

Staff Surveys and Focus Groups

Communication is the cornerstone for planning and implementing workforce initiatives – it underpins success – and without it, ‘the building blocks’ either go in the wrong place at the wrong time, or fall down because they have no foundation.

Many of the Information Sheets in this series have referred to Staff Surveys and Focus Groups as highly useful communication tools in developing successful workforce initiatives.

Because they recognise the value of these tools, many larger organisations invest in external expertise to manage them – but for smaller organisations and those who feel the budget simply won’t allow that, this Information Sheet may help.

Why would you want to do it?

- Communication is never just about a one-way flow of information. Top-down information is what you put in memos, notices and newsletters – Staff Surveys and Focus Groups get the information flow happening in the opposite direction.
- While team meetings, performance development reviews and even informal ‘chance’ discussion can all effectively generate this type of communication, they are limited in concurrent ‘reach’ and are a slow pathway to communicating with an entire workforce.
- Staff Surveys and Focus Groups can be the key to ensuring any workforce initiative you develop is appropriate to your staff, your organisational climate and workplace culture.

How would you go about it?

The approach you use will depend on whether the information you’re seeking is *quantitative* (numerical, statistical, measurable) or *qualitative* (descriptive, opinions, characteristics) – and on a number of other variables relevant to specific work environments.

Deciding when to use Staff Surveys and when to use Focus Groups

- **Staff Surveys** can provide both quantitative and qualitative information, although the qualitative information is fairly limited.
- **Staff Surveys** can gather information from all staff (if conducted as a census, rather than a sample) whereas this can be difficult to arrange through Focus Groups. If a sample is used, it’s easier for the sample to be more representative, because you don’t need to take staff away from their work collectively.
- **Staff Surveys** can be useful for gathering demographic information to facilitate planning flexibility or work-life initiatives as well as providing feedback about initiatives already in place (such as reward and recognition programs).
- Because **Staff Surveys** give measurable outcomes, they are useful for tracking change and also for benchmarking against other organisations. Measurable outcomes are also easier to feedback to staff, whereas outcomes from Focus Groups can be perceived to be ‘open to your interpretation’.
- The **disadvantages of Staff Surveys** include the fact that information is somewhat biased by the questions asked (which is only minimally addressed by asking for ‘any further comment’) and they can be costly ‘per person’ to implement (survey design, data entry, analysis and reporting). They also don’t find out the ‘why’ of results.
- **Focus Groups** allow you to explore quite complex issues and can provide the reasons behind identified issues, as well as defining them in more detail.
- **Focus Groups** are also a great catalyst for ideas, suggestions and solutions – and identify barriers to be overcome before ideas can be implemented.
- **Focus Groups** can have a short lead time and are low cost (providing you can manage the release of staff to attend).

- Information generated during **Focus Groups** is available quickly (the record of discussion) and (if well-facilitated) the results are not biased by the phrasing of questions.
- Managed well, **Focus Groups** can also become vehicles for two-way information flow and therefore provide a better foundation for effective communication.
- **The disadvantages of Focus Groups** include difficulty in having a good cross-section of staff available to participate in each group and you will require a competent facilitator to ensure group discussion is not dominated by one or two people and that all views are heard. It's difficult to obtain 'measurable' results which means it's difficult to track changes, benchmark against other employers or report firm 'results' back to staff.
- **Both Staff Surveys and Focus Groups** can be used to identify general workforce issues or specific issues in specific work areas; or identify workplace culture, organisational climate and values in practice.

Tips for implementing **in-house Staff Surveys**

- Make the survey 'anonymous' to encourage honest answers. If it will be obvious from demographic answers who the respondent is, commit to (and uphold) confidentiality.
- If you don't have expertise in-house, get help with compiling the wording of the questions and the structure of the survey form – both can introduce bias which will reduce the validity of the survey results and their usefulness to you. Double-barrelled questions are a common mistake which cloud results.
- Determining the sample size considered statistically valid is actually quite a complicated process. Experts will tell you that there's no specific formula and the sample should vary according to the content of the survey and the importance of results. However, your sample size needs to be large enough to give you some confidence results are what you would find if you surveyed the entire workforce.
- To encourage maximum participation in open surveys, communicate the reasons for the survey; how anonymity and confidentiality will be protected; the relevance to participants; how the results will be used – and allow work-time for completion if the survey is comprehensive.
- Ask three or four separate questions about each issue you want to analyse. This helps to overcome skewed results because the wording of one question has been misunderstood.
- Don't reduce the usefulness of the survey by trying to keep it short. Staff won't mind a longer survey if it's well structured and clear – and you've explained the relevance to them.
- When gathering 'opinions' use consistent response options to all questions. For example, for each item make a positive statement and then ask staff to nominate whether they: ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree or Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
- Ensure top-level (CEO) support for the survey is included on the questionnaire, together with a commitment to provide feedback on the results.
- Analyse the responses and provide this feedback as soon as possible. If practicable, find material actions which will flow from the survey and report on them with the response feedback.

Tips for implementing

in-house Focus Groups

- Focus Groups tend to work best in groups of between eight and 16 people. Participants usually have a common interest, such as staff who work as a team or people with similar roles across different work areas. However a 'vertical slice' through an organisation – where one or more representative of every 'level' are brought together – has benefits in bringing different perspectives to the discussion table. In this case, care is needed to ensure some group members are not intimidated by the status of others.
- The general flow of discussion should be recorded and specific quotes if relevant – although these should not be attributed to specific people – and the group should reach consensus about key points, conclusions or recommended action from the session.
- The Focus Group Facilitator needs credibility. If you can't afford to hire a professional, still try to outsource the role to someone you can trust from another organisation. If you use an internal Facilitator they will need to be perceived as totally neutral on the topic at hand.
- For general sessions, ask open questions – What are the 'positives' about ...? What needs to be improved? – then tease out the 'why' and 'how-to' about each response.
- Ideally, Focus Groups can be used to provide detail and solutions to issues identified by Staff Surveys – but can also be used to identify key issues which need to be surveyed.

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Evaluating Initiatives

Why would you want to do it?

The initiatives discussed in this Information Sheet series have all claimed to have a solid business case – that investing in employees' career development; encouraging work-life balance; introducing workplace flexibility and demonstrating the value of employees will all produce a return for the business that outweighs the initial investment.

Cited potential 'returns' include increased capacity to attract recruits; increased retention of current employees; and enhanced productivity through impacts on workplace culture, absenteeism and workforce morale.

You could just 'guess' whether the initiatives deliver on their promised return (turnover rates can be obvious) but building in an evaluation process to each initiative answers questions such as:

- Did the initiative actually achieve the business goals you set for it?
- What were the strengths of that specific initiative? What worked well during the implementation? Did you get outcomes additional to those you were expecting?
- What were the weaknesses of that specific initiative? Which components were particularly difficult to implement? Did the initiative cause difficulties you weren't expecting in other work areas?
- What was the actual return on the investment? Did the costs outweigh the benefits? Did the cost-benefit ratio work well for the initiative, but cause additional costs elsewhere?
- What have you learned through implementing this initiative that will help to develop and implement others?

How would you go about it?

Larger organisations are likely to have ready access to data which will allow them to move straight to a calculation stage – and are also likely to have Human Resources staff well trained in analysing and evaluating workforce management strategies.

For smaller organisations, however, there are some basic steps to follow:

1 Build a workforce profile

- Age; gender; 'first language' and cultural needs; family responsibilities; work-life balance needs and intentions; job role; duration of employment with you (and previous employers if available); qualifications, skills and experience

2 Gather key indicators

- Look at turnover and absenteeism rates – but analyse these according to the categories above (age; gender; cultural needs; family needs; job role etc)
- Record the duration for filling vacancies in specific job roles or work areas
- What are the trigger points for staff leaving you?

3 Identify opportunities

- Is your turnover higher for older staff? Is the absenteeism rate higher for young mothers? Do people come back to you after parental leave?

4 Estimate the cost of (a) doing nothing and (b) potential initiatives

- Use accepted formulae to calculate the cost of turnover and absenteeism (one source is provided at right) and build in other estimates such as agency fees. Although turnover and absenteeism are only two costs in your 'do-nothing' scenario, they are useful because of their 'measurability' and the fact they are such clear indicators of other issues, such as a 'negative' workplace culture.
- When considering the cost of your potential initiative, don't forget the costs associated with planning and promoting the change; training management in the application of it; additional administration time (e.g. when moving to more flexible leave arrangements) and new equipment (e.g. additional computer equipment when introducing job sharing or more lifting equipment if targeting the recruitment and retention of older workers).

5 Pilot the initiative and gather the evidence

- Piloting an initiative doesn't mean just trying it for a short time. This is basically about introducing the initiative in a staged process and using in-built data collection mechanisms so you can adjust the initiative before you 'roll-out' to other areas.
- The Pilot therefore doesn't just need an identified 'run-time', but also clearly identified intervals at which you can measure 'change'.

6 Review outcomes against objectives

- This is where you analyse the new data against your baseline information. Did introducing more flexible hours increase your 'return-rate' following maternity leave? Did the age-of-retirement for your staff increase once you introduced a system whereby staff could 'pre-pay' longer leave breaks? Has staff morale lifted following the introduction of Cultural Awareness training?

Gathering the information you need

- **Staff Records:** Apart from helping to develop your workforce profile, staff records can also help you analyse issues such as the type and length of leave used by specific groups; rate of resignations in specific groups; incidence of absenteeism in specific groups etc.
- **Staff Surveys:** Some employers shy away from workforce 'satisfaction' surveys (feeling they open a 'can-of-worms') but they're really useful for the 'intangibles' you want to measure and can also give 'facts' to which you may not otherwise have access – such as 'why' people take leave.
- **Exit Interviews:** Most employers conduct exit interviews these days – but have you gone back to review them collectively to identify trends?
- **Focus Groups:** Try some using a vertical slice through the organisation and others in work teams.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- *Aldersgate Nursing Home* is a former winner of an EOWA award. In 2002, the organisation analysed its workforce profile; exit interviews; a workforce survey; turnover, injury and sick leave statistics; before planning a workforce development program. The program of initiatives included a self-rostering system where staff created shifts to meet their own needs within a master roster. Evaluation of the initiative found it contributed to reduced staff turnover and sick leave – and achieved an industry record of 100% return after maternity leave!

Where you can find more information

- The Australian Government's *Workplace* website has specific information about evaluating initiatives including examples and formulae for costing aspects of workforce management such as turnover and absenteeism. Go to www.workplace.gov.au → *Programs* → *Work and Family* → *Evaluating work and family strategies in your workplace* then scroll down through the information or click on the 'quick-links' to *examples* or *formulae*.

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Creating a Positive Workplace Culture

Defining exactly what is meant by 'a positive workplace culture' can sometimes be over-described and over-analysed – and therefore unnecessarily complex.

In its simplest form, 'culture' is about what behaviours are expected – and what behaviours are accepted – by the members in a particular group of people. The behaviours people expect of each other – or are prepared to accept from each other – in turn is influenced by the values they hold.

Creating a positive workplace culture therefore, is about ensuring all behaviours meet – or exceed – the accepted organisational values.

Why would you want to do it?

- **A positive workplace culture** encourages motivation; productivity; quality work; job satisfaction and staff retention – and facilitates recruitment of other 'quality' staff because people want to work for you.
- **A negative workplace culture** causes people to put in less effort; care less about those around them; take more time off – and eventually quit, because they'd rather work somewhere else.
- **Aged and Community Care is competing for staff** and needs to have a sector-wide culture that nurtures a skilled and diverse workforce; provides opportunity for career pathway development; offers flexibility for work-life balance; and appropriately recognises and rewards the value of that workforce.

How would you go about it?

Every Information Sheet in this series has ultimately been about making a positive impact on workplace culture – this current document is simply about 'pulling it all together'.

In a positive workplace culture:

- **People will know:** what they need to do; how they need to do it; how well they're expected to do it; how well they are doing it; what they could do in the future; and how they can get there.
- **People will be given:** interesting, challenging work; a clear definition of the work they are to do; opportunity to improve and learn new skills; feedback on their efforts; recognition and reward for their performance; leaders they respect and co-workers they value.
- **People will feel:** respected and valued by management; respected and valued by co-workers; respect for management and caring for co-workers; comfortable that they 'fit' within the team; pride in the work that they do; and pride in the place that they work.

Ways to actively influence your workplace culture therefore include:

- Developing written policies about appropriate behaviours and organisational values
- Always recruiting people who demonstrate those behaviours and hold those values
- Reinforcing your behavioural policies and values during the induction program
- Reinforcing workforce awareness through training (cross-cultural awareness; bullying and harassment prevention; team building behaviours, communication skills etc)
- Ensuring all members of your management team lead by example as well as monitoring and encouraging appropriate behaviours in others
- Providing a work environment that says you value and respect your workforce
- Rewarding – or not rewarding – behaviours and attitudes according to their compatibility with organisational values and a positive, productive workplace culture.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

Domiciliary Care SA and its 'Working in Harmony' Policy

In 2004, *Domiciliary Care SA (Domcare)* – formerly *Metropolitan Domiciliary Care* – began a cultural change program that has had dramatic impacts.

The start position

In 2003/4 the organisation lost 1142 days in WorkCover cases alleging bullying/harassment and spent a significant amount of money managing the cases. Other impacts were felt in negative publicity, community confidence, client concerns and unrest across the rest of the workforce – who reported 'bullying, harassment and unacceptable behaviours' as their number one concern.

What they did

Domcare developed a policy of 'zero tolerance' and put together a set of values and principles in a *Working in Harmony Policy* which was incorporated into every aspect of the organisation – job and person specifications; recruitment and selection of staff; orientation and induction; staff development and training; OHS&W; performance management; quality management; internal communications; HR functions; administrative functions; recognition and rewards program; employee assistance program; all policies and procedures – even the organisational structure and business planning.

How they did it

- The *Working in Harmony* policy is provided to all applicants when they request a copy of the Job and Person Specification and these documents also reinforce the requirement of Working in Harmony.
- Interviews for managerial or supervisory positions include a question about how they would prevent and stop workplace bullying and harassment – and all referee checks ask whether the referee believes the applicant could comply with the *Working in Harmony* policy.
- The *Working in Harmony* policy is distributed again to all staff at orientation, supported by a statement from the Executive Director (or delegate) to reinforce the zero-tolerance of transgressions.
- All managers and supervisors must attend a mandatory one-day workshop within 12 months of appointment – attended by the Executive Director (or delegate) to reinforce commitment to the policy.
- All managers and supervisors are trained to mediate informal complaints (with external mediators available when required) and a panel of internal investigators has

been trained to investigate formal complaints. This occurs within three working days of the complaint; the Executive Director is notified of the investigation; and the HR Unit monitors the investigation to ensure procedural fairness.

- All new staff receive mandatory training in the policy within six months of appointment and an electronic data-base has been established to monitor staff participation.
- All team meetings include a set agenda item entitled '*Working in Harmony Policy*' to ensure an opportunity for staff to raise general issues of concern – and an annual survey is conducted of all staff about bullying or harassment, with results presented back to staff. All teams complete a Team Health Check survey every year to monitor whether there is any unacceptable behaviour within the team. All teams complete a '*Team Communication Standards*' exercise annually – which reinforces the zero tolerance of bullying and harassment.
- Internal and external counselling is available to all staff through the Employee Assistance Program.
- All Performance Plans for General Managers, Managers, Team Leaders and Supervisors require strategies to prevent and stop bullying, harassment, discrimination and other unacceptable behaviours.
- The Executive Director and Executive model appropriate behaviour and a comprehensive system is in place to receive timely feedback about any inappropriate behaviour.

Outcomes

- WorkCover claims and expenditure reduced to a fraction of previous costs almost immediately and three formal complaints were immediately investigated and managed – resulting in disciplinary action.
- A repeat of the 'Bullying and Harassment' survey demonstrated a significant decline in the perception of issues and demonstrated a greater comfort among the workforce to report any incidents.
- Staff Focus Groups revealed the 'culture of bullying' has subsided and there is generally a much greater confidence in management.
- Domiciliary Care SA is now a Division of the SA Department for Families and Communities and Domcare's *Working in Harmony* program is now being reviewed with a view to implementing its successful components across all areas of the Department.

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Planning a Multicultural Workforce

The various aspects of recruiting, managing and retaining a multicultural workforce have been the focus of many publications, presentations and fact sheets. Entire books have been written on the subject!

This Information Sheet therefore does not attempt to cover the topic in depth – it simply conveys some basic tips to help you attract, recruit and retain staff from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Why would you want to do it?

- One in every three people eighty years or older living in Australia in 2016 will have a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background.
- We know that, as people age, they often return to the primary language and culture of their youth and that a culturally diverse workforce can respond to these people in a special way – through language, culture, beliefs, food and communication conventions.
- However, there are other real benefits for employers who encourage workforce diversity – it contributes to workplace culture; encourages new ideas and approaches; and helps develop and maintain better relationships in the community (because the organisation is more reflective of that community).
- Increasing the number of staff with CALD backgrounds also widens the recruitment pool, because people are attracted to work for an organisation where they know they'll 'fit in'. Retention of CALD staff improves for the same reason.

How would you go about it?

1 Finding potential new CALD Staff and Volunteers

Advertising in a newspaper or on the internet may not reach your target audience and will be more successful supported by other methods:

- **Word-of-mouth:** Ask existing CALD staff to promote employment opportunities among their friends and family. Hearing about the job from someone they know will help people to feel confident that you're the right type of employer for them.
- **Champions of Cause:** Approach CALD community leaders – including spiritual leaders – and explain the opportunities you have available and the type of support you're able to provide to new staff and volunteers. These people are highly respected in their communities and their endorsement is valuable.
- **Ethnic Radio and Media:** Advertise where it's most likely to reach the group you're targeting – and seek other promotional opportunities, such as participating (with someone who has appropriate language skills) in local 'current affairs' programs.
- **Develop networks within CALD communities:** This should be more than a 'meet-and-greet' (although even that will help). Often CALD community groups have their own management or workforce issues and you could consider ways of sharing resources; experience; or staff training and development opportunities.

2 Recruiting new CALD Staff and Volunteers

People from CALD communities may not necessarily be attracted to the same aspects of your vacancy that you usually promote as a highlight:

- **Task Focus rather than Job Focus:** Particularly when promoting vacancies to CALD mature-age women unfamiliar with the paid employment scene, job titles can be intimidating. For example, people may already have acquired many of the skills required of a 'Domestic Assistant', but they don't realise that – unless you describe the actual work that needs to be done.
- **Training and Qualifications:** You may *think* the opportunity for training and qualifications would be well-received – but to some people the thought of it is actually overwhelming. Choosing words carefully can make a difference – *"We'll help you to learn anything you need to"* may be more appealing than *"Accredited Training is provided"*.

- **Flexibility is a major drawcard:** Many mature-age people who were last in paid employment years ago in a different country, have no idea of the flexibilities available in today's workforce. They can be daunted at the thought of returning to what they once knew, but may respond to one of the options you can offer.
- **Interview performance:** The notion of 'selling' yourself during interviews in order to compete for positions against other candidates is not a concept that sits comfortably with some cultures – even describing skills, experience and qualifications may be considered an inappropriate form of 'boasting'. This means it can also be difficult for people from some CALD backgrounds to translate their life skills into useful and practical applications. They may underestimate their own skill level and life experience and therefore under-rate their performance capacity. You will need to help build confidence.
- **Recruiting volunteers:** Formalising the call for (and employment of) volunteers isn't always appropriate in CALD communities, where 'helping out' is considered a normal part of community sharing and participation. Developing a presence in the community is often the best way to let people know there's a need for their help. There's also a significant leap from contributing time to 'help out' as a volunteer to becoming part of the workforce – and it's not a move everyone wants to make. Take care when and how you promote the concept of this.

3 In the workplace

- **Allow time and provide support for practical applications and learning:** Many new CALD employees will be grappling with improving English skills as well as their job role; workplace OHS&W requirements; and the 'newness' of your organisational culture. In particular, they may need help with 'ordinary' tasks such as reporting documentation; understanding policies and procedures; time sheets and other HR requirements.
- **Use a 'buddy' system or 'job shadowing'** arrangement in the settling-in period and develop a mentoring partnership with another staff member who has the right skills to do this.
- **Cluster CALD staff** where you can. Having several members from one community working together helps them all to feel more comfortable.
- **Provide Cross-Cultural Awareness and Communication training to all staff.** Communication styles are very different across various cultures – and understanding those differences is important for everyone!
- **Consider whether you need cultural awareness support for clients too.** Especially where there has been a conflict between particular cultures in the past, clients may need some support in accepting care from staff from specific CALD backgrounds.
- **Celebrate Workforce Diversity** by building time into meetings and workshops to encourage understanding about the cultural values held by co-workers. Celebrate community diversity by inviting cultural groups on-site, attending cultural festivities in the community or perhaps hosting a staff/client lunch with multicultural food, dancing, displays etc.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- *Churches of Christ Life Care, South Australia* presented to the 2007 ACSA National Conference on Developing a Comprehensive Multicultural Strategy for a Mainstream Aged Care Provider. Life Care's strategy was developed over an eighteen-month period by a CALD Advisory Group that began by collecting data about CALD clients; analysing the results of a CALD service satisfaction tool; and consulting with a client focus group which included residents and family members.

As part of the strategy, Life Care built a *Translated Documents Register* and introduced a comprehensive *Cultural Awareness* staff training program, but the focus was on integrating a multicultural approach throughout all aspects of the organisation – in the same way as Quality or Safety – so that it became part of Recruitment, Orientation, Training and Support. Outcomes have included an organisation-wide cultural change, with financial impacts less than were expected.

Where you can find more information

- *Multicultural Aged Care Inc (MAC)* has a library of resources available for loan including: books; videos; training materials; CD ROMs; DVDs; music CDs; video kits; audio visual equipment and over 50 journals and newsletters. Publications include a Resource Directory (which is a handbook of CALD service providers); *Mainstream Services for CALD Communities Directory*; *Cultural Activity Resource Sets (CARS)* for 10 Community Groups; and *User Rights and Responsibilities* (in 10 languages). MAC also offers a range of training services and is a member of Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care (PICAC). To find downloadable resources visit MAC at www.mac.org.au or PICAC at www.culturaldiversity.com.au.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff

Some employers in Aged and Community Care are missing an opportunity to fill vacancies – and some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are missing out on jobs – because conventional recruitment and workforce management practices are ‘getting in the way’.

This Information Sheet offers some suggestions that may bring these two groups together – so that everybody benefits! It’s all about when and how to ‘tinker’ with standard practices.

Why would you want to do it?

- The rate of unemployment among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is double that of the total population. This doesn’t mean they’re not motivated to work. The reality of statistics shows a high incidence of social disadvantage in many communities.
- Paid employment doesn’t just make a difference for the job seeker – but has real impact for their family and for their community.
- However, developing a specific strategy to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people isn’t only about corporate responsibility – there are real benefits for you as an employer.
- Young people from these communities will be an important part of Australia’s future workforce. Developing your reputation now as a preferred employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will have you well placed to fill vacancies later.
- Financial assistance and a wide range of support is available through the Australian Government to assist in putting appropriate training and recruitment strategies in place.
- There’s also help for you to tap into a pool of highly motivated people working toward skills and qualifications. The *National Indigenous Cadetship Project (NICP)* links full-time students undertaking a Diploma, an Advanced Diploma

or their first Undergraduate Degree with employers who can give them paid work placements and ongoing employment once they finish their studies. Employers are asked to provide support, professional guidance and mentorship, but the NICP provides an administrative payment to employers and an allowance to the cadet while studying.

- All the benefits of workforce diversity apply when you facilitate an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff – including enhanced attraction and retention capacity and improved workplace culture.

How would you go about it?

1 Making sure your organisation is ready

Recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people only to have them leave quickly helps no-one – so it’s important to have made some preparations to encourage a long term relationship:

- If you already have a multicultural workforce, your current staff may already have a good understanding of cultural differences and appreciate all cultures as valid. If not, Cultural Awareness training is good for everyone’s personal development.
- The staff most likely to impact on the success of your employment strategy are the supervisors, team leaders and managers who will have direct supervision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It’s critical these front-line managers have help to understand issues which may arise and know how to manage them effectively.
- However, it’s important that you don’t allow stereotyping – from any level in your organisation. People within any cultural background are different from each other – and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people are as individual within their culture as anyone else. If you have had a less than positive experience in the past, don’t assume things will be the same this time.

2 Seeking appropriate support

- **Externally:** Advice and practical support to employ Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people is available from a number of sources. The Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is a good place to start and will also have information about relevant State programs.
- **Internally:** Developing an appropriate strategy to employ a number of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people will mean it becomes part of every-day business, rather than a 'stand-alone' program. Generating support internally is important – not just from the direct team, but from HR personnel and corporate roles.
- **From the community:** Community support is critical to the success of the program. Key leaders in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will not only be an important link to finding potential recruits, but also to enhancing your reputation as an employer, so that people want to work for you. Ask to present information to community groups; invite community leaders onto your site; display Aboriginal products or artwork in your reception areas.

3 'Tinkering' with standard recruitment and employment practices

- **Attracting applicants:** Try using newspapers such as the *National Indigenous Times* and *Koori Mail* to advertise your vacancies – but also to promote 'good news stories' about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in your workplace. The Indigenous radio sector is one of the fastest growing in Australia and can be a valuable tool to promote your activities as an 'employer of choice'.
- **Reviewing Position Descriptions:** What are your absolute essential requirements? Talk in terms of the *abilities* and *willingness to learn* you require, rather than qualifications. The amended PDs can then form the basis of an advertisement more likely to attract applicants from the group you're targeting.
- **Changing interview techniques:** Make the process less formal and intimidating. 'Tease out' the experience and skills people already have, through a casual chat. Consider interviewing at the premises of a community group, rather than on-site.
- **Discussing expectations:** Don't assume people know what you expect of them. Discussing your expectations – and those of the recruit – will see you better placed for a long-term relationship.
- **Appointing a 'buddy':** Preferably this will be another Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person – even if from another work team – but make sure there's someone appropriate the new employee feels comfortable approaching about 'the little things' they may be embarrassed to discuss with a supervisor.
- **Valuing the culture:** Rather than be apprehensive about extended family and kinship obligations, understand that as being closely aligned to your organisational values – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is typified by a basis of respect, trust, and a willingness to work for the good of the group, rather than individuals.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- *Aboriginal Home Care (AHC)* has successfully employed a number of staff using wage subsidies and *Structured Training and Employment Program (STEP)* support from the *Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)*. In one instance, the financial support enabled employment of a staff member in administration for a few months, who – having then developed 'a feel' for the business – went on to become a Community Support Worker, and is now a Case Manager!
- *ACH Group* employed an Aboriginal person for their Aboriginal Wyatt Holidays Program because they recognised the need for a person with knowledge of the Aboriginal community, who understood community needs and had the community links to give the program credibility. The Program regularly seeks advice and support from a Reference Group of representatives from Aboriginal organisations.
- *Aboriginal Home Care (AHC)* has Plain English Job and Position Descriptions, with only six or seven selection criteria and a focus on Aboriginal community experience and transferable skills, rather than qualifications. Positions are advertised in Aboriginal newspapers and through recognised local Aboriginal networks, organisations and communities. Interviews are informal.

Where you can find more information

- The Australian Government's *Workplace* website describes how to access advice and support for employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and provides guidelines and application forms for some programs. Go to: www.workplace.gov.au → *Programs* → *Indigenous Programs* → *Structured Training and Employment Programs (STEP)* → *STEP for Employers*.

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Targeted Recruitment

Targeted recruitment is much more than simply filling vacancies. It's the process of first planning exactly what it is you need – and then using the right tools to attract the right person with the right skills, experience and characteristics to closely match your requirements.

Many of the Information Sheets in this series support targeted recruitment – either by helping employers to identify the skills, experience and characteristics they need to acquire, or helping to build appropriate tools to be able to attract specific groups of people.

Why would you want to do it?

- To avoid the most common recruitment mistake:** The pressure to recruit 'in a hurry' (for now rather than later) is felt even more intensely in Aged and Community Care than other industries – because providing care to people generates a greater sense of urgency than producing a product. However, taking the time to appropriately target recruitment enhances the potential for more appropriate care over a sustained period.
- To improve retention:** Research has shown that 'getting the right person into the right job' in the first place is the most critical factor in staff retention.
- To facilitate succession planning:** Targeted recruitment is not only about 'getting the job done now', but also about meeting the future requirements of the organisation.
- To sustain or enhance workplace culture:** Because targeted recruitment considers characteristics along with skills, qualifications and experience; you're more able to select people who 'match' the workplace culture – or improve it, if you're in change management mode.

How would you go about it?

Don't be so nervous about contravening Anti-Discrimination Laws that you feel you can't target your recruitment activities. Discrimination is about treating people unfairly because they belong to a specific group of people – targeted recruitment is about attracting and selecting people with the right characteristics to meet organisational needs.

- Understand your current workforce profile and succession needs:** Clarifying what you already have in your current workforce – and what you'll need in the future – helps to identify the 'extras' you may want in new recruits. (If you're currently seeking an EN, but all your RNs are approaching retirement, you can target people looking to upgrade qualifications – if you're currently seeking a Care Worker, but already can't offer enough shifts to your young ENs, ambition for higher qualifications isn't so important).
- Prepare detailed job descriptions and person specifications for vacancies:** These documents need to consider how the role contributes to the overall goals of the organisation as well as specific tasks or functions. In certain roles demonstrated competencies, skills and qualifications will be 'essential', but in others it may be the 'aptitude and willingness to acquire' that you need, coupled with appropriate attitudes, values and behaviours.
- Tailor the way you advertise the position:** This not only includes where you might advertise the position, but how you word your requirements and what you promote as incentives to applicants. Candidates want to know first, 'Can I do the job?' then 'Do I want the job?'.
- Interview according to the characteristics you're looking for:** Asking people to demonstrate how they have addressed a specific situation in the past is based on the premise that 'past behaviour predicts future performance'. However, if your candidate doesn't have experience in this area, you may miss the opportunity for a 'perfect match'. Have a set of 'scenarios' and ask candidates how they would behave within those scenarios – and 'weight' responses which demonstrate the values you're seeking.

Initiatives you could consider

Getting ready to recruit

- Scan the advertisements of other organisations in Aged and Community Care, in the Health Industry and other industries to identify the type of incentives and organisational values they promote.
- Prepare an information pack about your organisation that explains why it's such a great place to work.
- Review Position Descriptions – these need to 'sell' the job as well as describe it! Has anything changed about the role since the last review? Is there anything new about the organisation?
- Prepare the selection criteria you'll use during interviews – what else do you want, apart from an ability to do the job?
- Visit schools, RTOs and Career Expos and leave information about your career pathway opportunities.

The marketing process

- Look for a mix of traditional and alternative recruitment methods – including Internal Promotion; Mainstream Press; Alternative Press; Internet; Employment Agencies; Search Firms; Network Meetings; Special Interest Groups; Professional Associations; Community Groups; and Word-of-Mouth.
- If you use newspaper advertising, consider which ones – national newspapers are more commonly read by people seeking management positions; the local community newspaper has greater appeal for more mature-age people; and CALD communities often have their own publications.
- When drafting your ad, try to find one or two words that you can headline to sum up what working for you actually means. Choose 'triggers' appropriate to your target group – younger people may be more attracted by 'career pathways' while mature-age people may be looking for 'flexibility'.
- In most cases, anti-discrimination laws prevent you from advertising for particular age groups – but saying 'People of all ages are encouraged to apply' will let mature-age people know you want them.
- If a number of vacancies have been created because of building extensions or an increase in home care clients, state that – so your target audience doesn't think you just can't keep staff.
- Develop a database during recruitment interviews (even those that don't result in an appointment) about what attracted people to apply – and use the triggers in your next call for applications.
- Promote the values and good corporate reputation of your organisation.

Don't overlook current and former staff

- Promoting vacancies and future needs internally may uncover potential candidates on-site – but also gives staff the opportunity to approach/refer people they know. Some employers actually have an incentive/reward system in place for referrals which result in a filled vacancy.
- Don't be shy about contacting former staff to see whether they'd like to return. 'Boomerangs' occur for a number of reasons – including changes at your workplace; changes at their current workplace; and changes in their lives. This can be an important move when people have actually left the sector – sometimes they only need a small prompt to return.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- *Life Care* uses a targeted recruitment approach which includes a '*Life Care Young Ambassador*' group – young employees assist the organisation to attract other young people by delivering presentations at career development sessions in schools etc. This group also helps in developing recruitment and retention strategies.
- *St Andrews War Memorial Hospital* in Brisbane ran a three-month targeted recruitment campaign to address difficulties in attracting RNs through traditional means. The '*Happy Nurses*' campaign revamped **newspaper advertising** by removing most of the text about the position and the hospital's requirements; used a '*Happy Nurses*' headline and carried a few dot points about flexible shifts, creative rosters and on-going education. The call-to-action was to '*Call Liz on...*' who happened to be the Director of Clinical Services! **Billboards** were used in four strategic positions across the city and rotated monthly to capture the 'passive jobseekers' – people not actively looking to change jobs, but who could be enticed with the right incentives. **Radio advertising** had the same purpose – although it was presented as a series of Health Updates which finished with "...and by the way, *St Andrews Nurses are Happy Nurses.*" **A Staff Reunion**, held as a social event, attracted 145 people. Several managers subtly 'worked the floor', explaining a new approach to rostering and professional development – and six of the participants rejoined the staff. In total, the campaign filled 58 FTE RN positions!

This Information Sheet is one in a series produced by Aged and Community Services SA & NT Inc. It is provided for general information only and does not replace the need for readers to make their own enquiries or seek independent advice.

Exploring Self-Rostering

Developing and implementing an appropriate staff roster can be one of the most complex and difficult workforce issues to manage.

While the underlying principle is obviously to ensure there is an appropriate level of care for clients at all times – delivered by staff with an appropriate mix of skills, experience and qualifications – there are other considerations that simply can't be ignored.

These include budgetary limitations; legal and industrial requirements; and workplace health and safety considerations.

To add further complexities, employers are also charged with ensuring rosters:

- Are flexible to accommodate employees' various needs for work-life balance
- Engender team cohesion (by equitable distribution of shifts)
- Provide learning opportunities and facilitate career pathways
- Comply with site-based or sector-based conventions
- Recognise and reward staff for their contribution.

All this needs to take place in a context where the demand is variable too!

It's easy to understand why the concept of Self-Rostering – where staff actually have the responsibility for designating shift arrangements – has most employers reaching for 'the too-hard basket'.

This Information Sheet is not about *recommending* Self-Rostering – for there are as many 'pros and cons' in this system as there are in Fixed, Rotating or Request-Based systems – it is simply to provide information which may prove useful to employers interested in exploring its potential for their workplace.

Why would you want to do it?

- Self-Rostering provides the most opportunity of any roster system for staff input to the hours and days they will work and – if the system is operating well – can therefore lead to an increase in job satisfaction; reduced absenteeism; and time 'at the right time' for families, life and learning activities.
- It's as flexible as rostering can get – and other Information Sheets in this series have shown the positive outcomes from workplace flexibility to include enhanced recruitment capability and increased staff retention.
- Research has shown that a 'capacity to self-roster' is one of the top five incentives which would encourage an 'out-of-sector' nurse to return to work in the role.
- Again if managed well, Self-Rostering can be the most equitable of the systems – and generates an increased cooperation and coordination among staff teams and individuals, thereby making a positive impact on workplace culture.
- Self-Rostering also significantly reduces the time managers spend on rostering – although they still have a role in developing the 'master' rosters; preparing and communicating guidelines for implementation; and monitoring the process.

Limitations to consider

- Self-Rostering depends on staff 'being fair'. Although most Self-Rostering systems operate under guidelines which create equity, there's often opportunity for those with more 'self-interest' than others to manipulate the system. Monitoring this to ensure less assertive staff are not disadvantaged can be time consuming.
- If guidelines are not well-developed or their application not well-monitored, disputes and dissatisfaction can do more harm to team cohesion than a rigid non-flexible system.

How would you go about it?

As with other rostering systems, Self-Rostering can be introduced as either a manual or computerised system. Some electronic systems allow staff to enter availability and a preference rating for each shift and then 'the program' sorts shifts to create the most equitable roster.

Whichever system is used, staff will need a Master Staffing Profile Plan (developed by management) which takes account of fluctuations in workload demand for each work unit. They will also need guidelines to work within; in much the same way as a Roster Coordinator does when allocating shifts.

In Self-Rostering, however, you may need additional guidelines about 'maximums and minimums'. Apart from legislation or industrial agreements, it's also worth developing some additional site-specific guidelines. For example, you could form a small group of staff within each unit to decide the maximum number of consecutive shifts they feel staff could do and still work effectively – or the minimum number of hours staff would need between shifts in specific work areas.



Where you can find more information

- After a 1999 *Queensland Health Ministerial Taskforce* highlighted inflexible and inequitable rostering as an issue affecting the recruitment and retention of nurses, six pilot sites were established to trial various rostering systems. One of the outcomes of the trials is a publication, *The Best Practice Framework for Rostering Nursing Personnel*. This publication is available at www.health.qld.gov.au and offers a comparison of the strengths and limitations of various rostering methods, including Self-Rostering. The document includes templates for developing a Master Staffing Profile Plan.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- Despite the fact *St Vincent's Hospital* in Melbourne will offer 105-110 places in its 2009 Graduate Nurse Program – and for many of them it will be their first full-time shift rotation – the hospital offers the Graduates Self-Rostering in many clinical areas. To reduce the potential for stress and sick leave, the Graduates are asked to observe 17 guidelines in planning their rosters. The guidelines cover issues such as the minimum number of shifts to work with a Preceptor; maximum number of days to work in a row; and maximum number of weeks on night shift. The hospital feels the guidelines will also help to ensure that the Graduates – and their colleagues – achieve fair and equitable rosters.
- *Tallangatta Health Service* in north-eastern Victoria operates a 30-bed hospital complex which also offers community health services and coordinates the HACC program across a service population of 4500 people. For many years, the Health Service has successfully operated a self-rostering system within specific units.

The following arrangements are used in a unit with 15 part-time staff and eight casual staff:

- Night Shifts are filled with permanent staff.
- Part-time staff are numbered 1 to 15 and move down one ranking each fortnight, with No.15 rotating back up to No.1.
- Each fortnight, the current No. 1 staff member has first opportunity to nominate shifts on the Master Roster, followed by each team member in numerical order.
- Shifts remaining after the No.15 staff member has selected shifts are then allocated to Casual employees who have already recorded their availability at the bottom of the column for each day of the fortnight.
- Each fortnightly roster is posted at least one month before it takes effect and confirmed by a Roster Coordinator within three days of the posting, so all staff (including Casuals) are aware of their confirmed shifts well in advance.
- The system accommodates important events by allowing people to register their name and an 'R' (for special request) ahead of their 'turn' in the numerical rotation.
- Space is provided at the bottom of the roster to highlight any 'vacant' shifts which remain after the roster is completed by all staff and these shifts are then open to anyone 'on the second round'.

Source: Based on an article in *Eden in OZ* newsletter, January 2008

Managing a Volunteer Workforce

The realm of volunteering has changed! Not only has there been an increase in the diversity of volunteers – in terms of age, educational background, social background, ethnicity and gender – but also in the nature of the work they do.

In Aged and Community Care, the changes have been keenly felt. Volunteers are vital to many Aged and Community Care services. They enhance, support and enrich the work of paid employees and this essential support network deserves a comprehensive management program.

Why would you want to do it?

- Enhanced Benefits for Clients and Volunteers:** Volunteers do so much to enhance the quality of life for clients. Effective management programs not only help to attract and retain them, but also enhance the volunteer's personal experience – which builds confidence and skills; alleviates social isolation; builds connectedness and a sense of belonging in the community.
- Risk Management:** Taking a more 'professional' approach to volunteer management helps to ensure they work within clearly defined boundaries and have sufficient guidelines and training to ensure their work is undertaken appropriately and safely.
- Increased Volunteer Recruitment and Retention:** An enhanced community understanding of the value of volunteers has brought with it an increased sense of reciprocity. Volunteers today anticipate they will be treated as a valuable part of the Aged and Community Care workforce.
- An enhanced Workplace Culture:** An effective volunteer management program doesn't just impact on volunteers – the rest of your workforce will also better understand the rationale, parameters and guidelines for interaction with volunteers – which improves the work environment for everyone.

How would you go about it?

The employment of volunteers is subject to many of the same laws that protect paid staff (OH&S, Anti-Discrimination etc) and also specific legislation such as the *Volunteers Protection Act 2001*. In addition, *National Standards* (available from Volunteering Australia) have been developed to provide guidelines for 'Best Practice'.

Developing an appropriate volunteer management program is a logical 'next step'.

One of the most important aspects is to realise the program needs to extend 'across the board' – whether volunteers are performing a 'companionship' role in homes or residential facilities; working in direct-care roles assisting Allied Health professionals; or performing in decision-making roles on Boards and Committees.

All volunteers need to know their role, rights and responsibilities; they need to feel engaged with the organisation they work for; they need to feel they have the skills, tools and capabilities to do the work they're there to do; and they need to feel their contribution is valued.

While some employers may feel these needs are accommodated without a formal program, documenting processes helps to 'make sure' – and also provides useful tools for monitoring, review and evaluation.

The suggestions overleaf are adaptable for specific roles and specific volunteers. For example, volunteers from non-English speaking backgrounds may have difficulty with written documents. That doesn't mean those documents don't need to be developed – only that their content needs to be communicated differently, either by having them transcribed in the appropriate language or translated by an appropriate interpreter.

Initiatives you could consider

Developing written policies, procedures and position descriptions

- **Policies:** Developing written policies to guide the program signifies to everyone how important it is and formally 'stamps' the program with your organisational culture. Useful policies include: *Interview and Selection of Volunteers; Volunteer Appointment and Placement; Volunteer Right of Refusal; Volunteer Duty of Care; Volunteer Confidentiality; Termination of Volunteers.*
- **Procedures:** Written procedures give a step-by-step method for implementing policies or fulfilling responsibilities and therefore encourage consistency. Keep them simple so they don't overwhelm people.
- **Position Descriptions:** Again, these documents don't need to be overcomplicated. Useful headings include: *Title of the Role; Need for the Role; Time Commitment; Your Supervisor; Other Team Members; Details of Duties/Activities; What we're looking for; Training and Development; Benefits of the Role.*

Preparing a comprehensive information pack

- Preparing the documents above will help you to tailor Volunteer Information Packs – which should also include an overview of the organisation, including values, and a Volunteer Rights and Responsibilities document.

Conducting a targeted recruitment campaign

- Use the same approach as for paid staff – predict what you will need in the future as well as what you need now and adopt a mix of attraction methods. Promotion options specifically for volunteers include posting an ad on community noticeboards; conducting a letterbox drop in your locality; seeking opportunities to have 'good news stories' published about your current volunteers in community newspapers; and registering with organisations such as Volunteering Australia.

Expanding orientation and training

- Orientation needs to include the organisation; systems in place; people (clients, staff members and other volunteers); work location; and workplace culture. This should be more than a site tour – volunteers need Orientation-Induction-Settlement too – and a buddy system over a period of time is appropriate.
- Training should be more than an initial 'hands-on' instruction. On-going development could include a series of workshops for volunteers as a team – with a mix of topics relevant to specific roles and others focussed on personal development. This approach upgrades skills, encourages networking and recognises value.



Initiatives other organisations have successfully implemented

- The *City of Unley* has a *Volunteer Policy Statement* in place to guide the management of more than 450 volunteers. A *Coordinator of Volunteers* works with program coordinators to ensure volunteers receive appropriate training and a quarterly *Volunteer Connect* newsletter facilitates networking. The Council has invited volunteers to provide feedback on a *Draft Code of Conduct for Employees and Volunteers* and a recent survey sought volunteers' input about how the Council could improve the experience for them. Community Services' volunteers have bi-monthly support meetings with coordinators (dinner included).
- *The Maltese Aged Care Association SA (MACASA)* has approximately 40 volunteers who assist with delivering meals; preparing food; providing mini bus and individual transport to clients; assisting with office work; visiting clients in homes or aged care facilities; and serving on the organisation's Management Committee. MACASA already has activities in place to recognise the value of volunteers, but is in the process of developing a more formal *Volunteer Recognition Policy* to ensure consistency of practice. One of the current 'recognition' initiatives is a *Discount Voucher Booklet*, made possible through the support of local businesses. MACASA plans to expand the discount program to include more vehicle-related businesses – such as outlets for mechanical work, batteries etc – to supplement the current mileage reimbursement. Volunteer Induction includes meeting with the Management Committee; on-the-job training; and 'speciality' training such as *Food Safety, Communicating with People with Dementia* and *SAPOL Driver Awareness Training*. Volunteers also meet twice a year at an afternoon tea and to hear guest speakers (e.g. Aged Rights Advocacy Service).

Where to find further information

- The Volunteering Australia website www.volunteeringaustralia.org has downloadable documents such as *Recruiting and Supporting Volunteers from Diverse Cultural and Language Backgrounds* and *Toolkit for Evaluating Volunteer Training* (which includes templates). The *National Standards for involving volunteers in not-for-profit organisations* can also be purchased for a small fee from this website

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