

From Strategy to Reality: A Model for Community Engagement

Ah Chin W*

Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, Northern Territory Public Sector, Darwin,
Northern Territory, Australia

Keywords

Indigenous, employment, community engagement, continuous improvement, public policy

Introduction

The days when governments did everything alone and without consultation are long gone. Community groups, organisations, business and private industry are increasingly being recognised as being crucial to the development and implementation of effective public policy and in its delivery of services (Department of the Chief Minister 2005).

The Northern Territory (NT) has a culturally diverse population, with Indigenous¹ people comprising the largest cultural group and the largest users of government services, and yet are often the least engaged in influencing public policy and service delivery. To contribute to moving the Northern Territory Public Sector (NTPS) culture in a direction that better reflects this diversity, and to assist the NTPS in becoming a leader in promoting a workplace culture that is more conducive to the employment of Indigenous people, a new way of doing business is required.

Research clearly shows that the community must be actively involved in the planning and development of public policy affecting their lives. This begins by engaging with and seeking the views of the community. Coordinating whole-of-government, whole-of-community responses to socio-economic issues is a challenge for government as well as the community (Goodwin 2004). However, quality decisions can only be achieved when people are actively involved in the consultation and decision making process.

This paper discusses a case study in which the NTPS, in partnership with the Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) NT Division, established the series of *Indigenous Employment Forums* to consult more inclusively and effectively with the community to inform the basis of the NTPS's *Indigenous Employment Tool Kit*. The purpose of the *Indigenous Employment Tool Kit* is to provide a reference guide for employers and managers in recruiting and retaining Indigenous people in the NTPS workforce.

The *Indigenous Employment Forums* were conceived to facilitate this consultation process, founded on the principals of community engagement, continuous improvement and local capacity development.

¹ For the purpose of this paper, the term Indigenous applies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Both terms are used interchangeably.

Before discussing the case study, the context in which the *Indigenous Employment Forums* were delivered is described. This paper thus explains the demographics of the Northern Territory and the Northern Territory Public Sector workforce, the Northern Territory Government's *Indigenous Employment & Career Development Strategy 2002–2006*, and the efforts by the Northern Territory Government to engage more effectively with the NT community through its Community Engagement Framework.

Northern Territory, Australia

The Northern Territory economy is small. It relies on world demand for mining, farming and tourism. But the NT also has a solid base of defence and government employment, with the Department of Defence presence notably increasing in the past decade (Access Economics 2003).

The NT is different to other jurisdictions in Australia. Some of these distinguishing factors include:

- The NT has a small and diverse population, spread across some of Australia's most remote and isolated regions
- The NT is isolated from the rest of Australia, with it being closer to Singapore and Hong Kong than it is to Sydney or Melbourne
- The NT represents only 1 per cent of the total Australian population, yet occupies 1.34 million square kilometres; the NT represents 17 per cent of Australia's land mass and coastline (Department of Chief Minister 2002)
- The NT has the highest proportion of Indigenous people and the youngest population when compared to other jurisdictions. For example, in 2001, 25 per cent of Territorians identified themselves as Indigenous, compared with an average of 2.2 per cent for all Australians (Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs 2004).
- Approximately 40 per cent of school aged children identify as Indigenous - projections suggest this will increase to 50 per cent in the coming years (Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment 2004)
- About 50 per cent of land in the Northern Territory is owned by Indigenous people (Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs 2004)
- Almost 60 per cent of the Northern Territory population live in the three major urban centres of Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs. This leaves approximately 40 per cent of the population living in rural or remote towns and communities (ABS Report 3222.7, 2001 cited in Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment 2004).
- The NT has the highest Indigenous labour market participation rates of any jurisdiction, but the lowest Indigenous employment
- Government services are delivered to the highest Indigenous population as a percentage of the NT's total population.

These factors present challenges to the Northern Territory Government in reaching out to people, listening to them and involving them in decisions (Department of the Chief Minister 2005). With the low levels of employment for Indigenous people, it is critical that the Northern Territory Public Sector address this major disadvantage faced by Indigenous people through the collaborative development of culturally appropriate

education, training and development systems to ensure that Indigenous people are able to participate in the labour market (Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment 2003).

The Northern Territory Public Sector is attempting to do this by engaging with the Indigenous community and other key stakeholders in the development and implementation of initiatives designed to improve Indigenous employment outcomes. In a relatively small jurisdiction such as the NT, the role of each of the stakeholders in addressing Indigenous employment is significant and must not be under-estimated.

Demographics of the Northern Territory Public Sector (NTPS)

In the NT, government and the Department of Defence are the biggest industry sector (refer Table 1), with the NTPS being the single largest employer within this industry (including Health & Community Services and Education).

However, the NTPS is a relatively small workforce when compared to our eastern neighbours, with a total of about 16,600 employees, yet it has arguably the most remote and diverse workforce in Australia, if not in the developed world, with 2300 jobs in 132 remote communities. As the largest employer in the Northern Territory, the NTPS and its staff are also the largest provider and consumer of services, thereby having a significant influence on the economy.

Table 1. Employment by industry, Northern Territory versus Australia (2001)

	Number NT	Share of total jobs (%)	
		NT	Australia
Government Administration & Defence	14,977	17.3	4.6
Retail Trade	10,724	12.4	14.9
Health & Community Services	7970	9.2	9.9
Property & Business Services	7620	8.8	11.4
Education	7176	8.3	7.3
Construction	5575	6.5	6.9
Cultural and Recreational Services	2655	3.1	2.5
Mining	2017	2.3	0.9

Source: Adapted from Access Economics, November 2003

The disparity between the representation of Indigenous people in the NT community compared to their participation rates in the labour market is significant. Representing 25 per cent of the NT population, Indigenous people represent only 6 per cent of the NTPS workforce, a 40 per cent increase from 2002 when the Northern Territory Government introduced its new Indigenous employment policy.

The average profile of an NTPS employee is a 41-year-old female with an average income of \$49,000. The average profile of an Indigenous employee in the NTPS is a 39-year-old female with an average income of \$37,000.

The Northern Territory Government's Indigenous employment policy

In 2002, the Northern Territory Government introduced its *Indigenous Employment & Career Development Strategy 2002–2006*. The primary aim of the Strategy is to address critical under-representation of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the Northern Territory Public Sector workforce by providing a range of appropriate recruitment, career development and retention initiatives.

In developing the NTPS *Indigenous Employment & Career Development Strategy*, the government recognises that engaging with the community is critical to achieving improved service delivery and developing effective policies affecting the Northern Territory community. It acknowledges that people in the NT community must be offered the chance to actively participate in decisions affecting their lives and in exploring ideas about what happens in their communities.

The three key principles underpinning the NTPS *Indigenous Employment & Career Development Strategy 2002–2006* acknowledge that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play the major role in developing policies and decisions affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are an integral component of the development of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Indigenous programs and services implemented by government should, wherever possible, be delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to reflect the needs and aspirations of the Indigenous community (OCPE 2002).

Following the introduction of the NTPS *Indigenous Employment & Career Development Strategy*, an extensive implementation phase was undertaken across all regions with chief executive officers (CEOs) and their executive teams.

Consultations during the implementation phase provided a message to agencies that this was a key policy of a government that was fully committed to increasing the number of Indigenous people employed in the public sector and made clear the government's expectations that CEOs would deliver on the policy.

Some of the comments and questions received when meeting the executive teams and regions shocked us. Comments such as: "We've been down this path before" and "Why all this attention on Indigenous people?" gave an insight into the culture that existed at the time in some of the agencies.

To say a fundamental shift was needed in the mind set of many would be an understatement. We realised that to achieve a strategic approach with stakeholders would require us to reconfigure the way we went about our business and the way we engaged with the various stakeholders. History clearly told us that doing more of the same was simply not going to work.

In its goal to increase the number of Indigenous people actively participating in the labour market, the challenge for the Northern Territory Government continues to be in developing capacity within the community and engaging with the community to develop partnerships and strategies to address the significant under-representation of Indigenous people employed in the Northern Territory.

The strong perception held by many that it had all been tried before and that it had failed meant that doing more of the same was not an option. Developing multiple solutions to address the chronically low representation of Indigenous people in the labour market would clearly require a fundamental shift in the way we do business.

This new approach would require policy makers and service providers to have a shared understanding and commitment to the principles and practices of community engagement and capacity development. The process would require a continual review of where we are now and where we want to be. It is about reflecting and asking oneself “Am I doing the right thing?” rather than “Am I doing things right?”.

What is community engagement and what does it mean for the Northern Territory Government?

Community engagement recognises that good ideas are generated through a variety of interconnecting processes. It offers people a chance to actively participate in decisions affecting their lives and in exploring ideas about what happens in their communities. It improves the accountability and responsiveness of Government (Department of the Chief Minister 2005).

In its commitment to engaging with the NT community in the development of public policy and service delivery, the Northern Territory Government developed a Community Engagement Framework. This framework emphasises consulting and engaging with the community and ensures that consultation is explicit in the planning and development process.

‘Community engagement’ provides a new approach in the way government works with people in the community — an approach that encourages and rewards active participation. Rather than informing people about pre-determined policy directions in the name of ‘consultation’, the concept of community engagement for the Northern Territory Government emphasises a continuous conversation and dialogue with the community about shaping government policy and improving service delivery as part of the decision making process (Department of the Chief Minister 2005).

Community engagement provides the opportunity for individuals, groups and community organisations to work with government in a constructive way to initiate policy and to ensure important local knowledge is considered in building better communities with Territorians (Department of the Chief Minister 2005).

<i>Community engagement is about seeking the active participation of Territorians</i>	
Information giving is a one-way flow of information	Government → Territorians/community
Consultation is a two-way communication process, which provides a feedback loop	Government ↔ Territorians/community
Active participation is an interactive and ongoing process <i>It acknowledges a role for Territorians in proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation rests with the government</i>	

Source: Northern Territory Government 2004, *Community Engagement. Working Together for a Better Territory.* .

By adopting this approach, the Northern Territory Government publicly acknowledges the value it places on the active participation and constructive contribution of Territorians in seeking solutions to the range of concerns that affect them.

In identifying stakeholders, it is important to ensure all relevant stakeholders are included in the consultation phase. Key stakeholders may include:

- industry
- regional representatives
- local government
- private sector
- researchers
- community groups and organisations
- peak community and business councils
- individuals and community leaders
- Indigenous communities.

Source: Department of the Chief Minister (2005)

The need to engage

Governments are increasingly under pressure to produce better public policy and deliver more efficient and equitable services. Governments are attempting to do this in a world of unprecedented global change (Stewart 1999). As a result, governments have to address fundamental questions about their role and what their business ought to be and the means used to achieve this. It raises critical questions about how governments determine their priorities and the processes used to go about this.

The challenge for government is to develop new roles and relationships with communities where agencies not only deliver services but also foster capacity building. Agencies can create avenues for local people to act on their concerns, build local relationships and value existing community capacity. Public agencies can, and do, influence the economic and social health of communities (Cavaye undated).

Champions at a senior level in the Northern Territory Public Sector have a critical role to play in sending a strong message that they are committed to improving Indigenous employment and that they are prepared to make a difference. Having commitment from the top down was vital to the success of the forums and to effecting change. In the beginning one senior executive took it upon himself to have his executive team briefed on their responsibilities in improving Indigenous employment outcomes. This created the impetus for other CEOs and their executives to follow suit.

The case study — Indigenous Employment Forums

The initiative for an *Indigenous Employment Forum* was conceived by the Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA), NT Division, and implemented in partnership with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment (OCPE). As a professional body, IPAA proved to be an effective vehicle to access the three tiers of government, as well as the non Government sector and various professional groups.

The aim of the *Indigenous Employment Forums* was to promote local policies and strategies on Indigenous recruitment and retention. Additionally, the *Indigenous Employment Forums* provided stakeholders with an opportunity to create, renew and reinvigorate networks.

Process and participation

The approach of IPAA NT Division and OCPE adopted an inclusive and participatory approach with the community. Various individuals and organisations were consulted time and time again throughout the forum process, with many individuals volunteering their time and some taking leave from their work and family commitments to attend meetings and participate in the planning, development and implementation stages.

It became apparent that the methodology we had adopted was consistent with the principles of community engagement, continuous improvement methods and local capacity development. These principles provided a strong foundation early in discussions and formed the basis of team decision making. Thus, the process was flexible but rigorous, and planning and development of the forums was undertaken in close collaboration with stakeholders in the community.

The *Indigenous Employment Forums* focused on how we could work together, to engage with community stakeholders in promoting the small but growing number of recruitment, retention and career development strategies to establish a shared understanding of what we needed to do and how we needed to address the low representation of Indigenous people in the NTPS workforce.

The forums allowed for the active participation of local Indigenous people and other stakeholders and resulted in increased confidence, capacity and skills development of Indigenous people who had volunteered their time to be part of the process.

The *Indigenous Employment Forums* were conducted in two phases to enable both urban and regional participation, with a total of six forums held across the regions in the Territory. The overarching theme of the forum series, titled '*From Strategy to Reality: Successfully Delivering Indigenous Recruitment and Career Development in the Northern Territory*' commenced with Phase I in Darwin in September 2003.

Phase I, titled 'Sharing policies and strategies on Indigenous employment' was designed for stakeholders to share and showcase their Indigenous employment policy and strategy ideas as a precursor to Phase II, which was a rollout series of regional forums held in Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Nhulunbuy, concluding in Darwin in December 2004.

Phase II, which was conducted in the regions over a period of twelve months included:

- 'Mentoring, other effective retention strategies and the manager's role' (Katherine)
- 'Creating role models: developing partnerships that work' (Tennant Creek)
- 'Developing Indigenous career pathways: how to succeed' (Alice Springs)
- 'Recruitment and retention: getting it right the first time!' (Nhulunbuy)
- 'Working towards sustainable Indigenous employment outcomes' (Darwin).

In all, the *Indigenous Employment Forums* attracted more than 800 participants, with more than 350 participants attending the initial forum in Darwin in 2003. This was an outstanding response. We knew then that we had struck a chord with the community.

All delegates were invited to participate in a series of issues-based workshops and were rotated around in small groups to discuss and share ideas including best practice examples on the themes provided. The *Indigenous Employment Forums* utilised skilled Indigenous facilitators to coordinate group discussion and act as role models. Details of the key findings can be found under the section headed 'Forum Findings'.

As with most planning processes, the forums experienced a number of delays. For example, the unexpected death of a traditional owner in one region and competing priorities in another meant that the planning team had to be flexible. Rather than pose a problem for the consultation process, these interruptions provided valuable time for the team to review, reflect and re-focus among themselves and with stakeholders.

Government as enabler

Engaging with the community and developing local capacity is pivotal to government's success in developing effective public policy and culturally appropriate services. Involving all relevant stakeholders throughout the

planning, design, implementation and evaluation phases of the *Indigenous Employment Forums* was of paramount importance and guided the team's decision-making processes.

The implementation of the *Indigenous Employment Forums* proved to be an evolutionary process consistent with those described in the Continuous Improvement (CI) and Process Improvement (PI) models. Based on the Australian Quality Council's Process Improvement Model (see Figure 1), improvement is shown as a series of logical steps throughout the process. In order to move from one step to the next, we had to *plan* for the improvement; we then had to *do* the activities required to implement the improvement; and we then *checked* to ensure that the desired results had been achieved. After each step in the process, we had to *act* to ensure that the gains were maintained.

Our role was to facilitate the consultation process through appreciating and utilising existing local community networks and improving interaction and communication between stakeholders and government.

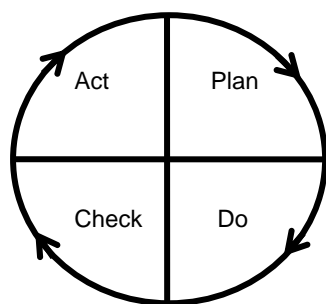


Figure 1. Process Improvement Model

Source: Australian Quality Council (1995)

It was anticipated that the synergies created by the *Indigenous Employment Forums* would help to promote and sustain partnerships with Indigenous people by engaging them in key roles, as well as driving initiatives to target the policy and decision-makers of government and the general business sector.

This approach enabled effective partnerships to be developed between the NTPS, Indigenous community groups and organisations, industry representatives, the business sector and representative councils on behalf of traditional owners and senior cultural people.

Planning to plan

The original idea of the *Indigenous Employment Forums* was that it would be just a one-day forum. However, early on in the planning stage, a scoping paper was developed which identified the need for the *Indigenous Employment Forums* to be rolled out across the regions.

The scoping paper also identified specific themes for each forum: a communication strategy; formation of a planning committee; structure, outline and design of a planning workshop; focus on the development for

stage 1 (policy) and stage 2 (practical strategies); consultative strategies with Indigenous leaders; engagement of keynote speakers; funding and co-hosting responsibilities; and anticipated timeframe.

The first planning committee meeting was held in April 2003 with an open invitation encouraging Indigenous people to comment on the draft scoping paper. At the time some Indigenous people questioned the validity of another Indigenous 'talkfest', their reservations supported by a history of indecision, broken promises and lack of action on Indigenous issues.

Their belief was that the proposed workshop could result in another fruitless and embarrassing effort by government wishing to satisfy its own requirements. Some regarded the proposal as patronising and insincere, a view indicative of the hopelessness that has been perpetuated over the years. It was as much about establishing what the stakeholders didn't want to see happen as much as it was about the outcomes they did want to see from the *Indigenous Employment Forums*. The perception of it having all been tried before and failing meant that doing more of the same was not an option.

A workshop model was proposed and a plan developed to present the *Indigenous Employment Forums* in two phases throughout 2003 and 2004. The workshop model broadened the spectrum and provided an impetus for increasing the project's scope and momentum. Following the second forum in Katherine it was decided to prepare trigger papers to enable and prompt participant discussion in a more focussed way.

Engagement was sought from key representatives of local, state and federal government, Indigenous community groups and organisations, the private business sector, including registered training organisations, and unions. The response was positive, with people attending from a broad range of local, territory and federal government departments, non-government organisations, schools and universities, private sector organisations, community representatives and individuals.

Engaging Indigenous people in all stages of the *Indigenous Employment Forums* has been critical to its success and has resulted in Indigenous people participating in various capacities throughout the planning, development, consultation, implementation and evaluation processes. Indigenous people acted as coordinators, keynote presenters, scribes, masters of ceremonies, chair persons, mentors, record keepers, workshop facilitators, project managers and evaluators.

Feedback from Indigenous people indicate that the *Indigenous Employment Forums* has had a significant impact on the personal and professional development of Indigenous representatives and proved to be a real confidence booster, with them being able to pass on their newly acquired skills and knowledge to others in the community, as well as take back to the workplace.

Objectives of the Indigenous Employment Forums

A number of objectives of the forums were identified. These include:

- actively engaging Indigenous people in the planning, development, implementation, consultation and review of the forums
- promoting good case studies on Indigenous recruitment, career development and retention strategies.
- allowing for a shared and increased understanding of cultural awareness amongst participants
- promoting the diversity of Indigenous employment initiatives developed in the workplace
- developing sustainable partnerships with the three tiers of government, as well as Indigenous community groups and organisations, industry representatives, the community business sector and interested individuals
- based on the information arising from the forum discussions, contributing to the development of the NTPS Indigenous Employment Tool Kit, which is designed to assist managers and employees in the NTPS in achieving successful results in Indigenous employment. A draft of this Tool Kit was presented for community comment and discussion at both the Nhulunbuy and Darwin forums.

Forum findings

Key findings from the forums included the need by employers to have an understanding of, and be flexible enough to meet, the cultural and employment requirements of Indigenous employees. It also highlighted the requirement for processes and systems to recognise Indigenous needs and aspirations within a culturally supportive context.

A strong element of the process has been the extremely high quality of speakers in the regions, with the majority being local Indigenous people using local resources and local case studies. Through the use of brief, two-minute snapshots, each of the *Indigenous Employment Forums* provided participants with an opportunity to share initiatives they had developed to address Indigenous employment. This allowed for an interactive process and gave the regions a much needed voice.

Additionally, the forums highlighted the need for:

- Indigenous cultural knowledge and skills to be included in job descriptions
- greater flexibility in all aspects of employment, including pre-recruitment, recruitment, job design and career pathways
- the importance of partnerships, networks and interactions across sectors to be more inclusive of the Indigenous community
- executive and management staff to support and champion Indigenous employment in the workplace
- greater opportunities for work placements in communities, particularly in regional and remote areas where access to jobs is limited
- alternative advertising and selection practices to attract Indigenous people
- a genuine commitment to employing Indigenous people
- provision of more flexible modes for the delivery of training, particularly outside of major townships and not solely delivered through the traditional 'classroom' approach
- a strategic approach in the development of solutions that meet the needs of the Indigenous community and government

Balancing community expectations and the need for participation and strategic approaches which meet government objectives is not an easy process. The *Indigenous Employment Forums* highlighted this ongoing tension. Developing strategies and inclusive approaches requires decision-makers and stakeholders to review, reflect and re-focus throughout the development, implementation and evaluation stages and acknowledges, importantly, that a 'one size fits all' approach does not work.

On reflection, there was much to be learned about successfully engaging the community, including:

- policy makers must base all decisions within a community engagement and continuous improvement framework
- the role of government to act as enabler and facilitate local capacity development
- the need to have champions at a senior level
- the need to be responsible for driving and coordinating the process at a local and regional level
- leading by example to influence change
- strategies must be developed at a systemic level
- genuine goodwill of team members must be present
- respect for the views and opinions of others is integral to the process
- reviewing, reflecting and re-focusing by the team and stakeholders must happen regularly
- showcasing small successes will build momentum and influence the culture
- being prepared to think outside the box when seeking resolutions leads to success
- remember to appreciate and utilise existing community networks.

How will we know when we are effectively engaging with the community?

Government will be effective in engaging with the community when the community is able to actively participate in decisions which affect them.

The Northern Territory Government still has a long way to go. We will know we are effectively engaging with the community when:

- Territorians are offered a range of innovative opportunities to engage in policy development
- Territorians are better informed and more involved in shaping decisions on policies, programs and services from planning to implementation and evaluation
- Territorians are contributing information about issues of importance and are confident that their input is valued
- community engagement activities are better coordinated by government departments
- policies, programs and service decisions better reflect the diversity of community views and needs
- government planning better reflects regional aspirations.

(Department of the Chief Minister (2005))

Building the momentum

Running in parallel to the *Indigenous Employment Forums*, a number of other Indigenous employment initiatives were being developed across the Northern Territory Public Sector. Establishing clear and accountable reporting systems to capture, monitor and report on Indigenous employment data was established. Progress by agencies in implementing the Government's Indigenous employment policy was being submitted bi-annually to Cabinet Office. This was particularly important as the reports enabled agencies that were doing well, and those not doing so well to be identified, and for this information to be distributed widely among Ministers, CEOs, agencies and internal and external stakeholders. We were not only holding ourselves accountable for current activity, but had established a process to measure outcomes over the longer term.

Other achievements were the 'Kigaruk'² Indigenous Men's Leadership Development Program run for Indigenous men in the NTPS. This pilot program was an outstanding success, with all 25 participants completing the program and receiving a Diploma of Business (Frontline Management). One of the participants was the recipient of the coveted Charles Darwin University Medal for most outstanding achievement in Vocational Education and Training. Following the success of the Kigaruk pilot program, a similar program is currently being developed for Indigenous women in the NTPS.

Conclusion

People everywhere want governments to improve their performance. The Northern Territory Government is no exception and is attempting to do this by engaging with the NT community more openly and transparently in the development of public policy and service delivery through its Community Engagement Framework.

Based on the principles of this framework, and on the principles of continuous improvement and local capacity development, early indications suggest that the *Indigenous Employment Forums* have been an effective method to engage and gain support from a broad range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders at local, regional and Territory-wide levels. This consultation has been crucial to informing the basis of the Northern Territory Public Sector's *Indigenous Employment Tool Kit*.

While the NTPS has a long way to go in achieving a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community it serves, the consultative process undertaken throughout the *Indigenous Employment Forums* indicates that it has been successful in engaging with a broad cross section of the community and helped to develop alliances and relationships with stakeholders that actively contribute to, and influence, the development of Indigenous employment policies and initiatives.

Engaging Indigenous people in all stages of the *Indigenous Employment Forums* in various capacities has been critical to its success and has also impacted significantly on the personal and professional

² The word 'Kigaruk', a Kungarakan (Koong-ar-akan) language word which means 'adult male', was formally adopted with permission from the Kungarakan Culture & Education Association, Darwin, Northern Territory.

development of many Indigenous representatives, in particular graduates of the Kigaruk Indigenous Men's Leadership Development Program. The prospect of being viewed as role models and being able to pass on newly acquired skills and knowledge to others in their communities has provided Indigenous people with the personal and professional development opportunities that they may not otherwise have received.

Indigenous people still only make up 6 per cent of the Northern Territory Public Sector workforce but developing effective public policy informed by consultation and engagement of the community is an improvement and a major step forward. Every small step can effect change. More, however, has to be done.

Government alone does not have all the answers. Working collaboratively to develop a shared vision requires a fundamental shift in the mindset of government and the community. Developing a strategic approach informed by the community can lead to incremental and sustainable change. We need to remind ourselves many of these problems are multi-faceted and complex.

It is hoped that the personal and professional development of Indigenous people, fostered through the inclusive approach of the *Indigenous Employment Forums* continues to grow and to influence policy and program development impacting on Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

Re-engineering the way government works with its stakeholders in a true spirit of community engagement will be a small but significant step in the right direction.

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