The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment (OCPE) hosted the fourth NTPS Aboriginal Employee Forum in Alice Springs over two days on 16 – 17 May 2018 (first one held in October 2016, second one held in Alice Springs on 31 May and 1 June 2017, third in Darwin November 2017). The Forum is a key initiative within the NTPS Indigenous Employment and Career Development Strategy 2015-2020. The Forum was based on a workshop style to allow participants the opportunity to provide input, feedback, and contribute to future employment and career development initiatives for the whole NTPS.

From the 91 nominations received, 86 Aboriginal NTPS employees attended the Forum from a range of agencies across the Territory. The Forum facilitated a series of workshops on Mental Health First Aid, employment and career development strategy refresh and Middle Managers matter as well as showcased the OCPE Cross Cultural E-Learn. There was two Aboriginal guest speakers sharing their stories, they were Natasha Abbott – DTBI - Economic Development Officer and ACT 2018 Australian of year Dion Devow.

Forum Attendees:

**Applications Received**

- 91

**Total Attendees**

- 86
  - (21 Males & 65 Females)

Photo: NTPS Aboriginal Employee Forum Attendees
**Evaluation Respondents:**

83.7%  Evaluations completed by (72) attendees  
91.6%  (66) attendees would be interested in attending the next Forum

There were a total of 86 attendees at the Forum; of these 72 completed the Evaluation Form. The majority of respondents (66 out of 72) said they would be interested in attending the next Forum.

Fifty seven per cent of completed evaluations stated that overall, they found the Forum to be ‘excellent’ compared to 32 per cent who found it ‘good’, 4 per cent found it ‘satisfactory’ and 7 percent did not answer the question, as displayed in the following graph.

Some positive comments from the evaluations:
- “Networking and other department employees, sharing experiences good or bad within their fields. Having Aboriginal people from middle-senior executive roles speak about their struggles and how they reached their levels within the government”.
- “To deadly this forum – need to continue this on the next 20 years +”
- “Networking and information, Craig from OCPE interacting with everyone, great workshop and thank you to all involved”.
- “Overall a fantastic two days, really enjoyed the exposure to higher perks and ability to be heard about our side of the story and having key players in decision making involved in these discussions”.
- “The people I met and the atmosphere and knowing now I can be stronger”
Attendees Workplace Location

Aboriginal employees who attended the Forum came from Alice Springs, Darwin, East Arnhem, Katherine, Mt Liebig, Ntaria, Papunya, Tennant Creek, Ti Tree, Tiwi, Wadeye and Yuendumu.
Attendees Classifications

The attendees who participated in the Forum ranged from AQ4SA (Apprentice) to EO2C and included various streams (Administrative, Professional and Technical). The highest numbers represented by attendees were at the AO4 level.
Agencies Represented

The attendees who participated in the Forum were represented by 14 NT Government Agencies with the highest number of 26 from Territory Families.
The 2018 Aboriginal Employee Forum Experience

As illustrated in the graph below, evaluation respondents perceived an overall high quality of the Forum.

The Forum topics, design and set up was based on feedback from the 2017 Alice Springs and Darwin evaluation forms. Due to this feedback we did not break into workshops and had all participants in one room. There was mixed feedback about the forum set up, seating allocations and forum topics, see comments below.

- “Thank you for organising a good forum for us mob to come and talk openly about current issues”.
- “It would be great to have more networking workshops. I feel setting up seating and mixing people up would be hugely beneficial and would promote great networking circles”
- “Excellent as usual. Better venue for Forum this year than last year. Workshops were great with everyone all together so we can hear others views”.

Commissioners Welcome:
The Commissioner welcomed participants to the forum and informed them that he was there for the two days and participants could approach him to discuss any issues/matters. Craig also discussed the current priorities of OCPE and the Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Division such as the Aboriginal Employee Mentor and Mentee program and the Indigenous Employment and Career Development Strategy (IECDS) refresh.

Craig Allen, Commissioner

Michael Tennant, CEO Department of Trade, Business and Innovation and A/CEO Tourism and Culture delivered a speech stating that he supports career pathways for Aboriginal employees and discussed what his departments are doing to support the IECDS.
Guest Speaker:

Dion Devow – Aboriginal Entrepreneur, CEO - Darkies Design, YERRA Aboriginal Employment Agency and Jingili Cleaning. Originally from Darwin, Northern Territory, Dion is of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent with heritage that stems from Palm Island in Northern Queensland, to Darnley Island in the Torres Straits.

Dion was awarded ACT NAIDOC Person of The Year in 2016. Dion is also an Ambassador for Indigenous Community Volunteers and was appointed to the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. Dion was deeply honoured by being named ACT Australian of the Year 2018 and hopes to use this profile to encourage Indigenous business and to progress the many social initiatives he has established. Dion discussed his career pathway and how he became an Aboriginal Entrepreneur. He advised how his mother played a big part of how he came to be where he is now. Dion stated how his passion is now supporting other Aboriginal people to start their own business.

Sharing My Story:

Natasha Abbott, Economic Development Officer, Northern Australia Development and Trade within the Department of Trade Business and Innovation. Natasha shared her employment journey, spanning over twenty five years whilst working for herself, for Aboriginal organisations as well as the Public and Private Sectors in Alice Springs and their surrounding communities as well as working in the mining sector in Western Australia. Natasha spoke about how having a mentor supported her throughout her career. How she set goals to reach success and the want/need to heal our people using our own tools. Natasha main passion is to work with her family and community to support and assist them in making their dreams come true. Natasha show cased her brother’s tourism business on their country, which she had assisted and supported him through. One of the evaluation comments made was “Natasha Abbott – if young kids both black and white had her attitude, Aboriginal people would be more successful”

Presentations:

The following presentations were delivered by representatives from various agencies and organisations providing information on their respective areas:

Renee Long, Senior Workforce Advisor, Strategic Workforce Planning and Development within OCPE presented information on Middle Managers Matter – How to drive your career development; Capability & Leadership Framework (CLF) and the 360 self-assessment tool.
OCPE E-Learn – Cross Cultural Foundational Story: Jason Elsegood – CEO Cross Cultural Consultants (CCC), showcased the OCPE E-Learn – Cross Cultural Foundational Story, which was developed in partnership with CCC. The E-Learn is for new NTPS employees only and they will be required to complete the online program as part of their induction. The E-Learn is not to replace face to face Cross Cultural Training.

Q & A Panel: Mischa Cartwright – Executive Director Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Department of Chief Ministers. Cliff Weeks – Executive Director Central Australia, Department of Chief Ministers, Ann Vincent – Director Aboriginal Employment and Career Development, OCPE. Senior Aboriginal staff gave their stories on their career journeys, their success, how to overcome difficult situations and shared their opinions on how Aboriginal Employees can drive their own careers.

Mental Health Association of Central Australia (MHACA) – Kathryn Broadbent and Amanda Houston presented information on the Mental Health First Aid in the Workplace: What is Mental Health, destigmatising Mental Health, looking after self and building resilience to having the capability to bounce back through different strategies.

Alice Springs Senior Aboriginal Reference Group (SARG): The SARG introduced themselves to the forum participants and explained their roles and responsibilities of being a member of the SARG and discussed what their roles and responsibilities in their respective Agencies. The SARG assists the AECD team and the Commissioner by providing comments, suggestions and feedback on policies, programs and strategies that have an impact on Aboriginal staff in the NTPS.
What did you enjoy most about the Forum?

When employees were asked what they enjoyed most about the Forum, there was a good mix but once again networking came out on top. There was a variety of comments that employees made on the specific areas, see below:

- Learning about CLF and how to apply this structure to your own Career Development Plan and the training support for Middle Managers
- Networking, engaging and hearing peoples stories
- The information provided
- Hearing other people’s stories and how they got to where they are now
- Access to information and services within the Government
- The motivational speakers
- Sharing stories of the different types of success and hard work
- Networking opportunities, Middle Managers matter workshops
- Connecting with work colleagues and learning more about my Aboriginality
- Having an opportunity to meet strong successful Aboriginal people
- Hearing stories from other Aboriginal people and how they have progressed in their careers
- Networking. Knowing things I didn’t know i.e. Special Measures, Middle Management matters
- Networking to find out what other workers are doing about/for Aboriginal and TI people’s concerns and issues
- I enjoyed the success stories of out mob, how they struggled I could relate to their story
- The success stories by Natasha and Dion
- Networking and hearing what initiatives agencies are developing/implementing
- Meeting different people from various organisations. The content was good
- Natasha Abbott – if young kids both black and white had her attitude, Aboriginal people would be more successful
- Organised very well, presenters were great to listen to
- It was eye-opening
- Participating in the workshops where we can share our thoughts
- Welcome to Country Cultural Performance and sharing my story, Q + A panel: Senior executive Aboriginal staff
- Success stories from guest speakers, easy access to OCPE Aboriginal unit and Craig, networking
- Networking and information, Craig from OCPE interacting with everyone, great workshop and thank you to all involved
- The Q + A panel – Fantastic! And networking
- Learning about the NTPS regarding Aboriginal employment and retention
- I enjoy hearing from senior management about their journey, interacting with other NTPS workers and high ranked NTPS workers
What did you least enjoy about the Forum?

There were various comments made and it has been duly noted have more interaction in groups, have more local staff but not in Management on Q & A Panels.

- NIL (weather)
- Cross Cultural Awareness discussion went on too long. I went to sleep. Mindfulness session Day 2 – I lost interest, 5 mins into the presentation after their questions, etc.
- The Q+A - needed to have different viewpoints. SAO1 – Middle Management and AO1 – AO4
- Other information sharing ideas; concepts; communications
- Each subject of the forum was relevant and informative, interactive modules more engaging then speeches however
- Not enough speakers from the local people/indigenous staff, I mean people not in management positions – HEAR THEIR VIEWS AND HOW THEIR GOING
- Not having time to question panels, questions need to be allowed to be driven from the floor, merit selection or recruitment process
- The rice and chairs LOL
- People asking questions without a microphone – I couldn’t hear the question and then couldn’t follow the response
- Seeing all that food go to waste especially because we are facing poverty in the NT
- Wasn’t enough engagement activities that got people out of their seats
- Mental Health – it was not planned and delivered properly
- Not enough time for the Q + A panel. Suggestion: have the execs answer the questions and email out to the group
- People talking while others were talking
- Nothing I enjoyed everything
- Networking event was too quick
What topics would you suggest for the next Forum?

Many of the following topics were suggested for the next forum and there was one main theme that was consistent and that was for information on mental health:

- Q + A panel
- Physical Development/ Mental Health identification
- Aboriginal identified NTPS jobs, what does Special Measures really mean – explain advantages and disadvantages
- Access Special Measures – what is working, what is not, it is apparent it is weak and not achieving what it wants to
- Special Measures and how it can assist with promotions
- Getting youth involved – and listening to their stories
- Having a cadet talk about their Career Development journey both young entry level and someone who has been in NTG a long time because of NTG Cadet Program
- More topics to do with youth into NTPS our future leaders and school leavers
- Maybe some younger people giving my stories about their journey into the public sector
- NTPS mentors
- Mentoring workshop real live discussions, more story telling from struggle street to success and public speaking workshops
- Short personal stories and videos
- CLF – some practical role plays in smaller workshops to give staff experience
- More agency staff talking about their role and programs
- Agency incentives and initiatives
- Creating pathways between agencies
- Info on any changes to work conditions
- Review again, the Indigenous Employment and Career Development Strategy
- Snippets of Machinery of Government info, histories and evaluations of Indigenous Policies
- Assistance for people from remote communities who move to the city for an opportunity with NTPS
- How to grow and develop the remote workforce what one other jurisdiction doing in this space?
- Confidence building/more of a variety of motivational speakers, fighting for your worth/learn to develop a career pathway – workshop how you do it
- Strategies/opportunities to strengthen self confidence
- How to drive your Career Development
- Workshops on Career Personality types – identifying weakness that we can work on
- Move – working group work around subjects that are important – How to work within a demanding, bullying environment
- Setting up supports to deal with negative behaviour from NTPS workers
Recommendations for Future

There was a range of comments/suggestions to take into consideration for future Forums and they are as follows:

- “One answer from each table to feedback, time for speakers was too long”
- “More interactive training/workshopping”
- “Delegate a voluntary speaker from each table to contribute to discussions”
- “Don’t let participants choose their own seats, put them out of their comfort zones and allocate seats with other departments”
- “Different Aboriginal facilitators from various backgrounds/departments and rotate MC’s from the regions”
- “Perhaps separate workshops at targeted level groups. Example: Strategic/Exec level workshops on how to be a Manager/Executive with ATSI staff and non-ATSI colleagues”
- “Don’t let participants manipulate and take over the question time and asking questions during inappropriate times”
- “Wasn’t enough engagement activities that got people out of their seats”
- “It would be great to have more networking workshops. I feel setting up seating and mixing people up would be hugely beneficial and would promote great networking circles”
- “First day starting at 9:30-10am for people to match the flight and finishing early on the second day to match the flight and shorter breaks”
- “Better clarity around the workshops we participated in”
- “Want to see main displays and stalls from people attending, especially local people attending”
- “It would be good to have other senior managers or government reps to share their journeys, i.e. Ken Vowels, Malarndirri McCarthy, Joe Morrison, or interstate government representatives, Warren Snowdon, Pat Dodson. Having access to the Commissioner of Public Employment at the event was inspiring”
- “More personal interactions/discussions at forums, getting people more involved in conversations/interactions”
- “Provide opportunities for agencies to talk about their challenges”
- “More guest speakers from community in remote NTPS employed listen to their stories to shape their workforce in the NT”
- “Longer section on open forum. Give participant enough time for question and answer. More Indigenous remote workers to attend these forums”
- “More activity with the groups. Have everyone move from tables (not stay at the same table all the time)”

Participants Recommendations to OCPE:

1. Send out Forum agenda when nominations open.
2. Invite Aboriginal MLAs to share their story
3. Invite Aboriginal guest speakers (not in Management) to share their journey/career in the NTPS.
4. Invite an NTG agency to share what they are doing that works/doesn’t work
5. Invite an Aboriginal Cadet or trainee people to speak about their journey
6. Continue to have a networking event after one of the forum days