

NTPS Aboriginal Employee Forum Alice Springs 2024

Report



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Acronyms	Full form
AEF	Aboriginal Employee Forum
AEMP	Aboriginal Employee Mentor Program
AEP	Aboriginal Employment Program
DCDD	Department of Corporate and Digital Development
DCF	Department of Children and Families
DCMC	Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet
DET	Department of Education and Training
DHLGCD	Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development
DLPE	Department of Lands, Planning and Environment
DoC	Department of Corrections
DoH	Department of Health
DPSC	Department of People, Sport and Culture
DTH	Department of Tourism and Hospitality
EA	Enterprise Agreement
ER	Employee Relations
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee
NTFES	Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services
NTG	Northern Territory Government
NTPOL	Northern Territory Police
NTPS	Northern Territory Public Sector
OCPE	Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment
PSAGR	Public Sector Appeals and Grievance Reviews
PWC	Power and Water Corporation
SWPD	Strategic Workforce Planning and Development
TGEN	Territory Generation

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Forum Overview

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment (OCPE) hosted the fourteenth Northern Territory Public Sector (NTPS) Aboriginal Employee Forum (AEF) in Alice Springs on 20 and 21 November 2024 at DoubleTree by Hilton in Alice Springs.

OCPE received 113 nominations, with 107 employees attending from a range of agencies.

The AEF is designed for Aboriginal employees to:

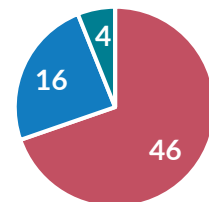
- learn about the key focus areas and progress of the Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy (AECDS)
- hear what NTPS agencies are doing to increase Aboriginal employment.
- gain knowledge of programs and initiatives available.
- learn about employment conditions and entitlements.
- learn about career and professional development opportunities.
- contribute to future Aboriginal workforce initiatives.
- hear the career journeys of youth and senior panels.
- meet new people, network, and celebrate the success of colleagues.

The agenda included participant activities, workshops, presentations, sharing agency stories and hearing from youth and senior panels.

Forum Satisfaction

Forum Attendees

- 113 nominations received.
- 107 total attendees (28 male and 79 female).
- 66 attendees completed the evaluation form (62%).
- 46 attendees were very satisfied with their overall forum experience (70%).



■ Very Satisfied ■ Somewhat Satisfied ■ Neutral

The Aboriginal Employee Forum Experience

The forum topics, design and set up was based on feedback from the 2023 Alice Springs AEF.

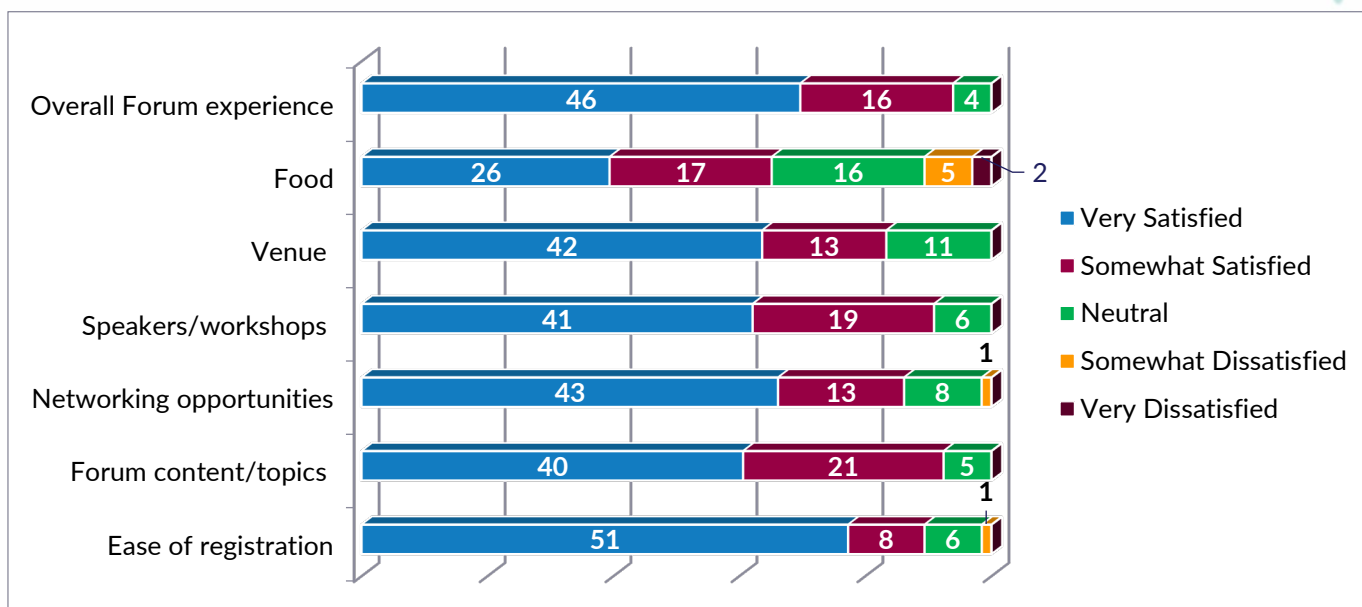
The 2024 Alice Springs AEF received great feedback about the guest speakers, workshops, and presentations.

Feedback received from the participants via the evaluation form included:

- *All topics were very interesting.*
- *I enjoyed all subjects, and the setting was good.*
- *Networking with different people*

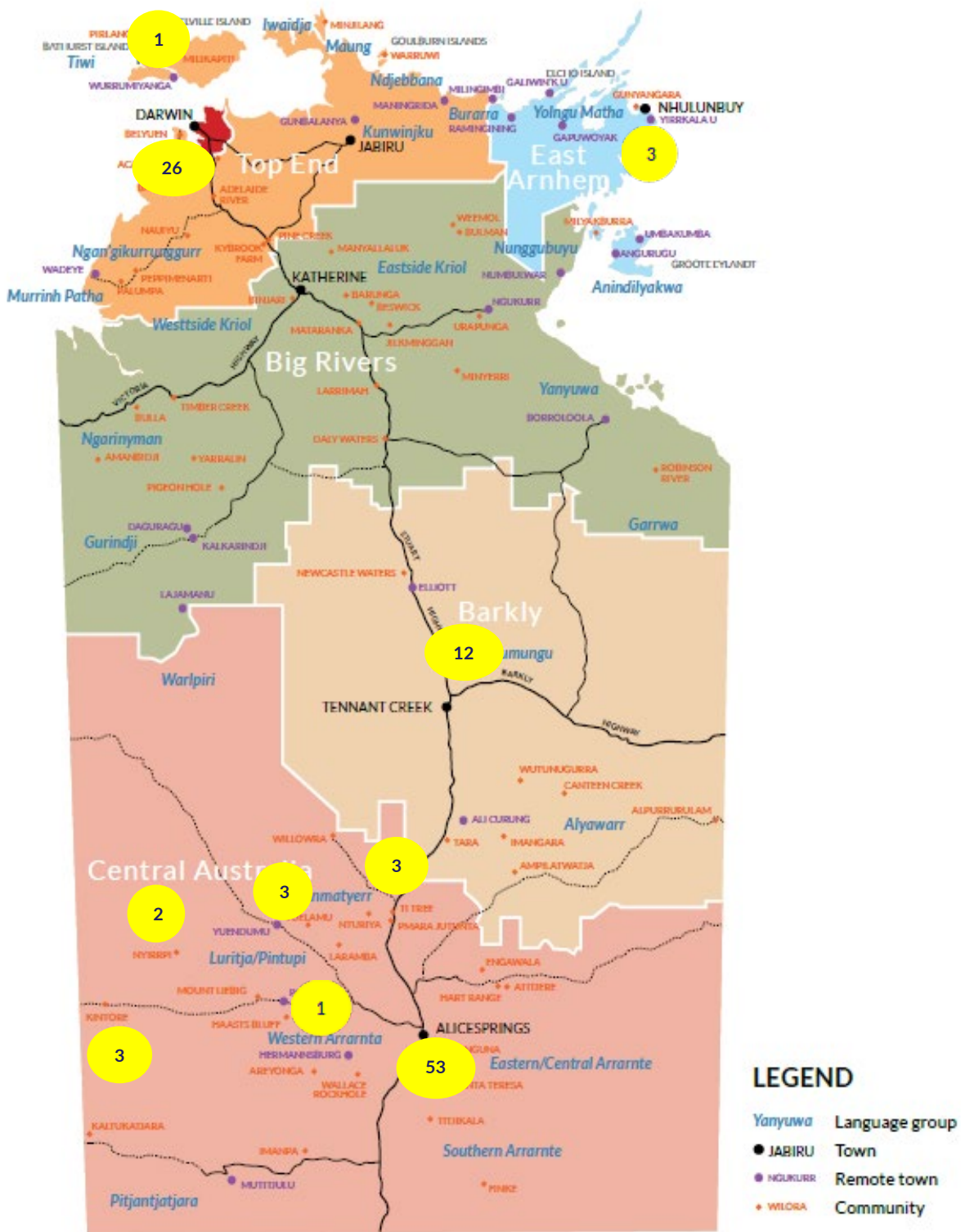
- *Good information*
- *The opportunity to meet with other Aboriginal workers and hear their stories and how things are going in their respective areas.*
- *Everyone was open and honest.*
- *The different departments all sharing their information and allowing all the open sharing and questions.*
- *The stories of the panel members*
- *Networking opportunities, hearing stories, getting updated information and advice about agencies and what they are doing and progressing for aboriginal employees.*
- *My learnings and getting out of my comfort zone and networking and learning about opportunities in the NTPS.*

The graph below outlines the level of satisfaction of respondents regarding the workshops, forum content, venue, food, registration process and overall forum experience.



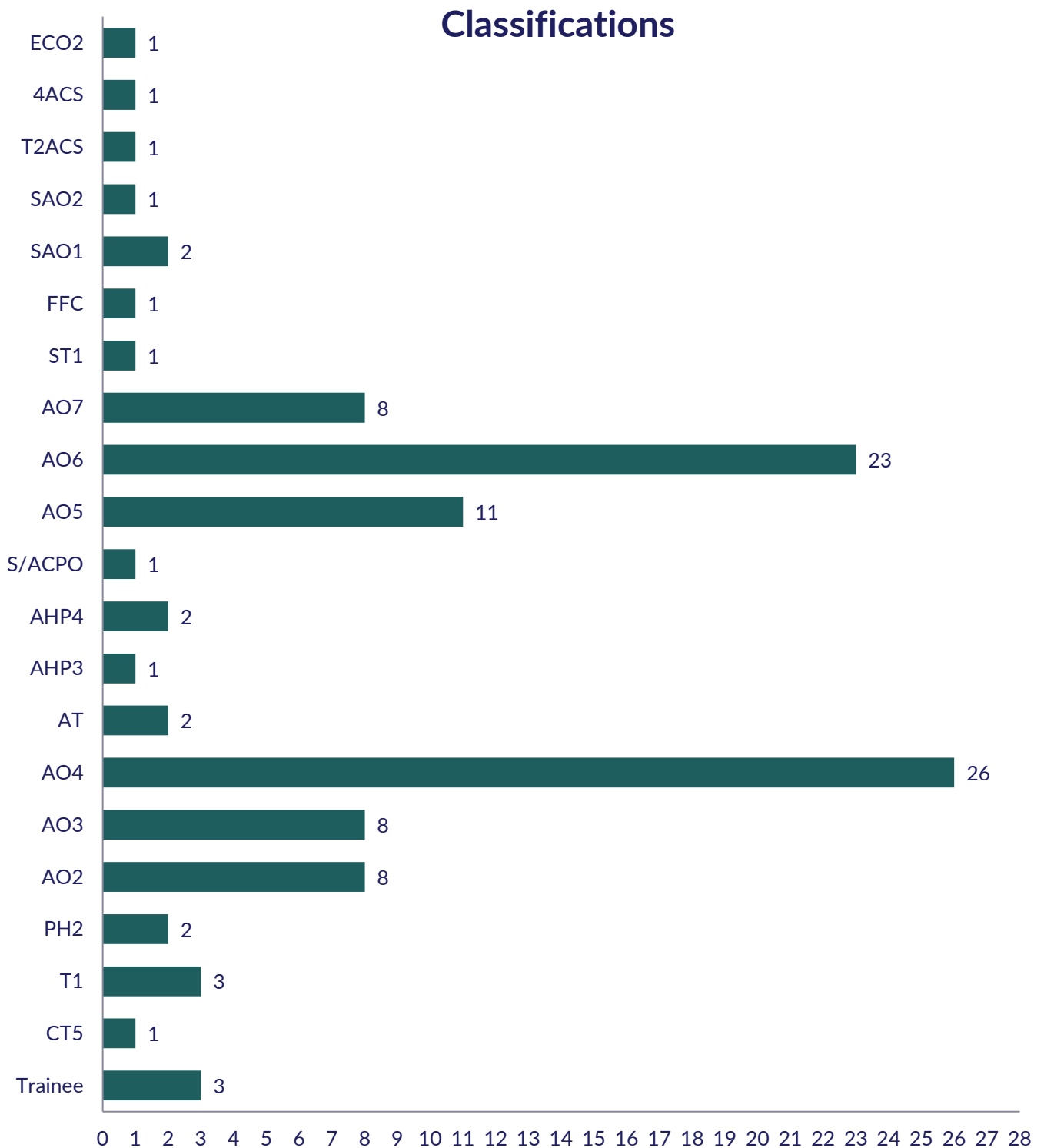
Participants Workplace Location

Whilst most attendees were from Alice Springs, participants travelled from Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Kintore, Nyirripi, Ormiston Gorge, Tennant Creek, Ti Tree, Wurrumiyanga and Yuendumu.



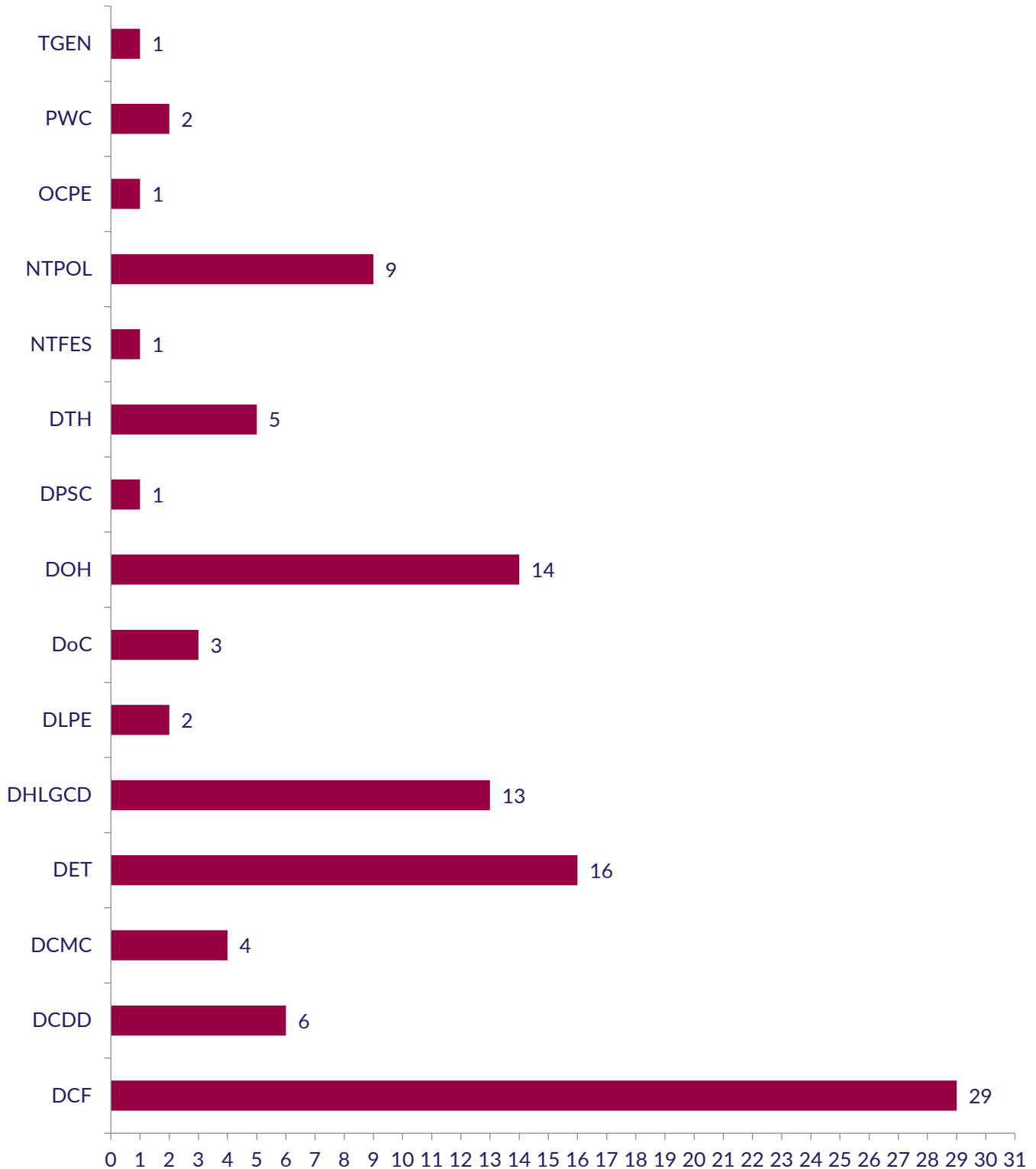
Participants Classifications

The participants classifications ranged from a Trainee to an Executive Contract Officer Level 2 (ECO2) and included various other streams (Professional and Technical). The highest number of participants were of AO4 and AO6 levels. The breakdown of classifications is detailed below.



Agency Representation

There were 12 NTPS agencies represented at the forum. Department of Childrens and Families (DCF) had the highest number of attendees (29), followed by Department of Education and Training (DET) who had 16 staff in attendance. Below is the breakdown of employees in attendance per agency.



Welcome to Country

The forum commenced with a warm Welcome to Country by Arrernte Elder, Ms Rosalie Riley – Aunty Kumalie.

OCPE proudly acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout the Northern Territory and Australia, and recognises their continuing connection to their lands, waters, and communities. OCPE pay respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this Country and Elders both past, present, and emerging.



Opening Address – the Honourable, Jo-Anne Hersey, Minister for Public Service



The Honourable Jo-Ann Hersey, Minister for Public Service and Education and Training, including Early Education, provided the opening address.

Although born down south, Minister Hersey considers herself a true Territorian, she has spent over 30 years living in Katherine, where she raised her family and ran a small hairdressing business.

In 2020, the Minister Hersey was honoured to become the local member for Katherine and is a strong advocate for community engagement, she is passionate about working together to achieve better outcomes for local concerns.

Minister Hersey noted the Government's three key priorities: reducing crime, rebuilding the economy, and restoring the Territory lifestyle and thanked everyone for their ongoing dedication to providing vital public services, particularly amid recent changes within agencies.

Minister Hersey highlighted that aligning public sector agencies with the government's priorities will drive a shift towards a more proactive and results-oriented approach that will transform how the public sector operates to deliver government commitments.

Minister Hersey emphasised her vision for a professional, proficient, and proud Northern Territory Public Sector (NTPS) workforce - one that operates smoothly to deliver the best service, support, and care to our families and communities. Minister Hersey expressed her desire for programs that offer young people real public sector career opportunities and to position the NTPS as a leading employer of choice. Additionally, the Minister Hersey emphasised the importance of strengthening cross-sector collaboration and partnerships and enhancing the capabilities of the NTPS workforce.

Welcome Address – Nicole Hurwood, Commissioner for Public Employment

Nicole Hurwood, Commissioner for Public Employment (The Commissioner) reaffirmed NTPS' commitment to investing in the growth and professionalisation of our workforce, with a particular focus on technical and specialised areas.



The goal is not only to fill positions but to build long-term careers that enable employees to thrive, grow, and achieve their career aspirations. This approach also aims to create a workforce that reflects the diversity of the Territory while fostering collaboration across agencies to tackle challenges, seize opportunities, and meet the expectations of both the government and the communities we serve.

OCPE continues to lead initiatives to attract, recruit, and support the career development of Aboriginal employees. The Commissioner highlighted the importance of valuing the contributions of Aboriginal employees, noting their unique perspectives, knowledge and cultural insights are essential in delivering relevant and effective public services. The lived experience of Aboriginal employees ensures that services are culturally appropriate and meet the needs of all Territorians. Aboriginal employees are integral to the NTPS' success, and the Commissioner is committed to creating an inclusive and supportive environment where everyone can flourish.

The Commissioner spoke to a key benefit of attending the AEF, the opportunity to build connections. She encouraged participants to network, engage with their colleagues, and share their stories, reinforcing that it was a safe space for collaboration where everyone's voice matters.

The Commissioner also introduced the NTPS Chief Executive Officer's (CEO) noting there are now 18 agencies. This group has a strong gender balance and is a mix of experienced and new CEO's, with eight existing CEOs, three new appointments from outside the sector and a further seven appointments have come from promotions within the sector.

CEOs and Departments



Ken Davies PSM
Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet (CM&C), including the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment (OCPE)



Andrew Warton
NT Fire and Emergency Service (NTFES)



Tim McManus
Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF)



Susan Bowden
Department of Education and Training (DET)



Gemma Lake
Attorney-General's Department (AGD)



Chris Hosking
Department of Health (DOH)



Catherine Weber
Department of Corporate and Digital Development (DCDD)



Emma White
Department of Children and Families (DCF)



Michael Murphy
NT Police (NTPOL)

CEOs and Departments



Matthew Varley
Department of Corrections (DoC)



Hayley Richards
Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations (DTBAR)



Alister Trier
Department of Mining and Energy (DME)



Louise McCormick
Department of Logistics and Infrastructure (DLI)



Joanne Townsend
Department of Lands, Planning and Environment (DLPE)



Andrew Kirkman
Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF)



Luccio Cercarelli
Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development (DHLGCD)



Suzana Bishop
Department of Tourism and Hospitality (DTH)



Samantha Livesley
Department of People, Sport and Culture (DPSC)

Presentation - Aboriginal Employment and Career Development

Ursula White, Director
Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Division, OCPE

Ursula shared an update on the services offered by OCPE in relation to the Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy (AECDS)

The AECDS will expire at the end of next year and over the next 12 months, the AECD team will be hosting consultation sessions across the sector and across regions with Aboriginal employees and key stakeholders to inform the direction and what is important to include in the next strategy.

OCPE remains focused on agency commitments in the AECDS and working towards the global target of 16 per cent Aboriginal employment and 10 per cent Aboriginal representation in senior positions.

- As of September 2024, there are 2728 Aboriginal employees within the overall NTPS workforce of 22110, representing 10.98% of the total. Since 2015, the number of Aboriginal employees has increased by 741.
- There are 204, Aboriginal employees in senior roles, defined as Senior Administration Officer 1 (SAO1) level or higher, accounting for 4.89% of the 4,173 senior roles across the NTPS. Since 2015, Aboriginal representation in senior roles has risen by 165.

OCPE continues to ensure appropriate application of Special Measures across the NTPS and has an independent review process for applicants who are unsuccessful under the Special Measures program. OCPE has issued Employment Instruction 15 and new Commissioner's Guideline regarding Special Measures with the aim to reduce challenges for Aboriginal people in remote areas in obtaining a Confirmation of Aboriginality when applying for positions in remote localities and enabling local advertising of vacancies in communities to attract local applicants.

OCPE continues to promote the NTPS as an employer of choice and have a handout 'Grow your Career in the Territory' to be shared with our mob.

To increase the number of Aboriginal staff members participating on selection panels, AECD maintain a register of employees who have completed the Merit Selection training in the last 3 years and want to participate on across sector selection panels. There are currently 51 Aboriginal employees on the register. Participants were encouraged to put their name on this.

AECD continues to facilitate the Aboriginal Employee Mentoring Program (AEMP) to support the career development and retention of Aboriginal employees. Launched in July 2019, this program pairs mentees with suitable mentors for up to 12 months to help them achieve their personal and professional goals. Currently, 34 active mentor-mentee pairs are participating, with 49 trained mentors available. Program dates for 2025 will be announced soon.

The NTPS has several frameworks and pathways to support career development and leadership growth, with specific programs designed for Aboriginal employees:

- **Career Planning Sessions:**
A 2 hour career discovery session with a personal career consultant to work with you to map out your career aspirations and explore your professional development needs.
AECD offers 10 sponsorships annually for Aboriginal employees.
- **Kigaruk and Lookrukin Aboriginal Leadership Development Program:**
Accredited training in a supported learning environment. Participants who successfully complete the program and all assessments requirements they will graduate with the Diploma of Leadership and Management. This program has helped many graduates to further their careers.

In 2023, AECD has launched the Key Dates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Significance with 12 key national days and in 2024, following feedback the Senior Aboriginal Reference Group, the Key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Regional Events and NT Dates of significance calendar. These calendars will be published in 2025 and be available on the OCPE website at [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander days of significance | Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment](#).

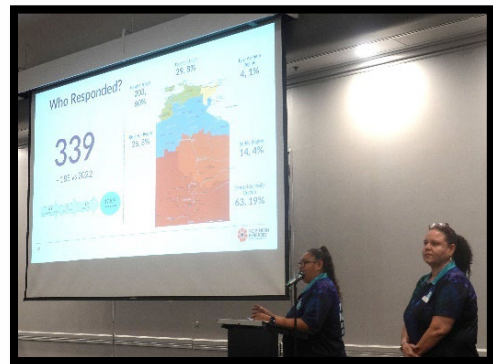
The theme for NAIDOC Week in 2024 was “Keep the Fire Burning! Blak, Loud & Proud”. This theme celebrates the enduring strength and vitality of First Nations cultures, with fire symbolising connection to Country, each other, and the rich traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. OCPE and the Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet arranged the NTPS community Event ‘Flame Tree Ceremony’ in Palmerston.

The online Foundations of Cross Cultural Training is an essential OneNTG training program for employees to complete as part of their induction. As at end of October 2024, the completion rate for this course across the NTPS is 36 percent. AECD are committed to working with different groups to review the Cross Cultural Training Framework and the Foundations of Cross Cultural eLearn module.

Presentation – NTPS Aboriginal Employee Stay Survey

Terese Kelly, Principal Advisor and Ursula White, Director Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Division, OCPE

Ursula and Terese led a session on the NTPS Aboriginal Employee Stay Survey, which provided valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal employees within the NTPS.



The key findings from the 2023 stay survey indicate NTPS Aboriginal employees:

- are passionate about their jobs.
- enjoy creating friendships, relationships, and networks.
- consider supportive managers and teams as critical factors for staying.
- want to support Aboriginal people in their communities.
- emphasise the importance of having Aboriginal people involved in public sector service delivery.
- believe that job security and being positive role models motivate them to stay.

The session also highlighted:

- 89% of survey respondents knew which NTPS Enterprise Agreement (EA) applied to their employment.
- 61% of survey respondent were able to identify their capability level within the NTPS Capability Framework (CF)
- 80% of survey respondents enjoying going to work.
- 78% of survey respondents feel included and valued in their teams.
- 53% of survey respondents have an approved career development plan (personal development plan, work partnership plan or a similar plan)
- 67% of survey respondents believe their manager does understand their cultural commitments and obligations.
- 54% of survey respondents confirmed their work unit does participate or celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander days of significance.

The survey has 15 recommendations and several suggestions for improving Aboriginal employee retention across themes of Industrial Matters, Aboriginal Leadership, Governance, Recruitment and Onboarding, Management – Attributes & Support and Culturally Capable and Responsive Workforce.

OCPE is committed to creating opportunities for Aboriginal people include pathways for long term career growth and ensuring our workplaces are culturally safe, welcoming and supportive. All feedback and suggestions provided for the stay survey will be continuous reviewed considered in OCPE's future work.

The 2023 NTPS Aboriginal Employee Stay Survey Evaluation Report and response to recommendations can be found on [Aboriginal workforce | NTG Central](#).

Workshop – Review and Refresh the NTPS Cross Cultural Training Framework

Terese Kelly, Principal Advisor and Maddison O'Donnell, Senior Advisor Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Division, OCPE



Terese and Maddison facilitated a session focused on reviewing the NTPS Cross Cultural Training Framework. The session aimed to assess whether this resource remain relevant and fit for purpose. A key aspect of the session was engaging participants in a discussion about the framework's effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement.

The Cross-Cultural Training Framework, developed by OCPE in 2013, provides an implementation guide to recognise the diverse multicultural composition of the NTPS workforce. This framework outlines learning outcomes for cross-cultural awareness training, with a focus on enhancing communication and service delivery within the public service.

The session included discussion of the five key areas of the Cross-Cultural Training Framework, which cover basic cross-cultural awareness, in-depth training for employees working with Aboriginal clients, manager training, senior management leadership, and reverse cross-cultural training for Aboriginal staff. Participants were asked to provide feedback on the framework's core objectives and learning outcomes. They were encouraged to suggest what should be added, removed, or updated, and whether there were other key areas, such as induction processes or significant historic events, that should be moved out separately or incorporated.



A portion of the session also focused on the Foundations of Cross Cultural Training eLearn module, which is a foundational resource for all NTPS employees, all new employees are to complete the training within three months of starting and refresh every three years. The eLearn module will be reviewed to ensure it continues to serve its purpose of fostering awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture, particularly in relation to the remote and regional contexts.

Many participants expressed a willingness to assist with the review and refresh of both the framework and the eLearn module. These participants will collaborate with the AECD to finalise the resources.

Activity – Group timeline – Years of Service

Following its success in forums over the past two years, the Group Timeline activity was included on the agenda. For this activity, participants order themselves from the employee with the least employment tenure to the one with the longest time in the NTPS. The task requires participants to communicate and collaborate to ensure they are sorted correctly, offering valuable opportunity for networking, and build connections.

Upon completion of the activity, it was calculated that the 107 participants in the room collectively brought approximately 995 years, 10 months, and 3 days of service and experience within the NTPS.

Presentation - Positive Duty, Right to Disconnect & Appeals & Grievances.

Courtney Mabey, A/Senior Director
Public Sector Appeals and Grievances, OCPE

Courtney led a session covering three key topics; the Right to Disconnect, Positive Duty, and Appeals and Grievances, providing attendees with important updates on their rights and responsibilities.

Courtney explained the recent changes to the *Fair Work Act*, effective from 26 August 2024, which give NTPS employees the right to refuse contact outside of work hours, with exceptions for “reasonable” circumstances, the method of contact, and the level of responsibility. For example, a ranger living on-site in a NTG park may need to respond to out-of-hours requests.

Forum attendees shared that disconnecting from work can be challenging, particularly for those in community-based roles where they are often sought for advice outside regular hours. This highlighted the need to balance personal time with professional demands while ensuring the right to disconnect is respected.

Courtney also discussed Positive Duty, introduced as part of legislative reforms in January 2024. This requires organisations to proactively prevent discrimination, sexual harassment, and victimisation.

The NT’s laws are broader than federal regulations, covering 24 protected attributes and all areas of discrimination. Positive Duty aims to foster a culture of change, with a focus on compliance and ensuring safe, inclusive workplaces. Further, agency obligations under Positive Duty, including policies, incorporating compliance into regular operations, and conducting risk assessments. Attendees emphasised the importance of ensuring these policies are actively implemented and understood.

The session then addressed the processes for Appeals and Grievances under the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act 1993*. Appeals are used to challenge decisions related to promotions or disciplinary actions, while grievances allow employees to seek an independent review of agency actions or decisions.

Courtney provided clarity on the steps involved in both processes, with case studies illustrating scenarios. Employees raised concerns about feeling unsupported in grievances or perceiving the appeal process as lacking impartiality, highlighting the need for consistent, transparent communication about these processes.

The session concluded with an invitation for employees to reflect on these topics and if needed to seek further advice from PSAGR.

This session was important for attendees to better understand their rights and the systems/processes in place to ensure fairness, cultural sensitivity, and a supportive work environment.



Youth and Senior Panels

A standing agenda item of each AEF is to establish a panel of senior and youth NTPS employees to share their career journey with participants showcasing the different pathways into NTPS as well as paths of career development, the following employees shared their story.



Donald Young

Senior Director Digital Strategy, Department of Corporate and Digital Development

Don talked about his mentors through his career and his different roles he has held, his journey through the public sector and how important it was for him to have the mentors he has had along his journey pushing him to think of what his career might be and then how he is now the mentor and leader of his own team and how he continues to foster and support his team to achieve their goals now too.



Becky Myers

Aboriginal Practice Advisor, Department of Children and Families

Becky was born and bred in Alice Springs and is a mum to four sons. Becky worked at Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Programmes Unit for 7 years as an alcohol and other drug worker, before winning an Aboriginal Community Worker position with the then Territory Families, Housing and Communities. Becky believes that having a mentor and have a supporting staff, you can achieve anything. Having a mentor or being a mentor allows you to support staff and more importantly you set goals and set your own path to achieve goals. Becky shared that she set a goal a couple of years ago to attain a particular position and Becky is making her way to that position.



Jacki A'Hang

Student Engagement Advisor, Department of Education and Training

Jacki talked about her love for sport growing up and her connection to it today. Growing up she never really had a mentor, but she was always trying to be the best version she could be for her peers and family. Jacki has lived in Tennant Creek for 49 years. Jacki has held many roles including being a receptionist with the then Department of Education for a couple of years before moving to Department of Transport and Works for 14 years, she has also worked at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

Jacki applied for a Student Engagement Officer with Department of Education and Training (DET) and has been in the position for almost 9 years.



Janette Turner
Senior Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Northern Territory Police

Janette shared her career journey, detailing the various roles she has held over the years. Janette spoke passionately about her love for working remotely and how her family supported her throughout her career. Janette worked as an Interpreter with the Aboriginal Interpreter Service for 11 years before moving over to her role at NT Police. Now, Janette has transitioned to a role where she can care for her family, reflecting on how her career has evolved alongside her personal life.



Reece Dudgeon
Aboriginal Education Officer, Department of Education and Training

Reece discussed his passion for working with youth and the rewards he finds in mentoring young people. He spoke about the mentors who helped him along and the special moments when he sees the youth/students he has worked with grow older and recognise the impact he has had on their lives. In his recent role, Reece has been instrumental in bringing the community into schools, creating connections between students and their Elders.

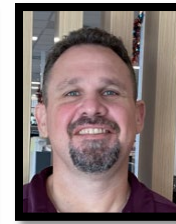
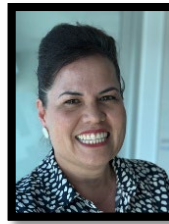


Kerri-Ann Butler
Public Housing Safety Officer, Department of Local Government and Community Development

Kerri-Ann talked about her career path, which began in education before transitioning into a senior college role. In 2018, Kellie joined a youth justice program working as a detention centre officer and in 2021 Kellie returned to Tennant Creek and now works in Housing as a Public Safety Officer. She enjoys the variety in her roles, watching young people grow, and embracing new learning opportunities. Kerri-Ann emphasised the importance of building relationships with youth and the responsibility she feels in mentoring them, often appearing, and supporting them at various stages of their lives.

Workshop - Enhancing the Aboriginal Employment Program

Sarah Temple, Senior Director Workforce Development, Daniel Valle Early Careers Consultant and Natasha Lloyd, Early Careers Consultant, Workforce Development Early Careers, DCDD



Representatives from the Early Careers team hosted a short workshop, to seek ideas and suggestions on how to enhance the Aboriginal Employment Program.

The Aboriginal Employment Program (AEP) is a 20-week program, developed for school leavers and the long term unemployed. It introduces Aboriginal job seekers to the workplace and offers the opportunity to gain work experience and start their career in the NTG.

During the program, participants complete a Certificate II in Workplace Skills at Charles Darwin University. They are employed as a trainee with an annual salary of \$20,048 to \$42,260 which includes 13 weeks of work placements in a host agency. Upon completion of the program, there is the ability for agencies to appoint participants to available AO2 roles.

The aim of the workshop was to enable a problem-solving approach where individual experiences and ideas are shared and used to inform future Aboriginal Employment Programs

Data shared at the forum showed there were more placement opportunities than participants who applied.

The recruitment activity snapshot shows a total of 40 agency placements available with 29 individuals applying. The low applicant numbers meant that during 2024, all applications received were accepted.

Aboriginal Employment Program	Application open period	Number of applicants received	Number of eligible applicants	Number of requested placements	Number of successful placements
2024 - Darwin	23 Feb - 14 Apr	44	15	23	15
2024 - Alice Springs	5 April - 12 May	Managed by external provider	14	17	14
2025 - Darwin	TBC				
2025 - Alice Springs	TBC				
Total			29	40	29

Achievements and Challenges from the previous and current program participants have been identified as:

- **Challenges:** Difficulty job matching, difficulty finding current referees, transportation difficulties for participants, limited AO2 jobs within NTG, workplace attendance by some participants.
- **Achievements:** Running 2 programs in Darwin and Alice Springs, Salt Bush Mentor Program engagement from other AEP participants, Meet and greet participants.

To inform improvements to the AEP, attendees were asked three questions, with each table having the opportunity to discuss the topic for 10 minutes. 1 to 2 tables shared their comments with the room. The following summarises questions and responses provided.

1 - YOUR EXPERIENCE: Can you share a personal story or experience related to starting full-time employment that highlights the emotions and challenges you've faced as an Aboriginal employee?

- On boarding is a challenge.
- Certificate of Aboriginality/proof is a challenge to obtain yet fake COAs accepted (Ashley Brown case), special measures stigma.
- Not acknowledged and recognised for our full potential and only used for culture interaction, no clear job roles.
- Takes too long to be accepted in the position.
- Lack of PDs suitable for position, training opportunities, and IT resources for remote workers.
- Using technology, PDF, and links and staff attendance (lack of support and guidance).
- Lack of support for those participants not completing the Aboriginal Employment Program.
- No wellbeing program, feeling overwhelmed, needed mentoring from families.
- Daunting being the only Aboriginal person in the team.
- Self-promotion is shame job.
- Felt welcomed in a team that already had other Aboriginal employees.
- Employer not having cultural knowledge or understanding about family and cultural obligations.
- Financial challenges for those on traineeship wage, AO1 and AO2 wages.
- Tasks that involved communicating incarceration to families.
- Work life balance couldn't get up early enough, no mentor.
- Harassment and bullying.
- Government systemic racism (stolen generation).
- No Aboriginal representation on interview panels.
- There is no dedicated AEP Early Careers Team based in Alice Springs.
- There is too much nepotism and 'jobs for the boys'.
- Felt isolated and not supported.
- Staff in community don't have full-time employment.
- Aboriginal employees need to be more qualified to get full time position.
- Terrified and nervous, worried about making mistakes.

2 - WORKING TOGETHER: What ideas do you have for overcoming employment challenges, and how can DCDD, OCPE, Agencies and Aboriginal employees work together to create solutions?

Recruitment

- NTG to provide 'How to Apply' workshops and Aboriginal HR contact person to assist and support applications.
- Panel members to include Aboriginal person on panel (relatable) for questions.
- Plain English and simplified JDs and recruitment process, application process (i.e. easier questions, paper application forms due to lack of access to technology)
- Make a specialised team/person to guide urban and remote new starters.
- Provide alternative ways to apply and to be interviewed for jobs (casual interviews, having coffee).
- Offer opportunities to remote communities to apply.



- People with 'Lived Experience' are being overlooked and need to be recognised for cultural knowledge and skills.
- Ongoing positions instead of contracts in both urban and remote.
- Ensure there is a job at the end, so that they do not lose interest.
- Changing JDs to take away Aboriginal identified positions.
- Discrimination to remote staff – not entitled to housing.

Staff development and support

- Short films about the agency for new employees.
- Employer to check-in with new staff and provide support where it's needed (include in group settings)
- Offer similar Kigaruk and Lookrukin program to AO4 staff and less.
- Improve personal development and have alternative training options (interactive and remote workshops).
- Access to strong cultural leaders and the right mentors for new starters.
- Bringing together experience and cultural knowledge.
- Team leaders, supervisors, managers have refresher training on cultural awareness how to support and manage Aboriginal staff and are letting staff know of entitlements i.e. cultural leave.
- Encourage new starters to speak up!
- Supervisors to be available and understanding around complex issues.
- Work plans – more focus on utilising workplans as a regular tool to keep on track.
- Daily briefs at the start of the everyday of what's happening that day.
- Make sure jargon is in simple terms.

3 – IMPROVING THE PROCESS: Referring to the employment pathway for AEP, identify key moments where additional support can be provided.

- A work ready program (including transition to work and computer literacy training).
- Work with schools to teach year 10-12 students about NTPS job opportunities.
- External providers – include cross cultural awareness for schools and boarding schools.
- More social media and promotion of the program on local Facebook pages.
- Murri grape vine – remote and everywhere (word of mouth between Indigenous people).
- Get into schools and approach schools (snr students).
- Aboriginal organisations like Congress, Larrakia Nation, Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, Gumatj Corporation and Tangentyere Council (ALS).
- Go out to community and do induction in community.

All the information and ideas shared will be used to inform the design of the 2025 Aboriginal Employment Program.

Sharing Our Agency Story - Increasing Aboriginal Employment across the Department of Health

Maureen Namitch
First Nations, Health and Wellbeing Division, DoH

Maureen spoke about the priorities for the Department of Health (DoH), which align with the government's key objectives of economic development and restoring lifestyle. She highlighted that increasing Aboriginal employment in the department leads to stronger governance in health practices, a healthier Aboriginal people, and more functional, thriving Aboriginal communities through self-determination.

Currently, the department employs 8,375 people, with 7.3% identifying as Aboriginal. However, there are several barriers preventing Aboriginal people from joining or progressing within the department, including:

- Misconceptions about the Department of Health, and it not being seen as an employer of choice due to insufficient value placed on cultural knowledge, perspectives, and lived experiences of Aboriginal employees.
- Negative experiences with the department or its staff, especially when services are not delivered in a culturally safe way.
- The online employment forms are considered too difficult to complete.
- Job descriptions that are too specific and not written in plain English.
- Essential criteria often don't align with guidelines, for example: requiring specific experience with government systems or TRM.
- Special Measures applicants may not always be properly considered by panels.
- The flexibility of roles does not sufficiently support work-life balance, and cultural leave may not always be adequate.

Maureen then discussed the pathways to increase Aboriginal employment, focusing on creating culturally responsive and sustainable workforce while providing accessible, community-centred healthcare across the Northern Territory.

The workforce initiatives include:

- Designing, driving and implementing culturally appropriate education programs for all DoH employees.
- Restructuring the cultural learning continuum and evaluating learning outcomes and impacts.
- Creating pathways to increase employment for bilingual health workers.
- Embedding entry pathways for Aboriginal employees.
- Designing and implementing flexible employment models to better support work-life balance.
- Coordinating scholarships, traineeships, and cadetships.
- Monitoring the department's Special Measures investment.



Maureen also outlined key Aboriginal workforce support initiatives offered by the department, which include:

- Advocacy for changes to recruitment processes.
- Assistance with training pathways, from design to implementation.
- Sharing of learned experiences to improve recruitment and retention.
- Provision of workforce data to help inform better decisions.
- Auditing job descriptions to ensure they are inclusive and aligned with cultural competency.
- Establishing the Aboriginal Employment Register, which is due to launch mid-2025.

Maureen stated these efforts aim to create a more culturally responsive and inclusive environment within DoH, enabling greater participation and career development for Aboriginal employees.

Maureen and health representatives also hosted an Employment Opportunities stall where employees could ask questions and engage in further discussions.

Activity - Employment Opportunities

In response to previous AEF feedback to participants to hear more about what employment opportunities are available in other agencies.

A session was held for participants to interact with representatives from DoH, PWC and NTPOL and find about career changes, how to apply and what they can expect on the job.



Workshop – Career Development and Professional Development Opportunities

Vera Dukic, A/Senior Director
Strategic Workforce Planning and Development, OCPE

Vera’s presentation on career development provided valuable insights into career progression within the NTPS, focusing on strategies, frameworks, and development opportunities that support employees’ career growth. Vera began by sharing her own career journey, offering a personal perspective on her career progression and the role of the Strategic Workforce Planning and Development (SWPD) Team. This team, which Vera leads, plays a pivotal role in several NTPS initiatives aimed at fostering a strong and capable workforce.



Vera outlined the key divisions within OCPE, including the AECD, SWPD, PSAGR and Employee Relations and when on to explain the purpose of the NTPS Strategic Workforce Plan and associated workforce frameworks, strategies, and policies. Vera noted sector-wide capability development is crucial to ensure employees possess the skills needed for current and future challenges.

Vera spoke to the People Matter Survey, a tool to gather employee perception data to inform the development of strategies aimed at improving employee satisfaction and engagement. Vera also discussed the EmployAbility Strategy which is essential to enhance inclusivity of the workforce, ensuring balanced and skilled teams are across the NTPS.

A story-sharing session was facilitated where participants worked in table groups to discuss their career journeys within the NTPS and their aspirations for the next 2-5 years. This activity encouraged reflection and peer exchange, fostering an environment of support and learning. Following these discussions, Vera then focused on career progression tools within the NTPS, introducing several key frameworks that employees can use to guide their development. Vera emphasised the importance of the Capability Framework, as well as the Middle Manager and Executive Leader Development Frameworks, to help identify strengths, areas for growth and training opportunities. Vera also provided a detailed explanation of both employee and manager responsibilities in utilising these frameworks to advance career development.

In addition to these frameworks, Vera highlighted NTPS programs available to nurture growth of leadership and managerial skills.

- Public Sector Management Program.
- Foundations of Public Sector Governance.
- Leadership for New Managers.
- Kigaruk and Lookrukin Aboriginal Leadership Development Program.
- Practical Public Policy Design.
- Results Through People - Getting Great Performance.
- Emerging Leaders Program.
- Project Management Fundamentals.
- Communicate with Influence.

Finally, if employees are unsure of what training to undertake, they can have a two-hour career planning session with a personal career coach to map out their career goals and development needs in align with their aspirations.

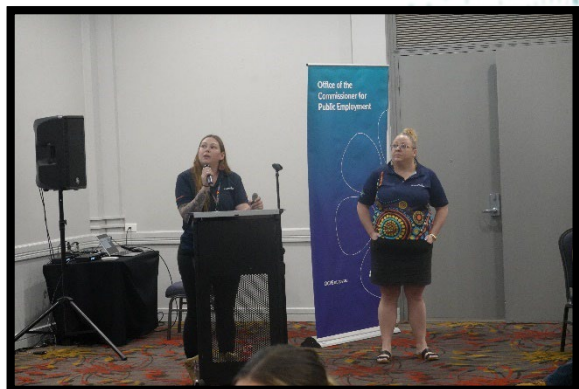
All career development and professional development opportunities can be found on [NTG Central](#).

Presentation – Reconciliation Action Plan Power and Water Corporation

Jenna Cubillo, Principal Diversity and Inclusion, People Culture and Safety and Cianne McConville, Senior Coordinator – Community Engagement, Power and Water Corporation

Jenna and Cianne shared insights into Power and Water's (PWC) *Reconciliation Action Plan* and their ongoing efforts to educate their staff and communities.

A question was raised about infrastructure in remote communities, to which they explained that they are educating the community on what the infrastructure is, its purpose, and the benefits through storytelling and other methods.



In addition to this, they are collaborating with community members on water security, streamlining processes with Jacana Energy to leverage both client knowledge and shared experiences. PWC run a Bush Schools Program, where they visited communities to educate children about water usage, conservation, and how to address leaks in their homes and their community. They are also developing a similar program focused on energy to educate school children and families on reducing energy costs.

Jenna and Cianne also shared details of several key initiatives, including the Voices from the Bush 2024 conference, held in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) on Arrernte Country. This event brought together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as non-Indigenous Australians, to discuss urgent water issues facing regional and remote communities.

They highlighted the Energy Fun Day, a collaboration with Mission Australia, which responded to significant electricity debt and disconnections faced by tenants in public housing. Power and Water worked alongside the community to host a BBQ in October, educating residents on energy and efficiency and offering support to those affected.

The Community Reconciliation Artworks Program was also mentioned, where community members artworks were featured on PWC infrastructure, now visible in various locations throughout the Territory.

This session was well-received, Jenna and Cianne also hosted an Employment Opportunities stall for attendees to inquire about PWC jobs.

The PWC Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2023-2025, can be found at [Reconciliation | Power and Water Corporation](#).

Workshop – Demystifying Enterprise Agreements

Damien MacRae, Senior Advisor and Nikita Dos Santos, Administration Officer, Employee Relations, OCPE

Nikita and Damien ran a session on Demystifying Enterprise Agreements (EA) and workshopped leave conditions to allow attendees to familiarise themselves with their own EA's and what their entitlements were.

An EA is a legally binding document that sets out the terms and conditions of employment for a specific group of employees within an organisation. In the Northern Territory Public Service (NTPS), EAs are read in conjunction with the *Public Sector Employment Management Act 1993* (PSEMA), which serves as the primary legislation.

An EA defines key aspects of an employee's work life, including wages, hours of work, leave entitlements, and other benefits. It outlines the rights and responsibilities of both the employee and the employer.

Understanding the terms of an EA is essential for employees, as it helps manage expectations in the workplace and guarantees fair treatment in accordance with the agreement. It also specifies employee entitlements, such as breaks, overtime pay, and leave. Additionally, the EA highlights both the employee's and employers' duties, such as adherence to workplace policies, maintaining professional conduct, and fulfilling job responsibilities.

An EA typically includes the following key sections:

- **Dispute Settlement Procedures:** This section outlines the process for resolving conflicts that may arise between employees and employers under the EA.
- **Types of Employment:** Describes the various employment categories or classifications covered by the EA.
- **Salaries and Allowances:** Details the pay rates and any additional allowances or benefits provided to employees under the EA.
- **Hours of Work:** Specifies standard working hours and any provisions for overtime, shift work, or flexible working arrangements.
- **Leave Entitlements:** Lists the types of leave available such as recreation leave, sick leave, parental leave, and other paid or unpaid leave options.

While the NTPS includes general conditions of employment, each EA specifies the conditions for different employee groups. Employees should refer to their relevant EA to understand the terms that apply to their classification.

All EA's can be accessed on the [Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment \(OCPE\) website](#).



Participant Feedback

To ensure continuous improvement of the forums, participants were asked what they liked the most about the forum, the least, and suggestions for the next forum.

What did you like most about the forum?

There was a mix of responses, but again the two topics that were most common was networking and hearing people's personal journeys/stories.

Below are some of the other comments made by participants:

- *Sharing ideas and supporting talks*
- *I really liked having so many different departments all together- great networking.*
- *Networking with other Aboriginal employees from different departments*
- *Good opportunity to gain networking, nothing to dislike.*
- *Great speakers, great presentations*
- *Good opportunity to network, good information to help understand the NTPS.*
- *Good to hear from others on issues they are experiencing in their areas.*
- *Good to be included in contributing to frameworks and other relevant policies for continuous improvement.*
- *All great presenters and staff- very helpful*
- *Learning and knowing about what we need to know about what we are eligible for*
- *Power and waters presentation and learning about their RAP- also meeting new people.*
- *Clear understanding re: EA clear introduction and awareness of OCPE*
- *The variety of topics and workshop activities*
- *Listening to people's story and meeting new people*
- *So many interesting stories and experiences if all the speakers were amazing- so much talented mob.*
- *Learning about different organisations*
- *The open discussions, hearing others' opinions and stories*
- *The opportunity for all Indigenous NTPS employees coming together and sharing stories.*
- *Ice breaker to know others and listen.*
- *Got a lot of knowledge.*
- *The many guests' speakers*
- *Sharing our agency story*
- *Presentations and the ability to network with others.*
- *The overview of health session*

What if anything, did you dislike about the forum?

Although there was a lot of great feedback, we appreciate receiving constructive feedback. Majority of the feedback stated that participants were very happy with the forum and would not change it. AECD acknowledge that the forum was a little late in starting and some of the sessions ran overtime and even though we had missed a couple of networking activities we were still able to complete them the next day.

Below were some other comments made by participants:

- *Sound, volume could have improved if had speaker at the back of the room as well.*
- *Some of the topics were a bit too long winded.*
- *I think there should be more opportunities to engage with other NTPS workers such as ice breakers and moving tables for people that are shame.*
- *Be clear on the purpose of each session, I found some where info and they could have been more targeted to initiate the right discussions, some presentations provided high level language. Probably need more work to simplify and wish there was more time to do workshops.*
- *Presenters, some of spoke too quick, may need to speak slower for those who have hearing loss, otherwise interesting topics.*
- *Some sessions were too long.*
- *Limited control of discussions staying relevant to the topic.*
- *Food - the amount of food provided; the hotel staff service was poor.*
- *Wasn't too interactive use slido.com for group activities and Q and A. Slido.com is more interactive for a q and a, quizzes, and word cloud.*
- *Too many slides.*
- *The timing of sessions.*
- *The food options.*
- *The enterprise agreement session- need more clarification.*
- *Not a dislike, just feedback about the tone and speakers a little bit fast for some with hearing to keep up.*
- *Employment opportunities*

Do you plan to attend this forum in the future, and why?

Participants were asked if they plan to attend another forum in the future. There was an overwhelming response with 83% stating yes, they plan on attending a future forum. Six people did not answer the question and 4 people answered no, one person mentioned because they would be retired by the next forum, another person said to let other staff from their agencies attend and one person said the forum was not relevant to them. Again, networking and sharing information were the top two responses.

- *Yes, because this is the time our voice can be heard.*
- *Yes, the information is different.*
- *Yes, to learn new skills and meet new people.*
- *Yes, learn more and more about who I work with.*

- *Yes, always good to catch up with other departments.*
- *Yes, if I am still employed in the NTPS.*
- *Yes, for the networking, career development and professional development opportunities.*
- *Yes, refreshing knowledge and networking.*
- *Yes, to keep up with the changes in the NTPS.*
- *No, been in the NTPS too long – younger and new staff should go.*
- *No, let other ALO's attend.*

88% of participants stated they would recommend attending the forum to their family, friends and peers.

What topics would you like to see covered at future forums?

Participants requested that at the next forum OCPE provide information on career development opportunities and advice on career pathways for existing employees, provide an update on available training offered through OCPE.

Other suggestions were:

- *Measurable “cultural Induction” focus- i.e. how do you measure someone’s understanding of “cultural induction”?*
- *More around the Capability Framework.*
- *More employment opportunities.*
- *More on the cross cultural awareness training and how we can put this out in the community.*
- *Leave entitlements.*
- *Not having to always be in the room, outdoor activities. Wellbeing and self-care too.*
- *Feedback from the previous forum and what was delivered from feedback, have attended many forums, and provided feedback but nothing changes from recommendations that have been made at these forums.*
- *More questions and answers time and leaders to speak.*
- *More agency specific feedback visited.*
- *Child protection related forums.*
- *More on workers’ rights and agreements.*
- *EA growth in work advancement.*
- *Having a remote focus- what’s out there, good stories, issues and how can regions be supported etc remotely.*
- *Yarning circles/lived experiences and truth telling.*
- *Unions.*
- *Challenges to success.*
- *Domestic violence support for staff.*
- *Slido.com used to have discussions.*
- *Development opportunities- how can we stop managers declining this due to operational requirements.*

- *More on career development.*
- *Social and emotional wellbeing practices, wellbeing program sharing.*
- *Health and wellbeing.*
- *Bullying in the workplace.*
- *More Human Resource information.*
- *More on definition of remote (e.g. Tennant Creek is but no funding).*
- *More time for reflection and discussion on each day.*
- *More interactive workshops, but less on the agenda to have more time per item.*

Do you have any suggestions on how we could improve the next forum?

Participants were asked to provide general feedback and suggestions on how the forums could be improved. Many participants commented that they thoroughly enjoyed the forum and would like to see more networking opportunities and more participant interaction activities. Below are some other suggestions and general feedback from participants.

- *More interactive activities.*
- *Like the workshop activity styles - lots of engagement as it helps with understanding.*
- *Have a few more agencies speak and do a presentation.*
- *Invite communities to come or 2 people from community.*
- *Better sound and volume.*
- *More engagement of remote area NTG staff to attend.*
- *Nothing needs to be improved, it went very well.*
- *Spotlight on agencies leading in their space.*
- *More group activities.*
- *Select another venue.*
- *More cultural activities.*
- *More explanations on acronyms for new starters.*
- *More countrymen because we found it hard to relate to city mob.*
- *More panels and space it out.*

Participants advised they would like:

- *Collect data on each topic via QR code to ensure written data collected.*
- *Good to have these forums to keep us updated on our rights through the NTPS. Sharing of information through our experiences in our workforce. Updates on recommendations*
- *Polos for attending the forum.*
- *Have more breakout small group discussions for example, mentor and mentee, challenges and overcoming them to talk to one another and share your story.*

Participants Recommendations

There were a range of comments and suggestions to take into consideration for future forums with the following recommendations noted by OCPE:

1. *Networking activities in department groups.*
2. *Have a networking evening event.*
3. *Having more departments involved in the Employment Opportunities activity.*
4. *More promotion and communication for remote NTG staff to attend.*
5. *Share OCPE LinkedIn profile the AEN.*
6. *Add 'champions' at each table who can guide and facilitate/support more discussions.*