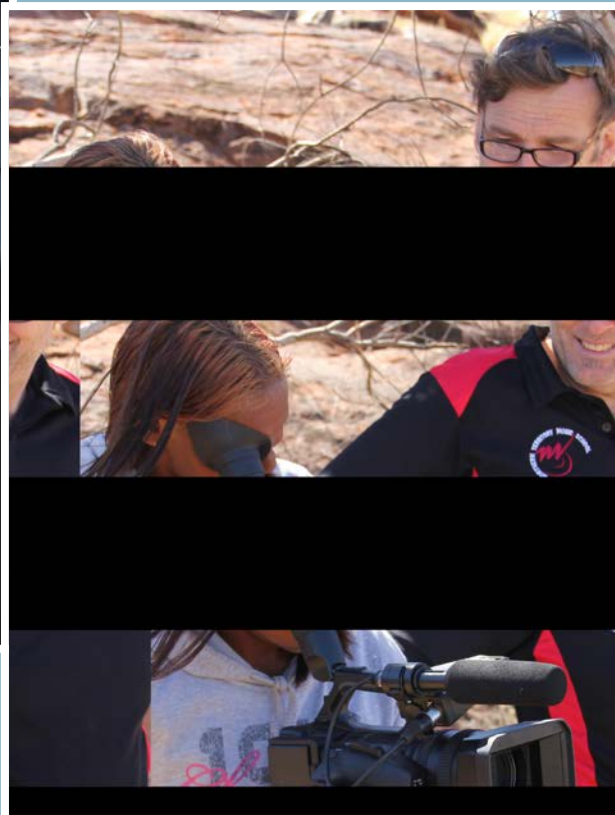


# Northern Territory Public Sector Broadening Our Horizons Avenues for Career Mobility



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# 1.1 Glossary of Terms

<b>ACN</b>	Australian Company Number
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>EA</b>	Enterprise Agreement
<b>Exchanges</b>	Job swaps where two employees switch jobs for a definitive period
<b>GST</b>	Goods and Services Tax
<b>Home Organisation</b>	The organisation from which the person has come
<b>Host Organisation</b>	The organisation to where the person is going
<b>Merit Principle</b>	Merit is defined in the Public Sector Employment and Management Act as “the capacity of the person to perform particular duties, having regard to the person’s knowledge, skills, qualifications and experience and the potential for future development of the person in employment in the Public Sector.”
<b>Mobility</b>	A broad term to denote movement across employers and within the NTPS
<b>NT</b>	Northern Territory
<b>NTPS</b>	Northern Territory Public Sector
<b>OCPE</b>	Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment
<b>OH&amp;S</b>	Occupational Health and Safety
<b>Secondments</b>	Where an employee is positioned with another organisation outside the NTPS for a temporary placement
<b>PSEMA</b>	Public Sector Employment and Management Act
<b>TPA</b>	Trade Practices Amendment

*NOTE: Agency/Department/Organisation are used interchangeably and are intended to have similar meaning.*

## 2.1 Rationale

There is no escaping the imminent labour shortages brought about by shifting community demographics and the ageing population. We also know through recent staff surveys and focus groups that there is a clear and unambiguous message from the workforce, particularly Generation X/Y that they expect and value the capacity to move freely between workplaces.

On top of this, the 'downshifting' phenomenon is growing rapidly across western democracies. The notion of 'voluntary simplicity' pulls together the threads of simpler living, perspective on the use of time, investment in the family and to enjoy more quality time with loved ones. People are re-evaluating the things that are important to them by weighing up the time balance that exists between family and work.

Workforce reform measures in the public services from industrialised countries are increasingly seeking to make more flexible use of their staff. A dynamic and productive NTPS is crucial to our success on the local, national and international stages.

One strategy gaining popular support across modern first world organisations is to promote and support mobility, exchange programs and secondments<sup>1</sup>. In fact, the greater the fluidity between workplaces, the higher the regard for the organisation. Greater mobility has the potential to act as a vehicle for professional development and an opportunity to exchange ideas and better practice approaches and is central to developing effective whole of government capabilities<sup>2</sup>.

The policy outlined in this paper provides NTPS employees with an opportunity to develop and/or refine skills and perform duties in a variety of job classifications. It also provides employees with a broader perspective through a better understanding of programs, functions and activities.

<sup>1</sup> The terms mobility, exchange, secondments, assignments and placements are used interchangeably to denote a form of movement across employers, however it should be noted specific provisos for secondments are referred to in the Public Service Employment Management Act, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Podger, A., Australian Public Service State of Service Report 2003-2004, Canberra

## 2.2 Policy aims and purpose

In a constantly changing and global environment, it is clear that organisations' business objectives will be best met through the development and nurturing of a competent, flexible and committed workforce. This policy also provides a sound basis for the development of customised career development opportunities and is an important step in moving toward the future type of flexible and innovative workforce needed to confront tomorrow's challenges. Put simply, we must have a public sector distinguished by excellence and equipped with the skills to operate in a knowledge economy and society.

*'Broadening Our Horizons'* highlights developmental opportunities to promote and facilitate this.

The aim of the policy is to promote stronger ties within NTPS agencies, and between agencies and Australian, State and Territory public administrations and organisations in other sectors both within Australia and internationally. To accomplish this goal, the policy presents opportunities through which employees in one agency or sector can accept placements or temporary



assignments in another agency or sector, thereby promoting the sharing of knowledge and business practices and processes across sectors and encouraging the professional and personal development of employees.

Promoting mobility of employees from one sector to another, the Australian, State and Territory Public Service, private sector organisations, academic institutions, volunteer sector and non-profit organisations will:

- Strengthen policies, programs and services;
- Share expertise and best practices;
- Increase diversity in agencies;
- Foster a spirit of cooperation and partnering with public and private sector;
- Provide replacement of key leadership positions from within the NTPS;
- Retain key talent;
- Prepare leaders for future challenges and growth;
- Increase human capital and corporate knowledge;
- Ensures a continuity of accumulated wisdom;
- Decrease turnover costs and lost productivity;
- Promote sustainability.

By taking placements in a new agency or sector, employees develop personally and professionally while their organisations benefit from new skills, knowledge and approaches.

A positive consequence of having a flexible approach to movement into and out of the service will be a reduction in turnover costs. Research<sup>3</sup> undertaken by the Council for Equal Opportunity in Employment reveals that labour turnover costs can range from between 50 and 130 percent of an incumbent's salary. Separation statistics in the NTPS<sup>4</sup> for the period 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009 shows a total of 2585 staff resigned from the sector.

Using a conservative average salary estimate of \$55,000pa, and a conservative salary turnover cost of 50 percent, the total turnover cost for the NTPS is estimated at \$71 032 500pa. In reality this cost is significantly higher once the cost of recruiting professionals and executives is taken into account. It is clear to see that any reduction in these costs can make a major contribution to an agency's budget.

3 [http://www.eowa.gov.au/Developing\\_a\\_Workplace\\_Program/Six\\_Steps\\_to\\_a\\_Workplace\\_Program/Step\\_2/\\_Costing\\_Turnover\\_Calculator/calc\\_home.htm](http://www.eowa.gov.au/Developing_a_Workplace_Program/Six_Steps_to_a_Workplace_Program/Step_2/_Costing_Turnover_Calculator/calc_home.htm)

4 State of the Service Report 2008-09, Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, p.81

## 2.3 General principles

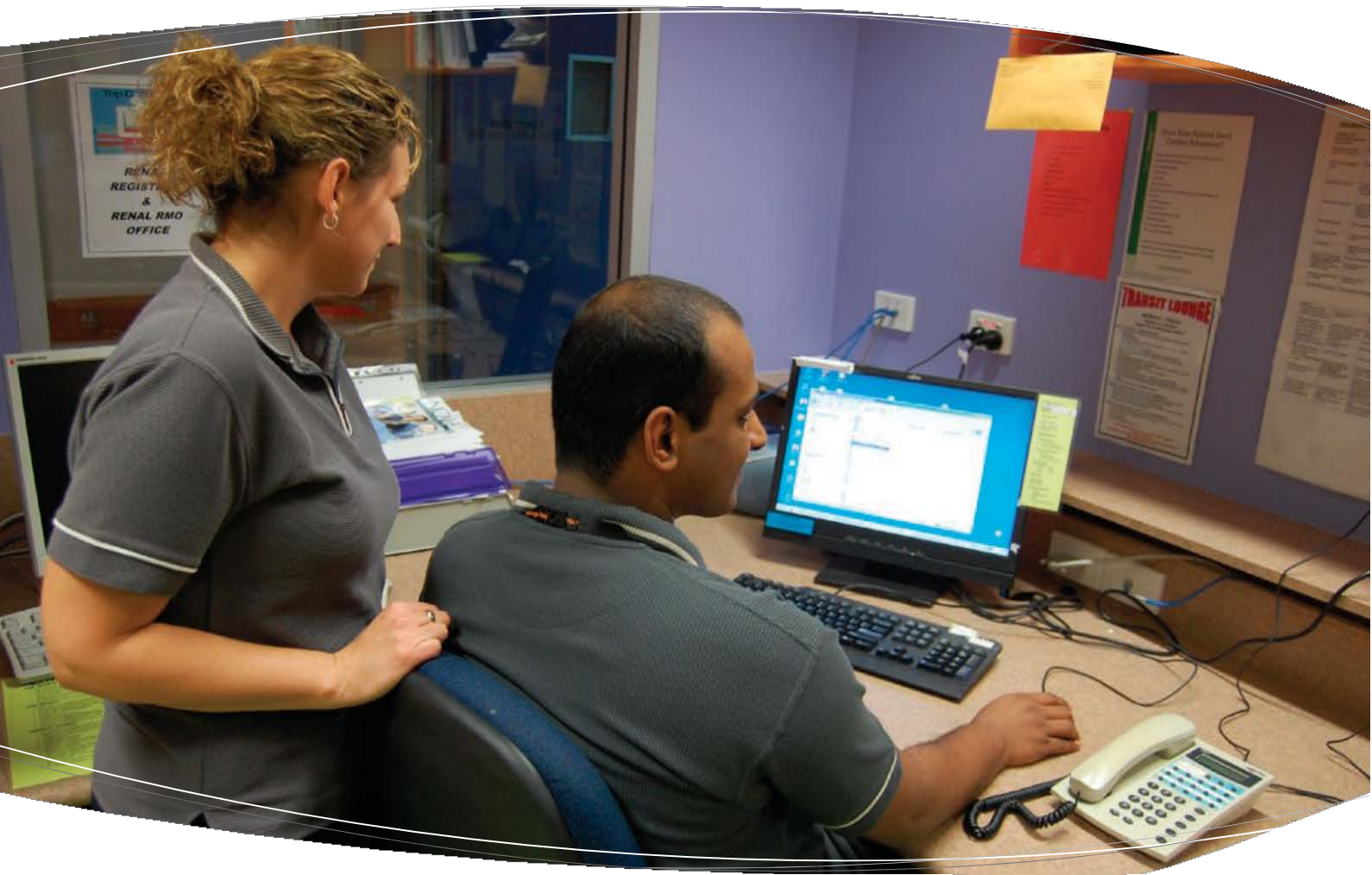
Building capability across the whole of government is regarded as an essential business decision if the sector is to perform efficiently and effectively. As with all development opportunities, operational issues and demands will need to be considered, however, where possible, these opportunities should be fully supported. Most current EAs also include a clause which states that the Commissioner for Public Employment will facilitate inter-industry mobility and exchange. The principles outlined below are intended to maximise capabilities beyond the bounds of individual agencies and promote a highly mobile, flexible workforce, capable of meeting the challenges of the future:

- Agencies are committed to having a whole of Government and whole of working life approach rather than an individual agency or position perspective;
- Agencies support employees in identifying their capability needs;
- Employees are entitled to equitable access to career development opportunities;
- Managers are committed to developing their employees to their maximum potential;
- The investment in an employee's capability development will benefit the employee, the agency and ultimately the whole of the public sector and the community;
- Agencies develop a collaborative approach with other organisations to achieve key objectives;
- Opportunities for all movements should be open and transparent;
- Senior management is committed to breaking down agency silos and fostering mobility;
- Employee involvement in development opportunities is voluntary.



In a knowledge based environment the key element is 'labour'.

- Do your staff have the transferable skills that allow them to 'migrate' to tasks that, although they may not be on an official duty statement, need to be done?
- Are the jobs in your work area designed in a way that the occupants will develop a broad range of skills? In a world that is increasingly mobile, employers have a responsibility to maintain the 'employability' of their staff.



## 2.4 Benefits - The impact will be felt for years!

Certainly the decision to release staff for placements is a business risk, but one that will pay off over time. The contacts staff make and the exposure to alternative ways of operating will have a positive effect.

Not only is career mobility something staff are asking for, it is a sensible business decision. The difficulties with workforce recruitment and retention currently being experienced by the NTPS will intensify as global labour market pressures increase and competition with the private sector and other public sector jurisdictions escalates. Rather than competing for talent, this policy takes a realistic view of global marketplaces and employee expectations. A long term strategic investment approach, whilst it may take some time to gain momentum, will set the NTPS apart from other organisations in terms of flexible employment approaches.

Some of the benefits include:

### **Employees**

- Enhanced career development;
- Broadening knowledge of complex public administration issues;
- Develop different perspectives;
- Personal and professional growth;
- Stimulation of testing skills and abilities in new circumstances;
- Develop leadership skills;
- Operate in new cultures;
- Increase of career choices.

### **Home Organisation**

- Align resources to fit organisational direction;
- Encourage employee development in line with strategic organisational needs;
- Provide challenging and rewarding career options.

## Host Organisation

- A spirited injection of new experience, ideas and perspectives;
- Lasting partnerships for the future;
- Receive fresh approaches to service delivery;
- Actively target diversity groups.

## NTPS

- Development of a skilled and flexible workforce with a broader understanding of the complexities facing the workforce;
- Strengthen linkages and partnership between agencies and other sectors;
- Development of a service wide perspective and enhanced awareness of whole-of-government priorities;
- Positive step towards attraction and retention.



## 2.5 Eligibility

The **target audience** for career mobility is not restrictive, with all permanent employees and executive contract officers of the NTPS able to enhance their career through placements. As the needs and expectations of employees will vary greatly, careful consideration should be given to meeting individual needs. For example, women, Indigenous staff, people with disabilities and people from culturally diverse backgrounds may all require different approaches.

It is accepted that employees must have the support of, and clearly demonstrate attachment to, their home organisation. Ideally, employees will return to their home organisation at the end of the placement unless all parties agree to other arrangements.

Similarly, common sense should always be a guiding principle when determining the **length of placement** and consideration should be given to usual human resources practices. It is anticipated that the majority of placements will be for 3-12 months.

## 2.6 When mobility may not be the answer

- As a way to shift performance problems or to avoid dealing with them;
- To trial staff before making permanent appointments;
- When there may be other suitable development methods/interventions;
- To avoid permanently filling a position.

## 2.7 Enablers

Research of better practice organisations and experience has shown that placements are most successful when:

- A person's professional development goals coincide with the operational needs and directions of the organisation;
- There are joint discussions in determining the scope of the placement;
- Consideration is given to application of knowledge ;
- Whilst providing enough stretch, the assignment is achievable;
- Exit and re-entry conversations are conducted early;
- The employee continues to be an active part of the home organisation.

Naturally there is also a greater chance of success if the employee has a positive and adaptable approach in undertaking a placement.



# 3.1 Legislative basis

## Within the NTPS

The *Public Sector Employment and Management Act*, By-laws, awards and certified agreements provide the legislative framework for facilitating the career mobility of NTPS employees. Agencies should refer to the following provisions when considering options for career mobility:

- Section 5 (D) of the Act establishes the principle that public sector appointments, promotion or transfers should be on the basis of merit.
- Section 29 allows Chief Executive Officers to employ, promote or transfer an employee in accordance with the merit principle.
- Section 30 specifies the procedure Chief Executive Officers must follow when filling vacancies.
- Section 34 enables the Commissioner to determine jobs that may be performed on a temporary basis or for a fixed period. Fixed period transfers or promotions of employees can be used as career mobility opportunities.
- Section 35 enables Chief Executive Officers to transfer employees within their agencies, or with the agreement of other Chief Executive Officers, to other agencies, without reference to the merit principle.
- Employment Instruction No. 1 – provides further detail on procedures for advertising, selection, appointment, transfer and promotion.
- Public Sector Employment and Management By-laws set out terms and conditions of employment for employees, for example recognition of prior service for long service leave under By-law 8(15).

The *Public Employment (Mobility) Act* enables employees to take up permanent employment with other public employers in the NT without the loss of accrued entitlements such as annual leave and sick leave.

Agencies also need to refer to the relevant NTPS enterprise agreement. Most NTPS agreements contain a provision which states that the Commissioner for Public Employment will facilitate mobility and exchange within the NTPS and with external organisations.

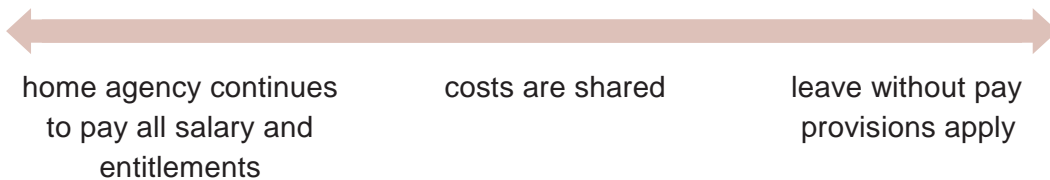
## External to the NTPS

- Section 39 enables Chief Executive Officers to enter into secondment arrangements with employers outside the NTPS for up to three years.
- Section 61 permits a Chief Executive Officer to approve paid employment outside the employee's duties.

Section 39 of the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act* (the Act) provides that the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of an agency may make arrangements for the secondment of an employee of the agency for a period not exceeding three years, if he or she considers it to be in the public interest.

Accordingly, approval for the release of an employee and the specific arrangements to be agreed can be negotiated between the home organisation and the host organisation concerned. The provisions contained within the Act for the secondment of NTPS employees are purposely very broad to allow CEOs the discretion to negotiate arrangements that most suit the purpose of the secondment and their agency's needs.

In releasing staff on secondment there are many different options on the continuum, with the scope open to a variety of flexible approaches:



It is important to note however, that the above discretion does not extend to establishing or altering employee terms and conditions of employment beyond that which is provided for within the relevant enterprise agreement and the Act. Where alternative terms and conditions of employment are contemplated it is necessary to seek the approval from the Commissioner for Public Employment.

**For further information about Career Mobility please refer to the OCPE website [www.ocpe.nt.gov.au](http://www.ocpe.nt.gov.au)**

