



Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
The Australian National University

Education, Training and Indigenous Futures
CAEPR Policy Research: 1990-2007

Research Summaries

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Reference No. 3

Summarising: Altman & Schwab (1998), *Staffing and Training Issues*

Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990-2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

The MCEETYA report and associated research summaries are available at <www.anu.edu.au/caepr/education.php>.

Title of Research:

Staffing and Training Issues

Research Publication:

In National Review of Resource Agencies Servicing Indigenous Communities, (eds.) J.C. Altman, D. Gillespie and K. Palmer 1998

Name of Researcher(s):

J.C. Altman and R.G. Schwab

Time period:

1998

Geographic location:

Remote areas of Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland, and Western Australia

Methodology:

Based upon a review of a sample of 24 Outstation Resource Agencies, involving case studies and analysis of staffing statistics.

Aims

The purpose of this paper is to examine staffing issues for Outstation Resource Agencies (ORAs) that enhance efficient service delivery to outstations, having particular regard to:

- The identification of core competencies for key resource centre staff;
- The need for compulsory training programs for staff and boards of management in accounting-based controls, recruitment practices and personnel management practices; and
- The need for standardization of rates of pay and other employment conditions.

Selected findings and insights:

ORAs provided services well beyond their housing and infrastructure responsibilities to include: provision of health care, adult education, training, assistance with employment, assistance with land management and the management of CDEP. They were staffed by between half a staff member FTE and 39 staff members, with an average of 8 staff members. Each ORA covered on average 14 outstations and an average Indigenous population of 222 persons.

- **Senior managers** tended to have professional and technical skills, were not members of the ORA but were usually non-Indigenous and externally recruited; and
- **Other staff** were generally Indigenous, members of the ORA and locally recruited. They tended to occupy low skilled and casual positions.

The paper notes that there were **cultural and political reasons** why it was problematic to employ local Indigenous people in senior management positions. The research identified low levels of commitment or absence of work ethic among Indigenous staff, which may in turn reflect the menial nature of the work

available to staff with low skill bases, limited work experience and limited commitment to year-round employment.

The paper makes the point that there was a view that **training needs to be targeted** to Indigenous people, not to the organisations and staff that service Indigenous communities. This was in keeping with a government priority on improving employment chances for Indigenous individuals by increasing their human capital. For example:

- At Weipa (Cape York, Qld.), training was only oriented towards employment at the mine and not to the needs of the ORA;
- In WA there was a common concern that field staff managing CDEP scheme participation required training because they lacked the required technical skills; there was a widespread need for training of ORA Boards, including managerial training.

Such emphases applied across all ORAs surveyed but the extent and type of training differed according to particular ORAs and contexts.

- Even among senior staff there were significant training needs in strategic planning and performance monitoring and ensuring their knowledge and skills in those areas are up-to-date.

ORAs differed considerably in the extent to which they offered training to their staff, with access to funding being a major determinant as was being able to access training by being located close to a training provider. For example, ORAs near Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Jabiru or Nhulunbuy, all in the NT, were advantaged by having access to training providers compared to ORAs in places such as Maningrida (NT).

- Only a few of the ORAs were accredited trainers and hence were reliant on fly in/fly out arrangements with providers, who tended to use generic training packages.
- There may be opportunities to develop an accredited training capacity among ORAs; and
- Training that occurred was diverse—55 certificates were awarded to staff of one ORA and its CDEP participants, covering, for example, essential services, building construction, driving, horticulture, first aid, special equipment operation.

Employment of Indigenous staff in senior positions is a long-term aspiration due to existing low level skills and for cultural reasons which need to be overcome – appropriate candidates should be targeted for recruitment, training, mentoring and eventual employment.

- Premature promotion of local Indigenous people to head up organisations can negatively impact on staff morale, organisational efficiency and services to clients.

Improving the capacity of Indigenous Boards is imperative and therefore training in governance, managerial and high level administrative skills is required.

Educational implications:

This paper identifies two principal issues to be addressed by educational authorities and training providers. The first is the development of training that is targeted to Indigenous governing Boards, senior staff of Indigenous organisations and general staff employed by those organisations. Of these it appears that the first two groups are less well catered for and, in fact, may not be aware of their training needs.

Unfortunately this paper does not include an audit of training needs although it identifies several priority areas such as strategic planning and monitoring but makes the point that training needs are staff and context specific. To avoid a piecemeal approach to training, based upon a fly in/fly out approach and using generic training packages, the development of educational partnerships between providers and Indigenous organisations seems a high priority. **[training]**

The second issue to be noted is the potential to develop locally based training provision through ORAs. This would benefit not only staff directly employed by the ORA as well as its associated Board but would also benefit the local community in its overall community development. ORAs, or the local equivalent, have the basic infrastructure on which to develop such a capability, either independently or in partnership with existing training providers or schools. **[training delivery]**

Relevance:

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

Pathways and strategies for remote locations

Related papers

J.C. Altman, 'In search of an Indigenous Outstations Policy for Indigenous Australians', *CAEPR Working Paper No. 34*, 2006.

<<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/WP/CAEPRWP34.pdf>>