Secondment Program placements.	People, Projects and Strategy	Annually

Actions	Who	When
9. Recognise and celebrate First Nations cultures as a vital part of workplace inclusion and diversity such as active involvement in National Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week, other key cultural events, and the sharing and reflections on cultural capability building activities.	All staff	Ongoing
10. Work with Property Services, JSA First Nations staff and the DEWR Diversity an Inclusion team to explore ways to build visually inclusive environments (i.e. Indigenous artwork, languages, posters and artifacts) in JSA work areas and communication platforms.	People, Projects and Strategy	Commenced

Indicators of success

✓ Staff and leaders are actively sharing cultural learning experiences

✓ We are participating in capability development programs and activities at all levels, in line with broader workforce planning activities

✓ Increased nominations submitted in JAWUN Secondment Program and Empowered Communities Program

✓ Improvements in APS Staff Census results indicating that JSA is actively promoting an inclusive workplace culture and achieving a decrease in staff experiencing bullying, discrimination, bullying or harassment

✓ New/refurbished work areas are being designed with a Country and culturally grounded approach and imagery

✓ Staff and leaders are actively participating in cultural awareness and immersion activities

Leadership accountability and responsibility

Commitment is embedded and demonstrated through leaders' deliverables and business-as-usual work.

Desired State

- First Nations employment initiatives are instilled in business-as-usual work, planning activities, and discussions.
- Commitment is embedded and demonstrated through leaders' deliverables and Executive Committee (EC) performance agreements.

Actions	Who	When
1. Executive Committee and all staff to continue to participate in regular cultural capability uplift training.	EC and all staff	Ongoing
2. Provide education and guidance to leaders to promote and assist in the implementation of the strategy, advocating its importance, commitment and responsibilities across all levels.	EL1s, EL2s and EC	Ongoing
3. Embed First Nations employment actions and targets into strategic planning and workforce planning.	People, Projects and Strategy Office of the JSA Commissioners	Ongoing
4. Embed First Nations employment initiatives and targets into Executive performance agreements.	EC	Annually
5. Utilise the JSA Pulse Surveys to include questions if staff consider JSA is a culturally safe workplace and if not, why?	People, Projects and Strategy	Annually

Actions	Who	When
6. Staff at all levels to include in their performance agreements how they will contribute to closing the gap into their role. Note: To support this, the People, Project and Strategy team will provide staff with examples as to what this looks like i.e. attending key First Nations event/s, undertaking cultural awareness training, joining a related network or Community of Practice.	People, Projects and Strategy EL1s, EL2s and EC	Aligned with Performance Agreement cycle

Indicators of success

- ✓ Six monthly progress reports contain evidence of active progress against deliverables
- ✓ Workforce planning includes First Nations employment related actions and targets
- ✓ Demonstrated evidence of senior leadership commitment and the growth of champions
- ✓ EC and staff performance agreements include a First Nations related performance deliverable
- ✓ Staff and leaders at all levels are actively participating in cultural awareness and capability activities

Talent attraction and recruitment

We apply culturally focussed talent attraction approaches and provide genuine employment opportunities for First Nations peoples to apply in both mainstream and Indigenous focussed roles and increase representation across all APS levels.

Desired State

- First Nations peoples across Australia are aware of JSA job vacancies and experience culturally safe, informed and exceptional support throughout their recruitment and onboarding journey

Actions	Who	When
1. Continue to increase First Nations employment opportunities by: - considering the APS SES100 when looking to fill vacant SES positions to attract First Nations leaders into senior executive positions and support First Nations leaders to be successful within their executive roles - expanding JSA's geographical footprint to attract talent from regional, rural and remote areas - embedding Affirmative Measures and/or identified positions as options when considering recruitment across all levels and branches - participating in APS First Nations entry level programs such as the Indigenous Apprenticeship Program and Indigenous Graduate Pathway to create a pipeline of future talent pending budget and ASL.	People, Projects and Strategy	Ongoing
2. Continue to review and develop position descriptions as part of recruitment activities to ensure culturally inclusive and appropriate language.	People, Projects and Strategy	Ongoing
3. Explore the option of creating a JSA branded Job Information Pack for Affirmative Measures/identified positions.	People, Projects and Strategy	June 2026



Actions	Who	When
4. Advertise and promote all vacancies, including Affirmative Measures and Identified positions, through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media channels (e.g. Koori Mail, Torres News, National Indigenous Times, Indigenous job boards) and Indigenous networks in addition to mainstream channels.	People, Projects and Strategy	Ongoing
5. Build requirements into recruitment processes that selection panels for Affirmative Measures and Identified positions have: – at least one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person on the panel – completed mandatory Indigenous cultural awareness training (training to have been undertaken within six months) – engage a First Nations scribing service.	People, Projects and Strategy	Ongoing (commenced November 2024)
6. Provide support to hiring managers and panel members on culturally inclusive practices, including the utilisation and promotion of the APSC Affirmative Measure Recruitment Hub and DEWR First Nations related material.	People, Projects and Strategy	Ongoing
7. Explore the possibility of securing ASL and ongoing funding to establish a JSA dedicated Indigenous Liaison Officer to support prospective and existing First Nations staff across the five focus areas and other related activities.	People, Projects and Strategy	June 2026

Actions	Who	When
8. Explore the option of developing a First Nations careers page on the JSA website for prospective candidates with information such as: – links to all JSA job opportunities – how to apply for an advertised role, recruitment and selection processes and additional support available for applicants, such as Indigenous Liaison Officers – available employee support networks, First Nations Workforce Strategy/RAP/Closing the Gap Strategy and the forthcoming JSA Statement of Commitment to First Nations peoples – conditions of employment including access to ceremonial, NAIDOC and cultural leave and flexible work arrangements, study assistance, EAP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Support Line.	People, Projects and Strategy	March 2026

Indicators of success

- ✓ We are leveraging Affirmative Measure and Identified position provisions as business-as-usual processes
- ✓ Position descriptions for all roles are constantly being updated to ensure culturally inclusive and appropriate language
- ✓ Advertisements for Affirmative Measure roles include details of a First Nations contact person (JSA ILO once established)
- ✓ We continue to see an increase of applications from First Nations candidates in regional, rural and remote areas
- ✓ First Nations staff and DEWR ILOs are actively promoting affirmative measure vacancies through their networks
- ✓ We consistently demonstrate culturally safe recruitment practices

Retention

We ensure that our First Nations staff feel welcomed, supported and are recognised for their rich and essential contributions and that JSA embeds culturally informed workplace practices, education, and support.

Desired State

- First Nations people have safe and positive employment experiences and continue to work in an environment where their culture is welcomed, respected and incorporated within the workplace.

Actions	Who	When
1. Review and update the JSA New Starter Guide to ensure cultural inclusiveness and relevant information is available to support new First Nations staff such as the option to join First Nations Employee Network, other diversity and inclusion networks, and communities of practices across JSA, DEWR and the APS during onboarding activities.	People, Projects and Strategy	Commenced
2. In collaboration with JSA First Nations staff, develop a JSA manager's toolkit for the onboarding of First Nations staff.	People, Projects and Strategy	August 2026
3. Encourage managers to assign a buddy for new First Nations staff, especially for those located in rural and remote locations.	People, Projects and Strategy	Ongoing
4. Review the JSA Employee Value Proposition (EVP) placemat: - to ensure its culturally inclusive and reflects experiences of our First Nations staff - explore ways of incorporating approved Indigenous artwork - incorporate electronic version of placemat in relevant JSA internal/external webpages.	People, Projects and Strategy	Commenced

Actions	Who	When
5. Develop a JSA Statement of Commitment to First Nations peoples in consultation with First Nations staff, representatives and groups that will also be incorporated in other strategy deliverables such as attraction, retention and EVP platforms.	People, Projects and Strategy	Commenced
6. Include reference to EAP's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Support Line 13YARN: – in the JSA New Starter Guide and relevant SharePoint pages – during culturally important dates/events.	People, Projects and Strategy	Ongoing
7. Work with JSA First Nations staff and the DEWR Diversity and Inclusion (First Nations) team to explore the development of a voluntary exit interview process that gives departing First Nations staff the option to have a yarn with a staff member they feel culturally safe with.	People, Projects and Strategy	April 2026

Indicators of success

- ✓ Improvements in APS Staff Census results indicating that JSA is actively promoting an inclusive workplace culture and achieving a decrease in staff experiencing bullying, discrimination, or harassment
- ✓ Increase in First Nations staff continuing their employment in JSA and reduced turnover rates for First Nations staff

- ✓ First Nations staff have access to culturally informed information and support during their onboarding and employment with JSA
- ✓ Increased retention of First Nations staff, measured by year-on-year improvement in employment participation and retention rates

- ✓ JSA's work areas, communication platforms and ways of working are culturally inclusive and reflective, including incorporation of Indigenous artwork, symbols and languages
- ✓ JSA is actively participating in cultural events

Career, development and growth

We work with First Nations staff to build their capability and provide career paths and pipelines into leadership roles and other aspirations.

Desired State

- Supervisors/managers are actively engaging with First Nations staff and establishing individual career development plans supported by development and advancement opportunities.
- First Nations staff have access to advice and support throughout their JSA career.

Actions	Who	When
1. Research and promote internal/external professional development and leadership training programs for First Nations staff as options to support their development and progression and incorporate material on the JSA learning and development intranet pages.	People, Projects and Strategy	Ongoing
2. First Nations staff and supervisors develop in partnership meaningful and productive performance agreements to actively support, encourage and grow careers, including accessing mentoring through the DEWR Amplify program.	People, Projects and Strategy	June 2026
3. Promote mobility opportunities for First Nations staff to diversify their skill sets, through voluntary moves using temporary transfers or other means within legislative frameworks. JSA to ensure contact is maintained and recognition given on their work and new skillsets.	People, Projects and Strategy JSA leaders	Ongoing
4. Work with the DEWR Capability team to prepare for and promote First Nations development programs such as the Sir Roland Wilson/Pat Turner Scholarship and encourage applications and release successful staff to participate.	People, Projects and Strategy EC, EL2s	Ongoing

Actions	Who	When
5. Promote the availability of the Study Assistance for First Nations staff.	People, Projects and Strategy	Align with Performance Agreement cycle

Indicators of success

- ✓ Evidence of First Nations staff participating in mobility programs
- ✓ Increased opportunities for First Nations staff to access leadership roles
- ✓ Increase in the number of First Nations staff participating in leadership and mentoring programs
- ✓ First Nations staff and managers are actively discussing development needs and advancement opportunities



We welcome your feedback or any questions you may have on our First Nations Workforce Strategy by contacting us at corporate@jobsandskills.gov.au

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