

Targeting or identifying a role for Aboriginal* Recruitment? We have forgotten the principles - you need to read this...

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**The term 'Aboriginal' is intended inclusively, to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. I recognise that people of Torres Strait Islander origin may not be of Aboriginal descent. I respectfully acknowledge Torres Strait Islanders as Australia's First Peoples. We acknowledge their separate culture, belief systems and identities.*

ARTICLE PREFACE

I would like to preface this article by stating it is specifically in relation to **Aboriginal targeted and identified recruitment**. If actioned appropriately Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people occupy and thrive in **all areas** and **all levels** of employment.

'Unlocking Opportunities: The Impacts of Aboriginal Recruitment'

At its core, targeting or identifying a role for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is a genuine recruitment strategy - it simply works. For decades, Government and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and the Private Sector have utilised these recruitment strategies and exemptions to attract Aboriginal people to their organisations. I have observed varying success and

uneven experiences for both the candidates and organisations that go through this recruitment process.

From an organisational perspective, for examples sake; a government agency in the *Justice Cluster*. When it comes to their interactions with Aboriginal people their vision is clear, their corporate objectives are evidence based, irrefutable, and historically concerning - Aboriginal people are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Quite purely put, 'the why' for this Cluster, regarding Aboriginal recruitment, is clear:

- They **need** Aboriginal people who participate in their community, understand current community sentiment and affairs,
- They **need** Aboriginal people who are accepted and known in their community, so that their advocacy and liaison between the community and Cluster is respected and sustainable, and
- of course, they **need** people of Aboriginal descent to assist in service delivery such as cultural programs, community engagement, family interventions, strategic advisory, policy development and review - the list goes on.

Positioning your organisation to understand and value the unique contribution of Aboriginal people to your organisation is the launch pad. Amongst your Leadership, and if possible, your current Aboriginal workforce, you must establish and understand your employee value proposition in an Aboriginal world view. Even more so your current world view, remit, and sphere of influence, so that effective and viable change can be made.

If the community within which you are conducting a targeted or identified recruitment action knows that your

organisation authentically acknowledges Aboriginality as a genuine occupational qualification, you enhance the attraction and engagement of talented individuals.

It's a unique offering and returns benefit to the candidate and organisation in exchange for their skills – their lived experience in direct relation to the role on offer.

Overall, to be successful in Aboriginal recruitment, your organisation must commit to building awareness and have leader-led accountability about **why** you need to employ Aboriginal people.

Embracing Aboriginal Identity: *Linking Aboriginal Cultural Capacity & Capability in Recruitment Practices*

In NSW, the [NSW Aboriginal Land Council \(NSWALC\)](#) states that to become a member you must be an Aboriginal person. The NSWALC leverages off the [NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983](#) (The Act (as amended)). This framework has been universally adapted across Australia and includes people seeking a Confirmation of Aboriginality. The criteria for an Aboriginal person (as defined by The Act) refers to a person who:

- is a member of the Aboriginal race of Australia, and
- identifies as an Aboriginal person, and
- is accepted by the Aboriginal community in which they live, as an Aboriginal person.

It is wholeheartedly noteworthy that processes vary across jurisdictions to confirm Aboriginality. Furthermore, a Confirmation of Aboriginality (COA), or

Aboriginality Certificate, is viewed differently among Aboriginal people and communities in Australia depending on various factors including cultural background, community dynamics, processes, and individual perspectives.

Back to the *Justice Cluster* example provided previously, you may see where I am going here? Government, the private sector, and NGOs alike, attempt to adapt their policy and/or recruitment positions so that *The Act*, is included in their respective Aboriginal recruitment processes. Additionally, the Aboriginal candidate must equally demonstrate that they have the **capability** to perform the role that has been targeted or identified, such as an Aboriginal Youth Officer, Identified Centre Manager, Aboriginal Correctives Officer, etc.

To balance the equation of Aboriginality and capability, organisations can consider that application and interview assessments merge Aboriginality with the operational accountabilities of the role. Let's continue with the *Justice Cluster* example for an *Aboriginal Officer* who is expected to deliver Aboriginal programs to adults - this question could be asked during the application process and/or interview assessment:

- 'Delivering programs to Aboriginal people is a key accountability of the role. Provide an example of a program you have delivered either 1:1 or in a group format to Aboriginal adults with criminogenic needs. What did you do and what were the outcomes?'

This approach can be further enhanced within any organisation by reviewing the role descriptions(s) before advertisement, understanding your vision, remit, and stakeholders for your respective sphere of Aboriginal affairs, and the inclusion of a local Aboriginal

community member in the culling and on interview panels.

Not only are you assessing the candidate's capabilities to perform the role on offer, but you are also prompting and encouraging the candidates to appropriately detail their Aboriginality and points of *The Act*. Utilising this approach, I have witnessed Hiring Managers become captured by what candidates have provided during assessment(s), opening their eyes to a candidate that cannot only perform the role but provide the organisation with so much subject matter expertise that Aboriginality accompanies in targeted and identified roles. It is noteworthy that a CoA does not mean that the candidate has cultural knowledge (or the required accountabilities the role description requires), like the title, a CoA confirms their Aboriginal descent.

Like all strategies, there are targets, objectives or outcomes required to measure your success – 'we need x-amount of Aboriginal people by 2028, recruit, recruit, recruit!'. But what if we disregard all of this, what are the risks?

Consider this; *would you allow an accountant to practise at your firm if they have never studied accounting? Furthermore, a client base you have worked so hard to build trust with?* The risks for you and your firm are high. We must treat targeted and identified Aboriginal recruitment the same way. When we discount the content covered in this article, we risk pushing the community (further) away, enhancing historical injustices and mistrust amongst our Aboriginal communities. You risk your strategic goals becoming unattainable, your organisation being culturally unsafe and overall reputation amongst Aboriginal communities.

Empowering the Aboriginal Workforce & Community: *Enriching Recruitment Outcomes through Engagement*

We must lean on our current Aboriginal employees and local Aboriginal communities/organisations to inform your current and future state of Aboriginal employment. These Aboriginal employees may occupy mainstream roles, targeted, or identified roles and they may acquire not only subject matter expertise on Aboriginal affairs, but they know your organisational context and can detail their workplace experience(s).

An empowered and enabled Aboriginal workforce can be your gateway to a more aware and invested local Aboriginal community.

I have observed organisations invest in empowering their Aboriginal workforce to participate in decision-making processes, even lead the entire negotiations (internally and externally) because of their internal Aboriginal units, advisory bodies, informing workshops and conferences. I have also observed the latter; no strategically co-designed targeted or identified roles or role descriptions, no mechanisms for internal or external Aboriginal engagement or platforms for employees to safely self-identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

For your greater awareness, there is so much more to unpack - the great news is that we have practices supporting solutions and ways forward. It is vital to understand that Aboriginal recruitment isn't just about targeting or identifying a role. It is a commitment to Aboriginal people, cultural capability, engagement, cultural safety, strategic

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workforce planning and leader-led accountability.

You can learn more about Reece's work and experience via [LinkedIn](#).

Organisational Intent vs Outcomes – I am here to provide explanation on definitions, key terms and concepts that will help make the article more accessible – please feel free to engage with me!

Many organisations undertaking Aboriginal recruitment have the right intent, although business readiness, and awareness are imperative to ensure success. To a reader who doesn't know about Aboriginal employment in Australia, the article may present some challenges in understanding certain terms and contexts.

The article assumes the reader has background knowledge about Aboriginal employment practices and the challenges faced by Aboriginal communities in Australia. Without this context, some parts of the article might be difficult to understand.

Overall, while the article provides valuable insights into Aboriginal recruitment practices and challenges, it may require additional context and explanation for readers who are not familiar with Aboriginal employment issues in Australia. **I am here to provide explanation on definitions, key terms and concepts that will help make the article more accessible – please feel free to engage with me!**