

The participation and engagement of First Nations people in the rail industry



March 2026



Wilay Designs





About the artist

Established in 2019, Wilay Designs is a creative partnership between Jazz and Kristal - who are two Ngunawal sisters and artists. Jazz resides in the ACT on Ngunawal Country and Kristal resides in SA on Ngarrindjeri Country.

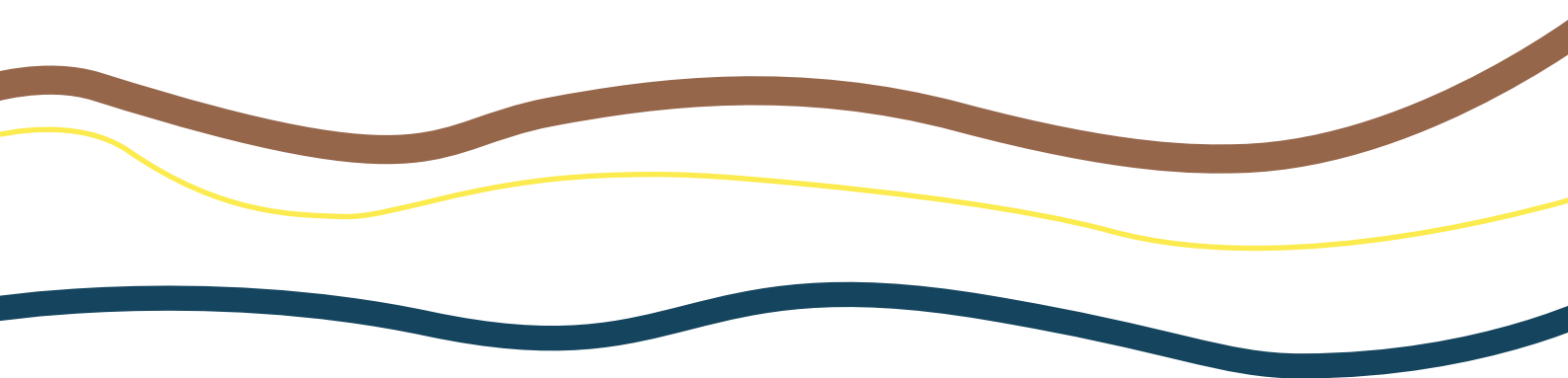
Wilay Designs art is inspired by their Ngunawal culture and the stories passed down by their family. Their art is not only a reflection of their own identity and perspective, but also a way to start positive conversations about culture, educate others, and promote understanding by sharing knowledge.

Journeys of Connection 2025

This artwork represents the role of rail in connecting people, communities and opportunities while honouring Country. The railway track symbolises movement and progress, linking key hubs represented by meeting places along the path. These meeting places have colours reflecting the Australasian Railway Association brand and the yellow connecting them is for empowerment.

Pathways reflect individual and collective journeys, highlighting First Nations employment and engagement in the rail sector. Waterways and Country colours acknowledge the importance of sustainability. Kangaroo tracks show continuous forward movement.

Together these elements tell a story of the rail, journey, connection and growth.



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ongoing connection and care to land, waters and community.

We pay respects to Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Sponsors

The Australasian Railway Association acknowledges and sincerely thanks our project partners, whose support made this report possible.

Their contribution demonstrates a shared commitment to strengthening First Nations engagement and participation across the rail industry, and to building a stronger evidence base to guide meaningful action. By supporting this research, these organisations have helped create an important resource for the industry at a time when there is both a clear opportunity and a clear responsibility to improve long-term outcomes for First Nations peoples and businesses.

The ARA thanks each of our partners for their leadership and willingness to invest in this important piece of work. Their support sends a strong message that the rail industry is committed to listening, learning and taking action to improve First Nations participation and engagement across our industry.



Project delivery partners

Social Traders is a leading organisation in Australian social procurement, founded in 2008, and is now the nation's leading authority on social enterprises in Australia. As the national social enterprise certifier and intermediary, Social Traders connects businesses and governments with social enterprises, using sector intelligence to challenge traditional business practices and make purchasing from social enterprises the norm.

Specialising in systems change, Social Traders has over a decade of credible service delivery and impact to showcase their effectiveness. They work with over 650 certified social enterprises and more than 150 businesses and government buyers from a range of industries employing transferrable systems change methodology aimed at fostering a more inclusive and equitable Australia through procurement.

Humanize Media is a 100 per cent Aboriginal-owned and operated creative and consultancy business. The name Humanize reflects their intent for purposeful initiatives that enable the possibility of an ethical and just future for all. Their team of researchers possess an ethical intent to deliver solutions informed by culture, evidence-based practice, strategic planning, and innovative design. Humanize Media's consultancy services are guided by the wisdom of Elders and senior researchers, reflecting their core values of relational, impactful, and innovative solutions for an inclusive future.

Ākina is Aotearoa New Zealand's leading impact consultancy. The organisation supports businesses across the economy in transitioning towards more impactful operating models through services such as Impact Management and Strategy, Impact Investment, Social Procurement, and Social Enterprise. Ākina frequently acts as a convenor, bridging the gap between community, government, and corporations, and has extensive experience working with Indigenous groups and businesses. They aim to use the levers of business to create positive change and grow the Impact Economy.

Foreword from Caroline Wilkie

CEO, Australasian Railway Association

This report is an important contribution to our understanding of how the rail industry can strengthen its engagement with First Nations peoples and make a practical contribution to reconciliation.

It reflects a clear ambition across our industry to better understand where we are today, where the gaps remain, and what action is needed to create stronger long-term outcomes. As an industry that operates across Country and connects communities, we have both an opportunity and a responsibility to deepen our engagement with First Nations peoples in a way that is respectful, deliberate and lasting.

The research shows there is a foundation to build on. Across the rail industry, organisations are already employing First Nations people, working with First Nations businesses, and progressing initiatives through Reconciliation Action Plans, procurement policies and cultural awareness programs. At the same time, the findings make clear that more needs to be done to improve long-term outcomes.

This report sets out a practical way forward. Its recommendations focus on four key areas: fostering safe and inclusive work environments, strengthening reconciliation and leadership, supporting long-term and sustainable employment, and building capacity through partnerships and Indigenous procurement. Together, these priorities provide a clear roadmap for action across the industry.

The ARA is committed to advancing the key recommendations of this report. We will work with our members, First Nations stakeholders and industry partners to support practical progress and more coordinated action. That means continuing to promote culturally safe workplaces, strengthening pathways for employment and career development, supporting meaningful reconciliation efforts, and helping create better conditions for First Nations businesses to participate and grow.

This report marks an important step, but it is only the beginning. Real progress will require sustained commitment, strong leadership and a willingness to listen, learn and act. By building on the work already underway, the rail industry can help create a more inclusive, respectful and equitable future for First Nations peoples and, in doing so, strengthen our industry as a whole.



Foreword from Wayne Johnson

CEO and Managing Director, ARTC

ARTC is proud to support this important research and the opportunity it creates for the rail industry to reflect honestly on its engagement with First Nations peoples.

At ARTC, we operate one of the nation's most critical pieces of infrastructure within Australia's supply chains, with our 9,600km rail network connecting regions, industries and communities across Australia. Importantly, it exists on Country that has been cared for by First Nations peoples for tens of thousands of years.

This means we have a responsibility to engage early, listen to hear, and work in authentic partnership with Traditional Custodians in a way that is culturally safe and consistent.

This report reinforces that genuine engagement cannot be achieved through commitments on paper alone. It must be visible in how organisations lead, how decisions are made, and how teams operate every day. It requires taking stock of how well we go about inclusiveness and co-creation, as well as investment in capability, clarity in governance, and the willingness to listen and learn.

Trust takes us to consistency through invitation, demonstrating open mindedness and commitment and is built through relationships, not letters and speeches. It begins at the top and requires leaders to support and ignite momentum across workplaces. It requires consistency and accountability in what we say and do. Above all, it requires respect, including listening and working at the pace that genuine engagement needs.

Engagement with First Nations peoples and values must be embedded in how we operate, not treated as a separate activity.

We commend the Australasian Railway Association and its partners for undertaking this research. It provides valuable insights and reinforces the need to commit to reconciliation in a meaningful and enduring way through strong associations and joint decisions.

ARTC maintains its motivation to continue our work in support of this report and our efforts to Closing the Gap, including strengthening our cultural capability, improving how we engage with communities across our rail network, and ensuring reconciliation commitments are supported by practical action and investment.

Reconciliation is an ongoing journey, not a single moment in time. It requires each of us to play an active role in listening, learning, reflecting and collaborating toward an increasingly inclusive, prosperous and connected future.



ARTC

Foreword from Raymond O'Flaherty

Chief Executive Officer, Metro Trains Melbourne



Railways operate on Country that has been cared for by First Nations peoples for tens of thousands of years. Traversing ancient songlines, we connect people, places and opportunity across Australia. Recognising this truth brings with it a responsibility to listen, to learn and to act with respect.

Metro Trains Melbourne is proud to be a sponsor of this important research. This report provides a thoughtful and evidence-based examination of how our sector is engaging with First Nations peoples, where progress has been made, and where more focused effort is needed.

What stands out in this report is the strength of First Nations voices and lived experiences. It reminds us that meaningful participation is more than representation alone. Cultural safety, genuine opportunity, strong leadership and sustained relationships built on trust are fundamental for the rail industry to move beyond good intentions and towards consistent, accountable action.

Across Australia, rail organisations are at different stages of their reconciliation journeys. This report offers a shared foundation, based on the principles of self-determination, for the industry; grounded in research, consultation and practical insight. The recommendations provide a clear pathway for improving workplace inclusion, strengthening reconciliation leadership, supporting long-term employment outcomes and building more effective partnerships with First Nations communities and businesses.

At Metro Trains Melbourne, we see this work as central to who we are as an organisation. Our approach, utilising the principles of self-determination, focuses on listening to community, strengthening cultural capability, creating pathways into employment and leadership, and using our purchasing power to support First Nations economic participation. We know this is ongoing work, and that progress requires genuine partnership with Community.

I commend the Australasian Railway Association for its leadership in commissioning this research. I encourage rail organisations across the sector to engage deeply with the findings and consider how they can contribute to a more inclusive, culturally safe and future-focused rail industry.

This work matters. By committing to it together, the rail industry can play a meaningful role in advancing reconciliation and creating positive, lasting outcomes for First Nations peoples and for the communities we serve.



Wilay Designs





Contents

About the artist	i
Journeys of Connection 2025	i
Sponsors	ii
Project delivery partners	iii
Foreword from Caroline Wilkie	iv
CEO, Australasian Railway Association	iv
Foreword from Wayne Johnson	v
Foreword from Raymond O’Flaherty	vi
Project background	4
Executive summary	5
Methodology and consultation	6
The rail industry today	6
The intersection of rail and First Nations people	7
Recommendations	7
Foster safe and inclusive work environments.....	7
Reconciliation and leadership.....	7
Supporting long-term, sustainable employment.....	7
Building capacity through partnerships and indigenous procurement.....	7
Summary of recommendations	8
Introduction: The intersection of rail and First Nations peoples	11
Rail and settler colonialism	11
Rail and reconciliation.....	13
2023 referendum.....	14



Project method	15
Phase one: Rail industry and First Nations community engagement.....	15
Desktop research and analysis	15
Phase two: Rail industry employment and First Nations business surveys	16
Rail industry employment data collection survey	16
First Nations business engagement and procurement survey.....	17
Phase three: Impact modelling workshop	17
Current industry practices.....	18
The rail industry today	18
Peak progress indicators	18
Employment data findings	19
First Nations business and procurement findings	19
Current experiences of rail industry workers	20
Improving participation, engagement and partnering with First Nations people in rail	23
Foster safe and inclusive work environments.....	25
Reconciliation and leadership.....	29
Supporting long-term, sustainable employment.....	35
Building capacity through partnerships and Indigenous procurement.....	39
Summary of recommendations.....	50
Conclusion	53
References.....	54
Appendix	55

Project background

Improving diversity and inclusion in the rail industry has been a key focus for the Australasian Railway Association (ARA). As part of this commitment, it has identified the need to explore opportunities to deepen engagement between industry and First Nations communities, including through improved approaches to meeting social procurement and First Nations participation targets.

The ARA acknowledged both the lack of data to benchmark and measure participation rates of First Nations people and businesses in the rail industry, and the need to understand the complex relationship between colonisation, historic exclusion and cultural safety for First Nations people, and the barriers to participation these factors may create. To support its members, the ARA initiated this project to focus specifically on enhancing engagement with First Nations people.

To achieve this, the ARA collaborated with industry leaders and experts, including Social Traders, Humanize Media, and Ākina.

The initiative involved gathering baseline employment data, conducting interviews to capture the lived experiences of individuals in rail, and conducting a survey of First Nations businesses to better understand their experiences engaging with the rail industry. These insights informed a set of strategic recommendations aimed at embedding cultural safety, strengthening Indigenous procurement practices, addressing systemic barriers to participation, and embedding anti-discrimination practices. The project also supports the implementation of Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) and broader Indigenous procurement efforts to foster genuine economic empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The ultimate objective is to create long-term, meaningful engagement with First Nations peoples in the rail industry and to establish sustainable pathways for employment, business development and partnerships that promote economic empowerment.

Executive summary

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive project commissioned by the Australasian Railway Association (ARA) to explore and enhance First Nations participation and engagement across the rail industry. The initiative responds to a clear gap in industry-wide data and a growing awareness of the need to address structural barriers, strengthen reconciliation efforts, and foster meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and businesses.

The research highlights a wide range of practices and experiences related to First Nations participation in the rail industry and identified several key focus areas, including employment pathways, workplace inclusion, organisational culture, reconciliation commitments, and procurement and supplier engagement.

The findings reveal that while many organisations are making efforts to engage with First Nations peoples, there are still significant gaps in representation, career progression, cultural safety and supplier diversity. Interview and survey feedback highlighted that organisational culture plays a critical role in shaping First Nations employees' experience, with many calling for more inclusive workplaces, stronger leadership on reconciliation and consistent anti-discrimination practices.

Survey data showed that most First Nations employees are concentrated in entry-level roles, with limited representation in leadership positions. Similarly, while some businesses are actively engaging First Nations suppliers, these suppliers reported that stronger partnerships, clearer procurement processes and targeted outreach are critical to enabling greater participation.

These insights informed 18 strategic recommendations for both the ARA and individual rail organisations. The recommendations are structured around four themes:

- Fostering safe and inclusive work environments
- Strengthening reconciliation and cultural leadership
- Supporting long-term, sustainable employment
- Building capacity through partnerships and Indigenous procurement

The report also introduces a set of impact goals developed through the Ākina-led workshop, offering a shared framework for measuring progress and guiding future industry actions.

Methodology and consultation

The project was designed and delivered in partnership with Social Traders, Humanize Media, and Ākina, bringing together expertise in social procurement, First Nations engagement, workforce inclusion and systems change. Together, these partners engaged with ARA members and First Nations stakeholders to better understand current practices, challenges and opportunities in the industry. The research included:

- One-on-one interviews with people in the industry, including those with lived experience as First Nations employees
- A desktop review of industry and government policy frameworks
- A survey of ARA members to collect employment and supplier data related to First Nations participation
- A First Nations business survey to capture the perspectives of Indigenous-owned businesses engaging with, or seeking to engage with, the rail industry
- An impact modelling workshop to test and map out the outcomes of future initiatives

Through the impact modelling workshop, key stakeholders identified a series of impact goals to guide efforts improve participation, engagement and partnership with First Nations people in rail. The impact model is intended to help the ARA and industry visualise the long-term positive change that could result from deliberate actions taken in the short to medium term. The group agreed on a set of five impact goals: .



These insights informed a set of strategic recommendations aimed at creating more inclusive, accountable and culturally safe practices across the rail industry.

The rail industry today

Rail industry organisations were surveyed about their current employment and procurement processes as part of the project. A desktop review of their adoption of peak progress indicators such as an Acknowledgement of Country, Reconciliation Action Plans and dedicated First Nations content on their website was also completed.

While some measures to recognise, attract and retain First Nations people were in place, many employers reported that they did not have First Nations employees or that this data was not collected. In addition, only a limited number of organisations were found to display peak progress indicators.

First Nations employees indicated in interviews a complex mix of personal experiences in the rail industry, with three major themes identified: racism and discrimination, organisational culture, and Reconciliation Action Plans. Most interview participants indicated that they had personally experienced racism while working in the sector, while emphasising the importance of leadership in setting the tone for acceptable and inclusive workplace culture.

The intersection of rail and First Nations people

Understanding the experiences of First Nations people in the rail industry requires recognising the broader historical and ongoing context, this includes the intertwined dimensions of settler colonialism, the workplace imperative of reconciliation and the national debate surrounding the 2023 referendum on constitutional reform.

This report explores these themes to frame a forward-looking strategy for improving outcomes for First Nations people working in or doing business with the rail industry.

At its core, this work is about equipping the rail industry to play a meaningful role in reconciliation and economic empowerment for First Nations communities. It invites the ARA and its members to take deliberate, coordinated action that is culturally informed, industry-led and focused on long-term change.

Recommendations

Foster safe and inclusive work environments

The results of the interviews highlighted the importance to First Nations employees of feeling supported and culturally safe in the workplace, particularly in settings such as frontline worksites, where cultural awareness appeared to be more lacking. Cultural load was identified as a key issue, referring to the extra, often invisible, responsibilities placed on First Nations employees to act as cultural advisors, educators or mediators in the workplace.

Recommendations under this theme emphasise the importance of training for greater cultural understanding and appreciation, as well as visual recognition and celebration of culture through initiatives such as inclusion communities, artwork and Acknowledgement of Country.

Reconciliation and leadership

Approximately half of rail businesses surveyed for this project indicated they have Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) in place. However, interview participants emphasised the need for RAPs to progress beyond a 'box-ticking' exercise and instil genuine commitment and meaningful engagement behind the targets.

Recommendations under this theme focus on executive leadership support and accountability for RAP development, in strong consultation with First Nations stakeholders. Further, engagement with dedicated individuals who specialise in cultural knowledge and advice is recommended, to reduce the cultural load placed on First Nations employees.

Supporting long-term, sustainable employment

Responses to the employment survey indicated that the majority of First Nations employees in the rail industry are working in entry level positions. This indicates that while responding organisations are providing potential long-term careers for First Nations individuals, more can be done to ensure promotion opportunities and representation at all levels.

Recommendations under this theme include initiatives to establish dedicated employment pathways for First Nations people and remove barriers to promotion and retention.

Building capacity through partnerships and indigenous procurement

Approximately half of rail organisations surveyed indicated that they engaged with First Nations businesses, contractors or labour hires, while the other half did not. First Nations businesses surveyed indicated that for them, the most critical factor for supporting procurement opportunities included strong relationships with rail organisations. This indicates strong potential for rail organisations to increase their engagement with First Nations business through relationship development. When asked about barriers to engagement, the most common response cited by First Nations business included a lack of relationships with key decision makers, lack of awareness of tender opportunities, and limited support and feedback after unsuccessful tenders.

Recommendations under this theme centre on raising awareness of procurement opportunities and fostering stronger connection between First Nations businesses and the rail industry, including through conference scholarship opportunities, strategic procurement targets, and collaboration with Indigenous procurement intermediaries.

Summary of recommendations

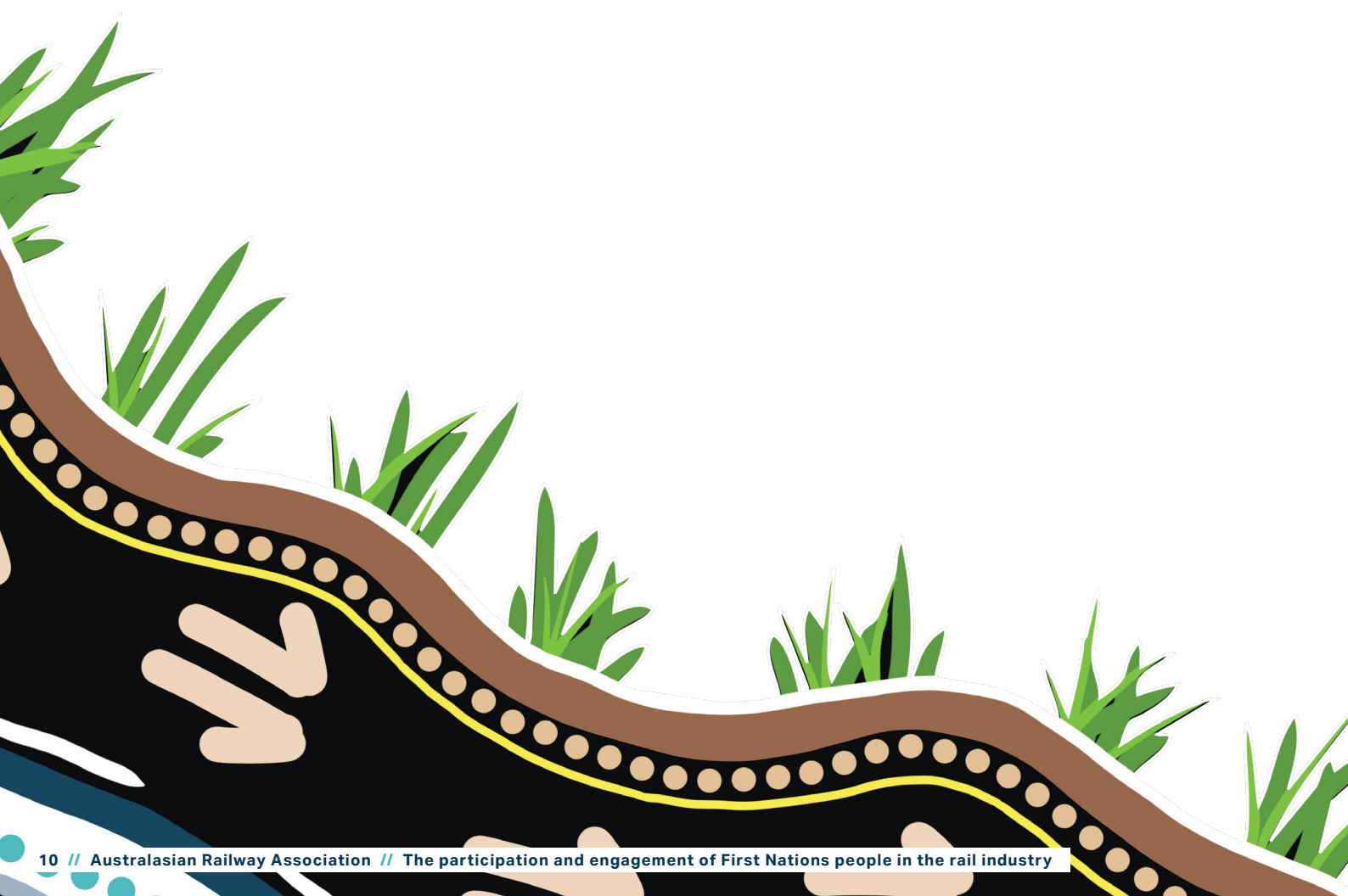
Recommendation	Industry	ARA
Foster safe and inclusive work environments		
1. Provide comprehensive training for staff, especially those in management positions, on anti-racism, cultural sensitivity, unconscious bias and respect at work	✓	✓
2. Foster a safe and inclusive work environment that celebrates First Nations peoples and culture		
• Ensure robust anti-discrimination strategies and systems are in place, supported by continuous training and awareness	✓	
• Create support teams or inclusion communities to support career advancement for First Nations people	✓	
• Include an Acknowledgement of Country on the company website	✓	
• Display appropriate First Nations artwork on websites or in office locations	✓	
Reconciliation and leadership		
3. Engage with First Nations stakeholders and drive RAPs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plans or Self Determination Plans through organisational leadership		
• Develop and implement organisational RAP, supported by executive leadership	✓	✓
• Provide resources and expertise from key organisations to support industry organisations developing and implementing their RAP		✓
4. Ensure long-term financial and structural support for RAP development and implementation		
• Allocate resources and provide consistent support for the implementation of RAP initiatives	✓	✓
• Ensure executive sponsorship for the ARA's RAP		✓
5. Foster transparency and awareness in the RAP journey		
• Measure and report on progress of RAP initiatives	✓	✓
• Provide education and awareness on RAP objectives, First Nations cultures and the journey towards reconciliation to build internal capability	✓	
• Create a dedicated First Nations webpage to highlight ongoing reconciliation efforts		✓
6. Employ dedicated individuals to provide cultural knowledge, linkages, and advice, such as incorporating an Elder in Residence, to provide culturally appropriate advice and guidance, and to act as a soft authority		
Create Elder in Residence or cultural oversight roles to guide on culture, linkages to community, respect and reconciliation	✓	

7. Provide leadership in promoting cultural respect and inclusion for First Nations Peoples including the development of a First Nations-led consultation group		✓
Supporting long-term, sustainable employment		
8. Establish employment pathways for First Nations peoples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide structured employment opportunities such as apprenticeships, traineeships and pre-employment initiatives for First Nations peoples 	✓	
9. Review recruitment processes to identify and remove barriers for First Nations peoples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review organisational recruitment processes to identify and address systemic and cultural barriers • Directly encourage First Nations peoples to apply by highlighting opportunities and support for First Nations employees 	✓ ✓	
10. Implement targeted strategies to support career growth for First Nations employees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish mentorship and sponsorship programs • Actively involve First Nations employees in decision-making processes that affect their professional development and the broader organisational culture • Provide access to support networks, employee resource groups or formal advisory bodies to enable First Nations employees to advocate for cultural change, share lived experiences, and advise on strategic priorities 	✓ ✓ ✓	
11. Establish measurable targets for First Nations representation at all levels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting and monitoring diversity and inclusion goals that specifically include First Nations employment targets • Ensure targets include a focus on including First Nations participation at all levels, including senior management 	✓ ✓	
Building capacity through partnerships and outcomes-driven procurement		
12. Raise awareness of Indigenous procurement and its impact across the rail industry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide webinars and training to highlight the value of Indigenous procurement as a key driver of economic empowerment and community impact for First Nations communities • Share success stories from both within and beyond the rail industry 		✓ ✓
13. Integrate Indigenous procurement strategies into core business strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed Indigenous procurement strategies as an integrated part of core business • Set internal Indigenous procurement targets 	✓ ✓	

<p>14. Collaborate with Indigenous procurement intermediaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with intermediaries to support Indigenous procurement strategies • Provide guidance for industry in partnership with key intermediaries 	<p>✓</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>15. Build capacity and capability through strategic Indigenous procurement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster long term relationships with First Nations businesses to support capacity development and scale 	<p>✓</p>	
<p>16. Provide scholarships for First Nations businesses to attend the AusRAIL Conference</p>		<p>✓</p>
<p>17. Partner with First Nations-led businesses to deliver training on increasing support and spend with First Nations businesses</p>		<p>✓</p>
<p>18. Introduce a transparent reporting system</p>	<p>✓</p>	

The project delivery team recognises the ARA's commitment in undertaking this project as a significant first step towards improving First Nations engagement and participation within the rail industry.

These recommendations are a starting point for the ARA and its members to consider and prioritise, based on this project's research findings. It is suggested that further work be conducted by the ARA and its members to understand best practices and evidence-based solutions specific to the recommendations presented in this report.

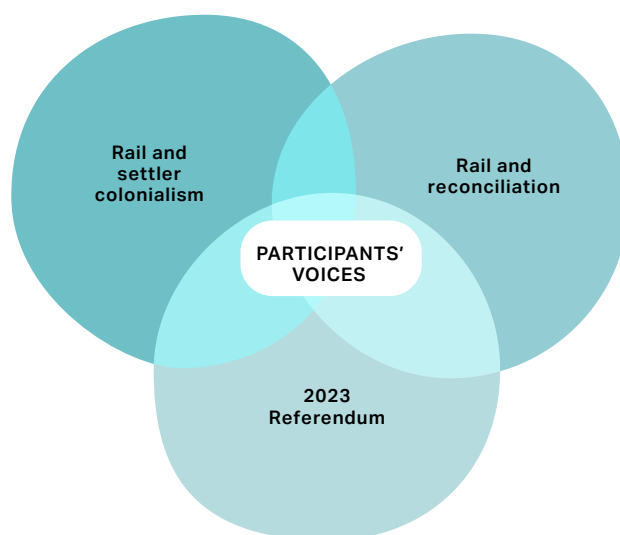


Introduction: The intersection of rail and First Nations peoples

“Our railway is operating on Country, across this nation and if railways can’t symbolically respect those who have come before us and the Lands of First Nations peoples and get that right, how can we ask others to?”

To properly understand the experiences of First Nations people working in the rail industry today, we must first understand the historical and ongoing context the industry operates within. This requires consideration of the intertwined dimensions of settler colonialism, the workplace imperative of reconciliation, and the national debate surrounding the 2023 referendum on constitutional reform. The connection between settler colonialism and rail infrastructure in Australia offers important insights into the current experiences of people working in the industry.

The key themes of this report highlight the profound impact the rail sector continues to have on First Nations lands and peoples, and the challenges of pursuing workplace reconciliation in the short term, especially following the failure of the national referendum on constitutional reform. Through this nuanced lens, the findings offer insights into the work-life balance of First Nations employees, who navigate a complex spectrum of deeply troubling and immensely satisfying labour-related experiences across the rail network.



Rail and settler colonialism

In Australia, railways played a crucial role in colonial expansion, driving economic growth and European cultural domination¹. Today, the rail industry remains vital to Australia’s mineral extraction, manufacturing and transport infrastructure, continuing to evolve to meet the needs and challenges of today.

The involvement of First Nations peoples in Australia’s rail industry is closely linked to settler colonialism and ongoing dispossession. Settler colonialism is a distinct form of colonialism in which foreign immigrants establish permanent communities on First Nations lands, deliberately displacing the original custodians². Unlike other forms of colonialism that primarily exploit resources for export or governance, settler colonialism seeks to permanently sever First Nations connections to ancestral lands and waterways³.

Settler colonialism introduces imported cultures and systems of governance, often through the assertion of sovereignty by force, resulting in profound and enduring impacts on First Nations lands and peoples⁴. These

1 Blatman-Thomas, N., & Porter, L. (2019). Placing property: Theorizing the urban from settler colonial cities. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 43(1), 30-45.

2 Wolfe, P. (2006). Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native. *Journal of genocide research*, 8(4), 387-409.

3 Veracini, L. (2010). *Settler colonialism*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 10, 9780230299191.

4 Moreton-Robinson, A. (2014). The house that Jack built: Britishness and white possession. *Critical Race & Whiteness Studies*, 10(2).

dynamics are illustrated further in Appendix 1, which provides a visual overview of settler colonisation as a structure.

Approximately 50 years after invasion, the first railroads were built in New South Wales and Victoria⁵. These rail networks were initially crucial for transporting commodities such as wool and agricultural produce from inland areas to coastal ports for export⁶. While the railways symbolised modernity and industrial development, fostering economic expansion and connecting remote areas with urban centres, they also reinforced settler dominance over annexed territories⁷. For Europeans, railways and rollingstock represented progress, but for First Nations peoples, these infrastructures divided ancestral Country, desecrated sacred sites, and facilitated access for outsiders who were neither welcomed nor recognised by clan groups. First Nations communities were largely excluded from decision-making processes and the associated economic benefits of the rail infrastructure.

Settler colonialism continues to have a profound impact on First Nations peoples, manifesting in widespread institutional and direct racism. The enduring legacy of historical dispossession marked by violence, discriminatory policies and exploitative practices has led to the loss of access to cultural traditions, languages and Country⁸. These injustices perpetuate intergenerational trauma, as well as economic and social marginalisation, further entrenching systemic discrimination⁹. Despite the historical and ongoing contributions of First Nations peoples to rail construction and various roles within the sector, this report reveals that pervasive racism and inequality continue to cast a long shadow over experiences and opportunities in the industry. Or as Bishop¹⁰ expresses below,

Same Window, Different Views: “Throughout the years leading up to the final decision to go ahead with the Alice Springs-Darwin rail, delays and difficulties with Aboriginal land ownership along the new rail corridor were constantly emphasised in the news media. With demands for apparently outrageous amounts of compensation, the rail project became the focus for a widespread uncertainty and anxiety about Native Title. Many felt that the compensation claims by Aborigines were holding the nation to ransom. During the planning phase, triumphal rhetoric about nation building, vied with alarmist headlines about native title claims hindering, even preventing construction. Complex issues about the potential displacement and relocation of numerous people, the disruption of deeply held associations with the country, as well as different stories of ‘the nation’, were generally ignored.” (p.169)

The findings and recommendations in this report offer an avenue for the rail industry to continue its work addressing these historical impacts through reconciliation and economic empowerment.



5 Campbell, D., Brougham, J., & Caldwell, R. (2009). Uncovering and understanding Australia's first railway. *Australian Journal of Multi-disciplinary Engineering*, 7(2), 147-156.
6 Howlett, C., & Lawrence, R. (2019). Accumulating minerals and dispossessing Indigenous Australians: native title recognition as settler-colonialism. *Antipode*, 51(3), 818-837.
7 Goodwin, C. D. (1963). Economists and railways in colonial Australia. *The Journal of Transport History*, (2), 65-86.
8 Murray, C. (2022). John Locke's theory of property, and the dispossession of indigenous peoples in the settler-colony. *Am. Indian LJ*, 10, 55.
9 Grewcock, M. (2018). Settler-colonial violence, primitive accumulation and Australia's genocide. *State Crime Journal*, 7(2), 222-250.
10 Bishop, P. (2010). *Train Spotting: Reconciliation and Long-distance Rail Travel in Australia* (Doctoral Dissertation, Wakefield Press).

Rail and reconciliation

First Nations participation in the rail industry is complex due to a history of exploitation and exclusion. Early on, many First Nations peoples were forcibly removed from their traditional lands to work on railway construction¹¹. This work was often unpaid, and workers faced systemic racism, overt discrimination, and oppression¹².

After the construction phase, First Nations peoples were largely excluded from ongoing employment within the industry¹³. Although there has been progress in recent decades, with initiatives aimed at increasing First Nations representation, there remains more work to do to address long-held scepticism, as Bishop noted in the late 1990s when writing about long-distance train travel.

“Do the dot-painted engines therefore simply represent what Jane Jacobs has termed, ‘the smooth space of reconciliation... [R]econciliatory place-making gestures [that] rarely involve Aborigines gaining any legal, propertied control’, or can they be understood as a more complex, paradoxical and ambiguous response to a reconciliation sensibility? Do the dot painted engines and their associated journey mark any significant break with previous promotional representations of Aboriginal people, the rail and the journey? Enno Hermann, in the context of the 2000 Sydney Olympics writes: ‘As a result of tourism market research, Australia increasingly advertises itself with images of Aboriginality.’ Perhaps it is not surprising that struggles around ‘reconciliation’ should be interwoven into corporate Australian identity.”¹⁴

Significant challenges remain in achieving equitable participation in the sector and addressing the historical legacies of intergenerational trauma, economic and social exclusion, and ongoing discrimination. This sector-wide effort is now framed under the banner of workplace reconciliation.

Workplace reconciliation focuses on strengthening relationships between First Nations peoples and other Australians through increased labour participation. Reconciliation Australia, the leading body for reconciliation in Australia, emphasises that this process should be based on five key aspects:

- **Historical acceptance:** understanding and acknowledgement of the wrongs of the past and how they impact First Nations peoples, including the impacts of government policies and practices
- **Race relations:** valuing the cultures, rights and experiences of First Nations peoples through positive two-way relationships built on trust and respect
- **Equality and equity:** equal and equitable participation by First Nations peoples in all aspects of their lives through self-determination
- **Institutional integrity:** active support by political, business and community structures to ensure reconciliation is achieved
- **Unity:** society values and recognises First Nations people’s cultures and heritage as a proud part of a shared national identity

To contribute positively to First Nations equity, organisations are increasingly implementing workplace Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs). First introduced by Reconciliation Australia in 2006, RAPs are strategic documents designed to contribute to closing the gaps in health, education, and employment outcomes between First Nations peoples and other Australians¹⁵. RAPs are driven by the desire to better harness corporate responsibility, to strategically address historical injustice and fast-track First Nations opportunities.

In operation, RAPs are iterative organisational commitments in areas such as employment, cultural awareness, supplier diversity and community engagement, which evolve through four key phases (Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate). Although each phase is designed to become increasingly more complex, each stage functions to develop lasting organisational commitments to closing the gaps and fostering mutually beneficial relationships with First Nations stakeholders.

While each rail industry organisation has a different function and operational footprint, it’s found that RAPs were tailored to suit the needs of the organisation. Across the evaluation, implementation of RAPs typically evolved through four key stages:

11 Maher, K. (2016). The other side of mobilities: Aboriginal containment in Australia from rail to jail, past and present. In *Carceral Mobilities* (pp. 186-201). Routledge; Maher, K. (2024). They put me on a train: Assimilation and the Australian railways. *Geographical Research*.

12 Bowden, B. (2019). Labor history, railroads, and Australia, 1880–1900. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*.

13 Maher, K. (2013). ‘We were all involved with the line’: Indigenous experience in rail. 2013 postgraduate research papers: a compendium, 29.

14 Bishop, 2010, p. 163

15 Reconciliation Australia. (n.d.). What is Reconciliation? <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation/what-is-reconciliation/>

Commitment and consultation: Organisations commit to developing a RAP and engage in consultations with First Nations stakeholders, and key employees to understand local priorities and tailor organisational agendas.

Development and approval: A working group is established to draft RAP documents, outlining specific actions, timelines and responsibilities. In most cases, RAPs are reviewed and approved by Reconciliation Australia or similar state and territory accreditation bodies.

Implementation and monitoring: Once approved, the RAP is implemented through a series of initiatives, programs and activities aligned with strategic organisational goals. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are established to track progress, assess outcomes and identify areas for improvement.

Review and reporting: Organisations progressively and periodically review their RAP to ensure alignment with evolving reconciliation priorities and operational agendas. In most cases, progress reports are submitted to Reconciliation Australia or state and territory equivalents for transparency and accountability.

2023 referendum

In October 2023, Australians went to the polls for a referendum to vote on a proposal to establish a constitutionally enshrined mechanism to ensure First Nations peoples can lead on matters affecting communities. The referendum emerged from the Uluru Statement from the Heart (2017), which called for a First Nations Voice (the Voice) enshrined in the Constitution and a Makarrata (making peace after conflict) Commission to supervise agreement-making and truth-telling between Australian governments and First Nations peoples.

While the referendum offered potential for initiating substantive measures aimed at addressing historical and contemporary injustices, it fell short of obtaining the requisite majority support needed for constitutional amendment. Ultimately, a national majority of 60 per cent rejecting the proposal prevailed. Relevant to this study, the result saw an urban-rural political divide, with regional and rural areas voting heavily against the Voice, while inner-city seats voted 'yes'.

The lived experiences of First Nations employees in both their professional and personal lives have been indelibly inscribed through the framing of the Federal Government's referendum, the scope and impact of both the Yes and No campaigns, and the ultimate result. This context framed the way First Nations and non-Indigenous participants experienced their current workplace relationships, and this same context now frames this research and report.

Project method

The project aimed to assess First Nations participation in the rail industry, review existing procedures and policies related to reconciliation, engagement and employment, and offer a set of strategic recommendations.

Humanize Media, Social Traders, and Ākina conducted the project, which included four phases:

- **Phase 1:** Rail industry and First Nations community engagement (Humanize Media)
 - Part 1: Desktop research and analysis
 - Part 2: Interviews with rail industry organisations and stakeholders
- **Phase 2:** Data collection and insights (Social Traders)
 - Part 1: Employment data collection
 - Part 2: First Nations business and procurement survey
- **Phase 3:** Impact modelling workshop (Akina Foundation)
- **Phase 4:** Final report, including recommendations

Phase one: Rail industry and First Nations community engagement

Phase one was conducted in two stages. Part one assessed rail industry organisations against peak reconciliation progress indicators while part two interviewed First Nations and non-Indigenous people working across the rail industry.

Desktop research and analysis

To gauge organisations' progress towards reconciliation, a desktop analysis was carried out for 214 ARA member organisations. Organisations' websites were searched for peak progress indicators and, if a search function was available, 'Aboriginal', 'Torres Strait Islander', 'First Nations', 'Indigenous' and 'reconciliation' were also searched.

To identify organisations' RAPs, Reconciliation Australia's website¹⁶ was consulted, along with Google searches. This approach revealed both current and expired or outdated RAPs.

To specifically evaluate strategies related to First Nations engagement, reconciliation, and employment, key federal, state and territory websites were reviewed for their primary First Nations initiatives.

Humanize assessed each organisation against six peak progress indicators of First Nations inclusion in outward facing domains, namely:

- Acknowledgement of Country
- Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)
- Dedicated First Nations page
- First Nations visuals
- First Nations employee-led inclusion groups
- First Nations story telling

Each organisation was categorised according to parent company location, with any organisation outside of Australia or New Zealand categorised as a multinational.

16 Reconciliation Australia, Reconciliation Action Plans – Who Has a RAP, <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation-action-plans/who-has-a-rap/>

Limitations

This desktop scoping exercise is not intended to be exhaustive, and it is noted that a limitation of this method is the reliance on publicly available data. Organisations and governments may engage in other internal activities that are not outwardly promoted. Please note, this review also excludes initiatives of local governments, specific government departments or portfolios.

Interviews

Results of the desktop analysis informed yarning¹⁷ sessions and semi-structured interviews with 18 participants. First Nations and non-Indigenous people working at various levels within a range of different organisations (government, public companies, multinational conglomerates, not-for-profits and state reconciliation organisations), situated in locations across Australia, were contacted to participate in the project. To ensure a spread of gender, experience-level and tenure range, recommendations for potential participants were received from industry representatives with knowledge of people working in certain categories where representation was required. Participants were contacted by phone and/or email with details about the project provided via email in the Humanize Media *Interview participant information pack*. All interviews were conducted online via either Zoom or Teams meetings.

Limitations

It needs to be noted that a limitation of these interviews was the fact that all participants spoken with worked in an organisation already looking at reconciliation, and all had a RAP (even if expired). There is potential that organisations who are not at this stage of their reconciliation journey may provide a different environment for First Nations peoples. While the interviews provide personal insights into the lived experiences of people working in the industry, the sample size of 18 people is not intended to provide statistical guidance.

Phase two: Rail industry employment and First Nations business surveys

The primary objective of phase two was to gather comprehensive, de-identified data to better understand First Nations participation in the rail industry — both through workforce engagement and supplier inclusion. This included two targeted surveys: one capturing data from ARA member organisations on the employment of First Nations people and their engagement with First Nations contractors; and a second survey focused on the experiences of First Nations businesses engaging with the rail industry. Together, these insights help build a clearer picture of current involvement, barriers to participation and opportunities to strengthen employment and procurement pathways for First Nations communities.

Rail industry employment data collection survey

Survey development and distribution method

Social Traders, in collaboration with the ARA, designed a detailed and de-identified survey to share with ARA member organisations. The survey was intended to capture a wide range of information regarding the involvement of First Nations people and businesses within the rail industry, while ensuring the anonymity of the respondents and their organisations.

Key survey areas

The survey focused on several key areas to assess First Nations participation in the rail industry:

- **Organisation demographics:** Including type and size of each rail industry organisation
- **First Nations contractor and labour engagement:** Reporting the involvement with First Nations contractors and the number of First Nations individuals employed
- **Employment of First Nations people:** Including roles, employment tenure and whether this data is formally reported
- **Supply chain participation:** Reporting the number of First Nations businesses engaged as suppliers and the types of products or services they provided
- **Diversity and inclusion policies:** Focusing on the presence of RAPs and specific stated commitments to First Nations inclusion

¹⁷ Bessarab, D., & N'Gandu, B. (2010). Yarning about Yarning as a Legitimate Method in Indigenous Research. *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, 3(1), 37-50.

The data was collected electronically and de-identified for analysis to uncover patterns and opportunities for enhancing First Nations participation in the rail industry.

Limitations

The survey had a response rate of 42 ARA members participating. While this may not provide a fully representative view of First Nations engagement across the broader rail industry, it offers valuable insights from key industry employers.

Additionally, there is potential that the responses may have been provided by a single individual within an organisation, who may not have had access to all the relevant details on First Nations engagement. As a result, the reader should consider the sample size when interpreting the findings. Additionally, the smaller sample size may have led to gaps in understanding the full extent of First Nations participation within the industry.

First Nations business engagement and procurement survey

Survey development and distribution method

Social Traders developed and distributed a dedicated survey to First Nations businesses across Australia, specifically those with experience or potential interest in working with the rail industry. The survey was designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights, including direct feedback on barriers and enablers to procurement participation. Responses were collected online and analysed to inform strategic recommendations.

Key survey areas

- **Current involvement:** Engagement with rail-related projects and types of goods/services provided
- **Engagement experiences:** Quality and inclusiveness of past or current interactions with rail organisations
- **Enablers and success factors:** What has helped businesses successfully access rail-related opportunities
- **Barriers to procurement:** Challenges in accessing opportunities, navigating tender processes or meeting buyer expectations
- **Capacity building needs:** Support required to strengthen business readiness
- **Recommendations for improvement:** Suggestions to enhance procurement pathways, strengthen collaboration and increase visibility of First Nations suppliers

Limitations

The survey had a response rate of 30 First Nations businesses participating. While this may not provide a fully representative view of First Nations business engagement across the broader sector, it offers valuable insights from suppliers with direct or emerging links to the rail industry.

The survey was primarily shared with businesses operating in or adjacent to rail infrastructure and project delivery. As a result, it may not reflect the perspectives of First Nations businesses that could support the rail sector in other procurement areas, such as corporate goods and services, facilities management, or professional services. Additionally, as the survey was targeted to suppliers with known or emerging rail experience, it may not capture the potential of future First Nations suppliers who may be well positioned to work in the sector but have not yet had the opportunity.

Phase three: Impact modelling workshop

Ākina facilitated a series of workshops with ARA member representatives and internal working group members to map out an impact model – exploring the potential outcomes that could be achieved through initiatives to improve First Nations participation and employment in the rail industry.

The impact modelling workshops were delivered virtually and used online tools to enable collaborative conversations and written input from all participants. The process stepped through the fundamental components of an impact model:

1. Why is this important, what situation / issue / opportunity is aiming to be addressed through this work?
2. What are the external drivers for this work (political, social, cultural, environmental)?
3. What are the main activities and initiatives that members and the ARA are either delivering or exploring, in order to drive positive outcomes for First Nations peoples in the rail industry?

- a. The workshop participants at this stage also had a view of some of the recommendations from the Humanize Media Report – and in some cases used these to inform their thinking.
4. What are the possible short-term outcomes that would be achieved as a result of the chosen activities? This explored changes that would be directly attributable to the activities of the industry and the ARA.
5. What are the longer-term outcomes? This explored what those initial changes would lead to.
6. Finally, they explored the impact objectives for the work. These are the long term, system-level changes that members and the ARA are hoping to contribute towards, they are the vision and the guiding goals for all this work.
- a. This section also enabled members to view some of the aspirational statements and impact goals reflected in phase one findings, and several were ultimately used in the Impact Model

Current industry practices

This report includes case studies provided by ARA member organisations. This includes data and information from website publications, linked in the text where relevant. The data from these case studies have been independently verified, and are aimed to provide a snapshot of existing practices to support First Nations participation and engagement in the industry.

The rail industry today

Peak progress indicators

To understand how the rail industry approaches First Nations engagement and its journey toward reconciliation, it is important to assess where companies currently stand.

Of the rail industry organisations reviewed, just over half were Australian, while the remaining half consisted mostly of multinational companies.

Location	Number
Australia	109
New Zealand	3
Australia/New Zealand	9
Multinational	93
Total members	214

An Acknowledgement of Country was the most common peak progress indicator identified in the review, and was predominantly shown on Australian company sites. There were seven other companies that displayed an acknowledgement: three Australia/New Zealand companies and four multinational organisations who had websites for the Australian (Oceanic) division of the company. An organisation having an Acknowledgement of Country was not indicative of having other peak progress indicators. Similarly, even if an organisation had a RAP, it did not mean they had an Acknowledgment of Country. Some organisations only had First Nations stories and no other indicators.

Peak Progress Indicator	Yes	No / NA
Acknowledgement of Country	35	179
Reconciliation Action Plan	33	181
Dedicated First Nations page	24	190
First Nations visuals	6	208
Employee-led inclusion	11	203
First Nations stories	31	183

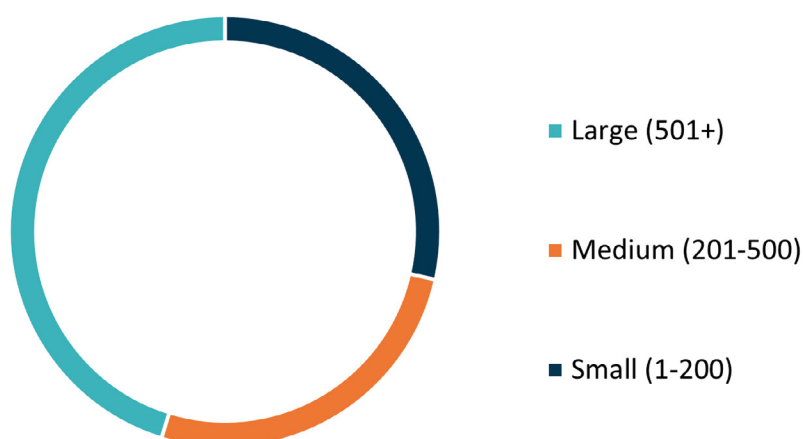
Two organisations did not have RAPs and instead had Action Plans. They were excluded from the totals, however they are noteworthy demonstrations that reconciliation can be pursued in more than one way.

Employment data findings

The employment data survey received responses from 42 organisations across various sectors of the rail industry and highlights a wide range of engagement with First Nations peoples and businesses.

The respondents represented a broad cross-section of the rail industry, with the majority of respondents work primarily in rail construction, followed by passenger rail, freight and heavy haul, and the rail supply chain, with additional representation from consultants and roles in logistics, maintenance, signalling and parts supply. Companies varied in size, as shown in the figure below.

Respondents by Size (employee headcount)



Twenty-eight organisations provided data on the number of First Nations people directly employed, with a total of 2030 First Nations employees. However, 14 organisations did not provide data, and of these, eight specified they did not have any First Nations employees. The remaining six organisations indicated uncertainty or advised they do not collect this data. First Nations individuals are engaged across a wide range of roles, including administration, technical and engineering roles, construction and labour, and management.

Employment type	Total number of employees	Number of organisations
Full-time	1716	27
Part-time	132	10
Casual	171	8
Contract	11	5
Total	2030	28

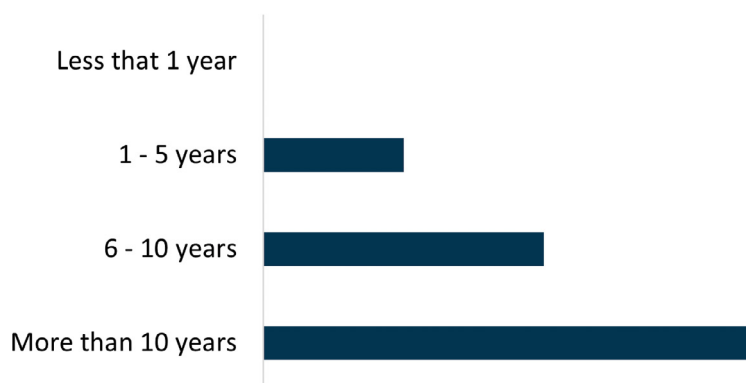
First Nations business and procurement findings

The First Nations business and procurement survey received responses from 26 First Nations businesses with varying degrees of experience in the rail industry. The findings provide insight into how these businesses are currently engaging with rail organisations, the challenges they face, and the opportunities for strengthening supplier diversity and collaboration.

The majority of respondents (85 per cent) indicated prior experience, suggesting an existing base of suppliers with relevant knowledge and capability, but also highlighting room to grow.

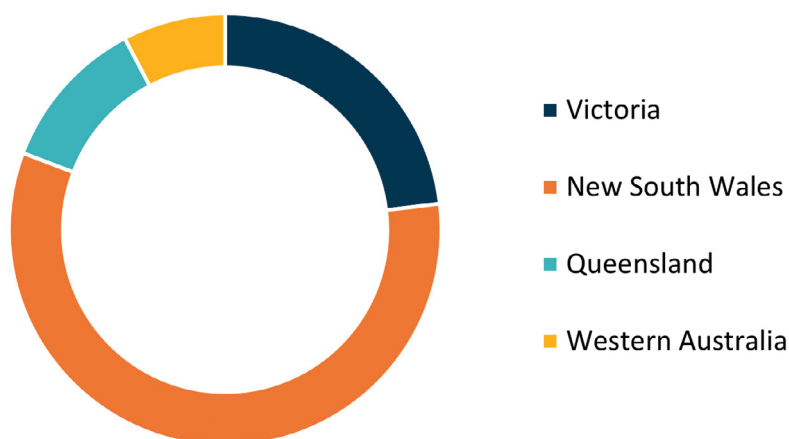
Most respondents were long-established businesses, with more than half operating for over 10 years. This indicates that many First Nations businesses engaging (or seeking to engage) with the rail industry bring substantial operational history and experience.

Responses by age of business



Businesses from New South Wales and Victoria made up the majority of responses. While this reflects areas of stronger current engagement, it also signals opportunities to expand outreach and engagement with First Nations suppliers in other states and territories.

Responses by state/territory



Current experiences of rail industry workers

Humanize Media assessed feedback from 18 interviews¹⁸ to look deeper into the different meanings, contradictions and specific factors that shaped participants' work experiences and social interactions. The interviewees' experiences showed that a mix of social, cultural, historical and political influences played a big role in how participants behaved and how they felt about their work.

This in-depth analysis revealed a complex mix of tensions, challenges, values and personal experiences that made interpreting the data more challenging. The thematic mapping and analysis resulted in the identification of three main themes: racism and discrimination, organisational culture and Reconciliation Action Plans. These themes are presented in *Figure 1*, alongside their relevant sub-themes of racism and discrimination, organisational culture, and reconciliation action plans.

¹⁸ While the interviews provide personal insights into the lived experiences of people working in the industry, the sample size of 18 people is not intended to provide statistical guidance.

Racism and discrimination

People interviewed for this project identified racism and discrimination as significant issues they had faced in the rail industry. Racism manifests in various forms, including direct, indirect, individual and structural racism, as well as microaggressions¹⁹. Participants observed the normalisation of these experiences within their organisations, recounting incidents ranging from casual remarks to more overt discriminatory behaviours. One participant shared an experience where a colleague questioned the focus on Aboriginal issues, reflecting the underlying racial biases within the workplace. Another noted the presence of racist attitudes in certain sectors of the industry, describing them as *“nasty little pockets”*.

Additionally, most First Nations participants interviewed reported experiencing racism in their current workplace, with casual racism and microaggressions being particularly prevalent. Following the 2023 referendum’s ‘no’ vote, First Nations employees interviewed observed heightened levels of racism in the workplace. Experiences such as this combined with casual microaggressions can create toxic environments that undermine psychological safety, job satisfaction and a sense of belonging.

“We have this [online platform] where you put up posts, and a message was posted about the Reconciliation Action Plan being launched, and there were a couple of comments on there, one was like ‘didn’t we vote no to this crap?’ [...]that’s what they’re putting on a corporate [platform], where the CEO could see it, and all ELT (executive leadership team). So what are they saying in their trucks, on the way to sites, in the depots? It just goes to show – [racism] is there.”

The accounts demonstrate a significant gap in awareness and empathy regarding the lasting effects of settler colonialism on First Nations employees, impacting their well-being and work-life balance.

“I just think a lot of what I’ve been facing is a lot of racism, bullying and harassment in this space. [...] You don’t see all the stuff going on inside, but once you get in, then you get to witness what’s actually going on and it’s so sad.”

Organisational culture

Facing combinations of both structural and individual racism, magnified across a spectrum from casual to intense, First Nations employees experience complex challenges associated with feeling culturally safe in their work roles²⁰. In some accounts, participants recounted vulnerability and hesitation around reporting problematic behaviours to management. One participant shared how comments were made by a manager about First Nations issues when they were not in the room. These experiences highlighted the lack of cultural safety and the psychological toll on First Nations employees, contributing to feelings of exclusion, alienation and stress.

Organisational cultures are characterised by a nuanced interplay of individual and collective identities, administrative norms and structural dynamics²¹. In workspaces, First Nations people often navigate a complex landscape where their cultural values intersect with dominant workplace expectations, often leading to challenges such as identity negotiation, cultural assimilation pressures and the experience of both overt and subtle forms of discrimination.

One interview participant expressed the need for leadership at all levels to take responsibility for fostering a more inclusive environment, saying:

“This is an issue I have with [organisation], not just the racial side of things, but everything – it needs to come from above. Not saying the CEO or ELT, but if you’re the leader of a work group, you need to call it out.”

This underscores the importance of leadership in setting the tone for an inclusive and supportive workplace culture.

Reconciliation Action Plans

Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) have emerged as pivotal instruments in Australian organisations committed to fostering meaningful relationships with First Nations peoples. Anchored to principles of mutual respect, equity and social justice, RAPs outline practical steps for organisations to acknowledge and address historical injustices, support First Nations cultures and empower communities economically.

¹⁹ Microaggressions are subtle, often unintentional, discriminatory actions or remarks.

²⁰ Bargallie, D. (2020). Unmasking the racial contract: Indigenous voices on racism in the Australian Public Service. Aboriginal Studies Press. Mohelska, H., & Sokolova, M. (2015). Organisational culture and leadership—joint vessels?. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 171, 1011-1016.

²¹ Mohelska, H., & Sokolova, M. (2015). Organisational culture and leadership—joint vessels?. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 171, 1011-1016.

The launch of RAPs can be a significant event, with one participant highlighting:

“Last week they launched the RAP, and it was massive. It was awesome. It was so good. Great turnout, a lot of the TO’s (Traditional Owners) came along. It was an eye-opener for everyone. [...] I was just over the moon about it. Looking forward to a bit more of that action happening [here].”

Improving participation, engagement and partnering with First Nations people in rail

A range of strategies will be required to continue to improve participation, engagement and partnering with First Nations people in the rail industry. The potential impact of affirmative action for First Nations peoples was explored in the impact modelling workshops led by Ākina.

The intention of the impact model was to help the ARA and the rail industry to visualise the long-term, positive change that could result from deliberate actions taken in the short to medium term. It served as a practical tool to explore how collective efforts spanning employment, procurement, cultural safety and community engagement can lead to measurable social outcomes over time. The model also supports a shared vision for the industry and helps ensure future decisions align with impact-focused goals.

During the workshop, participants co-designed a draft model that mapped out key initiatives either already underway or in scope for future consideration by both the ARA and industry organisations. A hypothetical approach was taken to illustrate the types of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes that could be achieved by adopting a coordinated, affirmative action approach across the industry.

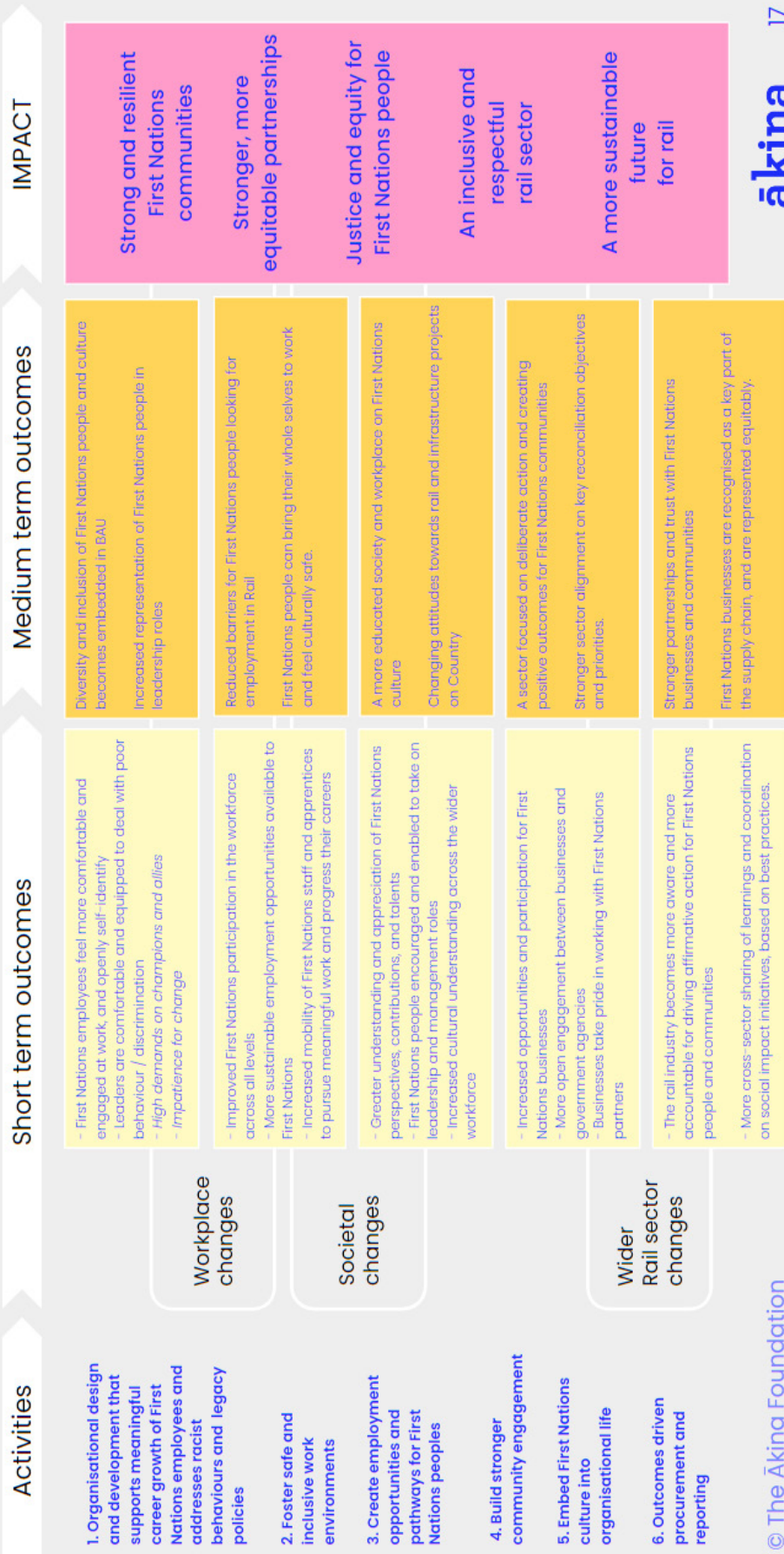
Some of the main outcomes industry sought to achieve included:

- Improved First Nation's access to meaningful, sustainable employment opportunities
- Improved presence of First Nations peoples in leadership and management roles
- An increased understanding, appreciation and presence of First Nations culture and values in the workplace
- A workplace environment where First Nations employees feel culturally safe, engaged and can bring their whole selves to work every day
- A more aware and accountable rail industry, which provides both engagement and opportunities for First Nations businesses and communities, and takes pride in meaningful partnerships with First Nations peoples
- A rail industry that takes deliberate action and accountability towards creating positive experiences and outcomes for First Nations peoples

The group agreed on a set of Impact Goals to guide future efforts:



ARA IMPACT MODEL



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These impact goals and outcomes assisted in shaping the recommendations of this report, while aligning with the evaluation findings from desktop research, interviews and employment and business surveys. As a result of this work, four key areas of focus have been identified to support improved outcomes in the rail industry:

- Foster safe and inclusive work environments
- Reconciliation and leadership
- Supporting long-term, sustainable employment
- Building capacity through partnerships and Indigenous procurement

The findings highlight both the progress made and the challenges that persist, particularly around addressing racism, enhancing cultural safety and the effective implementation of Reconciliation Action Plans.

These recommendations are designed to address the key issues identified, build on the progress already made and ensure that the rail industry moves forward in its efforts towards reconciliation and cultural safety.

Foster safe and inclusive work environments

The results of the interviews highlighted the importance to First Nations employees of feeling supported, fostering an environment of cultural safety in the workplace, and the significant work still needed to combat sentiments of racism.

Some interviewees described a lack of cultural safety in certain areas of their organisation, particularly in settings such as frontline work sites where cultural awareness and education appeared to be lacking.

One participant highlighted this disparity:

“I wouldn’t say we’re fully there yet, but it is a more culturally safe environment [within our offices] than sort of for the front-line staff. You walk into a corporate office versus some construction site, the language being used, the terminologies, the level of education, or at least cultural safety. Education is always quite evident. So, there is that sort of divide between our white and blue-collar staff and the level of engagement and education opportunities that they’ve had.”

While most participants felt their workplace was progressing towards cultural safety, these findings illustrate that while progress has been made in creating culturally safe spaces, there is still a need for greater consistency and commitment across all parts of the organisation.

Cultural load emerged as a key issue, referring to the extra, often invisible, responsibilities placed on First Nations employees to act as cultural advisors, educators or mediators in the workplace. These roles, though crucial in fostering understanding and combating organisational ignorance, were typically unpaid and unrecognised, adding to the pressure on First Nations staff.

This additional workload contributed to heightened stress and emotional exhaustion, as participants found themselves balancing their formal job duties with these informal cultural responsibilities. This was highlighted across the project interviews.

“Stop letting the cultural baggage be on Indigenous peoples... I feel like a lot of the time the cultural load always falls on us.”

“As part of my work, we sponsored a [sports] team. I arranged that with another [First Nations] lady [...] and next month we’re sponsoring a tent for [First Nations event], but that was off my own initiative.”

“It can be hard to carry the weight of culture within the workplace. People can expect you to know all things Indigenous - like the meanings of words etc.”

“I get frustrated, my boss understands now, but I say to him, don’t make me the token black fella because I am the only one that you know... I don’t speak on behalf of all Aboriginal people. I just don’t, don’t ask me the opinion of all of them.”

First Nations employees spoke of the vital role allies played in amplifying their voices and advocating for systemic change. One participant reflected on the positive impact their manager had, stating:

“[They are] a supervisor, and the best boss I’ve ever had. [They] pull me up every time - ‘are you good? Let me know’ - every time. I come to work for that only, because that support is there, and [they’ve] got my back. I just feel so good and confident coming to work.”

Across the evaluation, it was found allies walked beside First Nations employees to build stronger, more equitable workspaces. Aside from an innate inclination to listen deeply to First Nations co-workers, non-Indigenous allies actively engaged in dialogue, educating themselves, and were tireless in their advocacy for social justice and inclusive organisational practices. Interview participants shared:

"I've had some fantastic managers, that have supported me, and doing First Nations work on the side – attending meetings, doing work, risk assessments for NAIDOC day and attending the event."

"It's slowly changing, you look through history and we've always had white allies, which has been good, but probably not as many as we'd like."

Allyship often extended beyond symbolic gestures to tangible actions that contributed to more inclusive workplaces. As part of this effort, organisations implemented allyship and cultural awareness training programs, with participation numbers reportedly increasing significantly. One participant highlighted this growing engagement, saying:

"We're probably up to about 85% of our employees who've completed cultural awareness face-to-face and online".

While progress has been made, it was also noted that allyship and cultural safety were not yet consistent across all teams and levels of the organisation. There remains a need for continued efforts to ensure that all employees, regardless of their role or location, are actively engaged in building culturally safe and inclusive work environments.

"What does a culturally safe place look like? It looks like a place where Indigenous peoples can bring their whole selves to work.... The ability to access Indigenous Cultural Leave, ability to celebrate and attend National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week with pride and the encouragement to do so."

While these interview findings indicate there is significant room for progress to be made, survey respondents from many organisations shared that over the next 12 months they are prioritising cultural competency by introducing or expanding cultural awareness training, traineeships and First Nations employment strategies.

Training

Recommendation one: Provide comprehensive training for staff, especially those in management positions, on anti-racism, cultural sensitivity, unconscious bias and respect at work



For industry and the ARA

To foster a truly inclusive and respectful work environment, comprehensive training for staff, particularly those in management positions, should be implemented, focusing on anti-racism, cultural sensitivity and respect. This training must extend beyond mere awareness, aiming to dismantle systemic barriers and embed cultural safety and racial literacy throughout the organisation.

According to the Diversity Council Australia, six organisational 'keys' are essential for addressing racism: building racial literacy, centering lived experience, auditing for racial equity, removing racial bias in recruitment, recognition and reward, and creating capacity within the workplace for calling out racism²².

The program should begin with an in-depth exploration of the historical context and systemic racism. Interactive workshops are essential for examining the history of colonisation and its ongoing impact on First Nations peoples, utilising case studies, storytelling and role-playing to enhance understanding, reflection and

22 Diversity Council Australia. (2022). Racism at work: a call to anti-racist action for Australian organisations. Retrieved from <https://www.dca.org.au/news/news-articles/call-for-anti-racist-action>

empathy. Engaging First Nations leaders, historians and activists in these workshops will provide real-world insights and perspectives.

Staff should then be equipped with the skills and knowledge to identify racist behaviours and practices, while managers should receive specialised training to build their confidence and ability to effectively address and respond to these incidents. This training should provide practical tools to create a safe environment where racism can be called out, and where managers feel empowered to lead open, supportive conversations about race and equity in the workplace.

Central to this training should be self-reflection and personal accountability. Participants should be encouraged to maintain reflective journals to examine their own biases, experiences with racism and roles in promoting inclusivity. Developing personal action plans for addressing biases and contributing to systemic change is crucial, with regular progress reviews to reinforce commitment. Engaging with First Nations community-led training organisations in the development of internal training and ensuring executive leadership drives the initiative are also essential.

“To have that sort of, you know that most senior level buy-in [is important]. Now we’re just sort of filtering down through the different levels of the organisation from you know, GMs and managers who may be involved in the development or delivery of some of the actions within the plan. So far it’s been a really positive experience. I’m sure there’ll be some people who have an issue with having their name linked to some actions or having to do some extra work, but that’s always going to happen. But, you know, having that buy-in from the exec level kind of makes it non negotiable.”

Celebration

Recommendation two: Foster a safe and inclusive work environment that celebrates First Nations peoples and culture



For industry

Organisations should consider adopting a comprehensive approach that integrates cultural safety, reduces cultural load, celebrates First Nations culture and embeds robust anti-racism approaches. This multifaceted approach ensures that First Nations culture is positively embedded into organisational life, and that systemic barriers and biases are actively addressed.

Embedding First Nations culture within an organisation can involve integrating Acknowledgement and Welcome to Country ceremonies into all organisational practices and assets, as well as promoting the display of First Nations artwork and the celebration of significant events such as NAIDOC Week and National Reconciliation Week.

Anti-discrimination policies

Addressing and striving to eliminate racism across organisational culture requires robust anti-discrimination strategies and systems on top of continuous training and awareness. Organisations must have mechanisms in place to swiftly and effectively address instances of racism and discrimination against First Nations employees and clients. This involves creating a safe environment for reporting grievances, ensuring that complaints are handled with sensitivity and urgency, and promoting a culture of respect and inclusivity through allyship training and awareness programs.

Furthermore, it is important to consider and implement internal policies that support First Nations employees, such as cultural leave and special leave for community obligations. These policies acknowledge the cultural load on First Nations employees and demonstrate the organisation’s commitment to supporting their community responsibilities. By integrating these policies into the broader organisational framework, organisations can ensure that First Nations employees are supported in their cultural and community roles, thereby fostering a more inclusive and respectful work environment.

Inclusion initiatives

Inclusion initiatives can help organisations ensure a culturally safe workforce. They can take many forms, but should aim to foster positive work environments for First Nations' employees, supporting their advancement through collaboration and not assumptive practice.

Case study: Ventia's TRECCA program

Ensuring a culturally safe workplace can be approached by creating organisational First Nations support teams similar to that of Ventia's TRECCA program²³, which tailors recruitment and workplace strategies to support First Nations employees. TRECCA takes a trauma-informed approach, creating environments where First Nations employees feel culturally safe and valued. The program focuses on providing personal welfare and shifting organisational mindsets to break down barriers. This not only fosters better work environments but also supports First Nations employees' career advancement.

Case Study: Inclusion communities at Queensland Rail

Queensland Rail's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group was established in 2018 to further entrench opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within their operations and strengthen existing relationships with the Traditional Owners of the many locations in Queensland in which they operate. By 2020, seven inclusion communities were formed, along with an Inclusion Council to support a more diverse and inclusive workplace, where all employees feel safe, respected and valued.

Queensland Rail's Inclusion Council comprises of the Executive Leadership Team as executive sponsors, lead representatives from each of the inclusion communities and business enablers who support the planning and delivery of Inclusion Community Action Plans. This allows direct and visible advocacy and support by the most senior leadership team at Queensland Rail. The First Nations Inclusion Community was formed in place of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group, and is sponsored by the Group Executive People, Safety and Sustainability, who empowers and enables the delivery of Queensland Rail's First Nations Inclusion Community Action Plan.

The First Nations Inclusion Community provides Queensland Rail's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees with a platform to propose ideas and lead initiatives, including National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week celebrations. It is also an avenue to guide the wider business on how to foster a more respectful and inclusive workplace. There are currently 34 Queensland Rail employees who are members of this community, and membership continues to grow each year as more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are empowered to create an organisation they're proud to belong to.



23 Ventia. Creating Culturally Responsive and Safe Workplaces for the Advancement of First Nations People. Ventia, 2023. Available at: <https://cmspivot.ventia.com/insights/our-people/creating-culturally-responsive-and-safe-workplaces-for-the-advancement-of-first-nations-people>.

Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is a way to show respect for the Traditional Custodians of the land and their ongoing connection, care and custodianship of Country. As a minimum standard, organisations are encouraged to display an acknowledgement on their websites, demonstrating their awareness of and respect for the land they operate on and its Traditional Owners and Custodians. Incorporating this practice honours First Nations cultures and helps weave them into the fabric of the organisation's everyday operations. Training for staff on the importance and significance of an Acknowledgement of Country can support awareness and reduce biases, as addressed under recommendation one.

Metro Trains Melbourne²⁴ displays an Acknowledgement of Country on the footer of each web page and goes beyond just standard wording, naming the Traditional Custodians and Country they operate on.

Case study: Queensland Rail – Welcome to Country on Tilt Train Services

Queensland Rail moves passengers and freight right across Queensland. To recognise the peoples and communities of the countries the Tilt Trains traverse, Queensland Rail launched Welcome to Country greetings on select Tilt Train services. The Welcome to Country greetings were the first of their kind in Australia, sharing welcome messages in Aboriginal language on Tilt Train services.

Queensland Rail Travel partnered with the Gidarjil Central Queensland Language Centre to create the unique Welcome to Country experience on these services. The project was an opportunity to recognise the Bailai, Gurang, Gooreng Gooreng, Taribelang and Toolooa peoples as the Traditional Custodians and Native Title holders in the Bundaberg, Miriam Vale, Gladstone and Mount Larcom areas. The Welcome to Country greetings are delivered in the Aboriginal language of the Country that the trains travel through, by an Elder or speaker of the language, and is then followed by an English translation. Utilising modern global positioning system (GPS) technology, these services acknowledge the distinct countries that have existed for thousands of years and support the preservation of their languages. Where there is more than one language group for a particular railway station, the announcements feature multiple welcome greetings.

Queensland Rail Travel continues to seek out opportunities to acknowledge, celebrate and partner with the Traditional Custodians of the countries that they operate on.

Integration of artwork

Keolis Downer²⁵ has demonstrated effective alignment and embedding of First Nations culture by commissioning dedicated artwork, which is prominently displayed at the bottom of each page on their website alongside their Acknowledgement of Country. Additionally, Keolis Downer features a list of 'Events of Significance' for First Nations peoples on their website, which serves to raise awareness of these important dates among their audience.

"I think more artwork. I've always pushed for it. If we can get artwork in all the offices, it's the imagery. It's always a big thing with Aboriginal people to make it more welcoming for that workplace."

Reconciliation and leadership

The employment survey revealed that 54.8 per cent of the responding organisations have RAPs in place. A small percentage (2.4 per cent) were unsure of their RAP status. Among those with RAPs, several organisations were in the process of finalising or updating their RAPs, including plans to move from Reflect to Innovate stages. Some organisations indicated that their RAPs are publicly available through their own websites or via Reconciliation Australia.

Despite the growing normalisation of RAPs across the rail industry, some interview participants noted they had witnessed a systemic lack of organisational seriousness in the commitment to First Nations equity and the RAP process itself. A lack of commitment was colloquially referred to as 'box-ticking'. During the yarns, the term 'box-ticking' was used to refer to the practice of superficially attending to the obligations of RAPs without genuine commitment or meaningful engagement. Interview participants shared:

²⁴ Metro Trains Melbourne, "Metro Trains Home Page," Available at, <https://www.metrotrains.com.au/>

²⁵ Keolis Downer, "Reconciliation Action Plan," Available at <https://www.keolisdowner.com.au/reconciliation-action-plan/>

"We might have ticked a number of boxes in the Reconciliation Action Plan, but if we truly asked ourselves, as an organisation, are we a safe and welcoming place for First Nations people, at all of our sites across the nation? We know that we couldn't answer yes."

"It'd be great to hit the (RAP) goals in certain time frames, but that shouldn't be the focus. The focus should be doing those stages correctly, so it's not a race, it's a marathon sort of thing."

"I was part of the original team that developed the RAP action plan, but we haven't completed the RAP. We've gone backwards... It hasn't really progressed at all - stalled a bit - like it just went stagnant."

However, there was evidence of some organisations taking their RAP commitments further. One participant observed their organisation was beginning to challenge surface-level engagement and move toward deeper reflection. The participant highlighted their organisation's decision to pause and assess their cultural journey before advancing further. By focusing on whether their workplace was genuinely safe and welcoming for First Nations employees, the organisation sought to avoid repeating past mistakes of simply ticking boxes. This approach reflects a growing recognition that meaningful reconciliation requires more than just fulfilling obligations — it demands intentional, ongoing dialogue and self-reflection to foster lasting cultural change.

"We decided that what we needed to do was not move forward but really spend some time getting to the heart of where we are at, as an organisation, culturally. In terms of us being a safe, welcoming work site, actually making sure that we're all informed, engaged in the discussion [...] we need to spend some more time asking ourselves those questions otherwise we're just repeating some of our guesses, our learnings and mistakes of the past where we just, okay we tick the box, we move on, that one's done."

Developing and implementing Reconciliation Action Plans

Recommendation three: Engage with First Nations stakeholders and drive RAPs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plans or Self Determination Plans through organisational leadership

4. An inclusive and respectful rail industry



For industry

For RAPs to be truly effective and sustainable, it is important that organisations actively engage with First Nations stakeholders and ensure their leadership is deeply involved in driving both action and accountability through these plans. By integrating First Nations perspectives at all stages of the RAP process, organisations can develop more meaningful and impactful strategies that reflect the needs and aspirations of these communities. The involvement of stakeholders brings authenticity, cultural sensitivity, and relevance to RAP initiatives, ensuring they are not just symbolic gestures but genuinely contribute to reconciliation and long-term positive change.

This can be achieved by consulting with local communities and Traditional Owner groups to ground RAP initiatives in local contexts. Engaging with local state or territory reconciliation organisations can further strengthen this connection and ensure that regional nuances and priorities are considered. For organisations with a national footprint, it's important to coordinate a national reconciliation plan in strategic partnership with Reconciliation Australia, while also working with state and territory reconciliation bodies to align efforts across different regions. These collaborations ensure that RAPs are informed by both local and national perspectives, allowing for a comprehensive and culturally responsive approach to reconciliation.

Equally important is the role of organisational leadership in championing RAPs. When leadership takes an active role, it sends a clear message across the organisation about the significance of reconciliation efforts.

Leaders are uniquely positioned to allocate resources, champion systemic change, and ensure that RAP objectives align with broader organisational goals while remaining a continuous priority for the organisation.

Their involvement also ensures accountability, as leadership-driven RAPs are likely to be continuously monitored and adjusted to meet evolving challenges and opportunities.

This dual approach — engaging First Nations stakeholders and leadership accountability — provides a holistic framework for RAP success, fostering genuine partnerships and ensuring that reconciliation becomes embedded within the organisation’s culture, rather than a box ticking exercise.

While RAPs provide a clear and consistent process for developing reconciliation plans, other approaches can be adopted. For example, V/Line²⁶ does not have a RAP but has worked with local First Nations peoples and organisations to create an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan, which was in line with the state government framework committed to self-determination for First Nations peoples. V/Line was also one of the few organisations that used artwork (commissioned for the Action Plan) throughout their website. They also publish online the percentage of their workforce who identify as First Nations peoples²⁷. This demonstrates that alternative approaches, progressed intentionally and with a focus on genuine partnerships, can achieve positive outcomes.

Case study: Reconciliation at ARTC

ARTC’s national rail network crosses the lands of more than 50 First Nations peoples, with its Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) serving to strengthen connections and help build a more inclusive, culturally safe workplace.

Since launching its Reflect RAP in March 2022, ARTC’s key achievements include:

- Delivered on 30 of the 31 deliverables committed to in its Reflect RAP
- The number of ARTC employees identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has increased from 30 to 88
- More than 2,500 hours of cultural awareness training have been delivered to more than 1,600 employees
- 838 employees have undertaken new cultural allyship training, developed in collaboration with Evolve Communities
- 40 employees have become Reconciliation Action Plan champions across 38 locations to help drive positive change and promote reconciliation across ARTC
- Ongoing promotion of Supply Nation across ARTC to connect with Indigenous businesses, resulting in the direct engagement of 19 verified First Nations businesses by ARTC in 2023-24, including a spend of \$7.2 million (compared to \$3.6 million in 2022-23)
- Launch of the First Nations Employees Network to foster a sense of community and support among First Nations employees
- Launch of a range of merchandise and clothing, including PPE and corporate shirts with ARTC Reconciliation artwork (Journey) by Gomerioi artist Elenore Binge

<https://www.artc.com.au/about/rap/>

For the ARA

The ARA should demonstrate its commitment to reconciliation and First Nations engagement by developing its own RAP.

By developing a RAP, the ARA would set a precedent within the rail industry, highlighting the importance of reconciliation, cultural safety, employment opportunities and cultural awareness, as well as the industry’s role in fostering economic empowerment for First Nations peoples.

As a peak industry body, the ARA’s RAP would not only reflect its dedication to reconciliation but also set a benchmark for other organisations in the industry to follow suit.

Encouraging members to develop their own RAPs ensures that commitment to reconciliation is embedded at every level of the industry, from leadership to frontline operations.

The ARA could lead by:

26 V/Line, "Home Page," Available at <https://www.vline.com.au/> V/Line, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People," Available at <https://corporate.vline.com.au/Careers/Diversity-at-V-Line/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-people>

27 V/Line, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People," Available at <https://corporate.vline.com.au/Careers/Diversity-at-V-Line/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-people>

- **Facilitating peer support:** The ARA can create a peer support or community of practice for member organisations, where those who have successfully developed RAPs can mentor and provide advice to others starting their journey. This collaborative approach could help demystify the process of creating a RAP and ensure that best practices are shared across the rail industry.
- **Advocating for executive sponsorship:** The ARA could champion the importance of executive sponsorship for RAP initiatives across all rail organisations. Having senior leadership champions to support the development and implementation of a RAP demonstrates the importance of reconciliation as a strategic priority. The ARA can encourage rail organisations to designate RAP executive sponsors who oversee their organisation's progress and ensure ongoing commitment.
- **Highlighting the business case for RAPs:** Through public forums, reports and events, the ARA can make the business case for RAPs. Organisations that implement RAPs not only contribute to social responsibility but also benefit from stronger relationships with First Nations communities, access to a broader talent pool, and enhanced reputation within the industry. The ARA can share success stories, demonstrating how RAPs drive positive social and economic outcomes while also boosting corporate performance.

To guide its members on their RAP journey, the ARA should actively promote the use of resources and expertise from key organisations. By facilitating access to these resources, the ARA can ensure that rail companies receive the support they need to create meaningful, sustainable reconciliation initiatives that foster economic empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The ARA should highlight resources from organisations like Reconciliation Australia, which provides comprehensive support for developing RAPs, including templates, toolkits and case studies. Reconciliation Australia offers structured frameworks and guidance for organisations across all industries to craft meaningful RAPs that drive action, accountability, and cultural understanding. Their step-by-step approach is invaluable for companies just starting their RAP journey or looking to expand existing initiatives.

While national organisations provide essential tools and frameworks, the ARA should also encourage rail companies to engage with local First Nations communities and grassroots organisations. Building relationships with these local groups from the start of the RAP journey ensures that initiatives are culturally respectful, place-based and responsive to the specific needs of the communities involved.

By connecting with state and territory RAP networks, organisations can access localised support tailored to their geographic and cultural context. These local groups are often better equipped to provide on-the-ground insights into community priorities, local business opportunities, and the specific challenges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities face in different regions. This local engagement promotes more culturally appropriate RAP initiatives and can lead to more authentic, long-term partnerships.

By taking these actions, the ARA can lead by example, publicly advocate for reconciliation and inspire the entire rail industry to actively engage with First Nations communities through RAPs. The result will be a more inclusive, socially responsible rail industry, contributing to long-term reconciliation and the empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islanders.

Recommendation four: Ensure long-term financial and structural support for RAP development and implementation



For industry

Allocating resources and providing consistent support are essential to ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of RAPs. To make a meaningful impact, organisations must commit to providing stable funding for RAP initiatives, with safeguards in place to protect this funding from potential budget changes. Establishing a dedicated, long-term RAP fund can mitigate risks and prevent disruptions, ensuring that RAP initiatives continue uninterrupted and with the same level of commitment.

In addition to financial resources, it is equally important to ensure there is a dedicated group or senior sponsorship overseeing the implementation of RAPs and building robust relationships with First Nations communities, both internally and externally.

John Holland has established RAP working groups to ensure continuous monitoring and implementation of its RAP commitments. As outlined in their 2024 Reconciliation Action Plan²⁸. These working groups are integral to aligning the company's efforts with evolving community needs and maintaining a focus on their reconciliation goals.

For smaller organisations that may not have the capacity to allocate dedicated team members, organisations can incorporate RAP-related responsibilities into the roles of existing employees. For example, a portion of a senior manager's time can be dedicated to overseeing RAP initiatives, or HR staff can take on responsibilities related to implementing and tracking RAP progress. This approach integrates RAP activities into the organisational workflow and ensures that RAP initiatives are managed within the current structure. Additionally, forming a RAP Steering Committee with representatives from various departments can help oversee implementation and leverage existing expertise within the organisation.

By embedding these roles into the organisational structure, organisations can integrate RAPs into their daily operations more effectively and drive meaningful progress towards reconciliation goals.

"We need budgets for this work [...] My manager will say, but we did get money and I'll say funding and budget are different. You get funding from somewhere, something else, pull it in and say there's some spare cash, but a budget is money that's allocated, no one touches it, it's got cost centres, it's reportable."

For the ARA

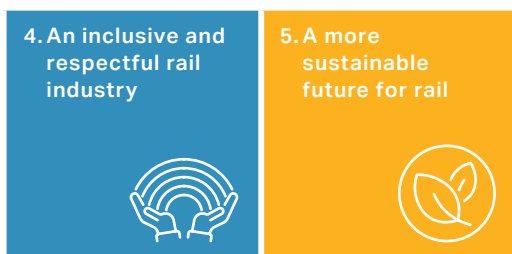
The ARA should ensure continuous executive sponsorship and safeguarded funding to support its RAP development. These two elements are crucial for ensuring that RAP initiatives remain a core strategic priority, sustained even during times of financial uncertainty or operational challenges.

Having a senior executive sponsor overseeing RAP activities is vital for championing these initiatives at the highest level. The ARA should set the example by appointing a dedicated executive sponsor to ensure RAP goals are embedded within their own organisational strategy, demonstrating their leadership on this issue. This senior leadership role reinforces the importance of reconciliation within the rail industry and within the ARA itself, driving accountability and encouraging industry-wide buy-in.

Executive sponsors within the ARA and across the rail industry can act as RAP ambassadors, promoting the successes and lessons learned both internally and externally. This leadership helps to create a culture that values reconciliation and actively supports long-term initiatives.

When RAPs are treated as long-term commitments, rather than short-term initiatives, they become ingrained in the daily operations of the organisation. The ARA has the opportunity to lead the rail industry through their RAP journey, demonstrating a commitment to meaningful and sustained reconciliation efforts, setting an example for organisations to follow.

Recommendation five: Foster transparency and awareness in the RAP journey



For industry

Effective communication and education about the RAP journey are important for building accountability, engagement and commitment within an organisation. Its recommended organisations should openly communicate RAP objectives and outcomes both internally and externally, fostering transparency and inclusiveness in their reconciliation efforts.

28 John Holland Group, Reconciliation Action Plan 2024, https://issuu.com/johnholland/docs/jh_reconciliation_action_plan_2024?fr=xKAE9_zU1NQ.

Clear metrics should be established to measure the impact of RAP initiatives, with progress reports delivered more frequently, rather than waiting until the program's end. This allows organisations to ensure targets are being met and make any necessary adjustments to improve performance and outcomes before the RAP is complete.

Education and awareness are key to building internal capacity. Prioritising training on RAP objectives, First Nations cultures and reconciliation practices can foster a deeper understanding and commitment across the organisation. Embedding this training into regular staff development programs can ensure all employees are aligned with the goals of reconciliation.

Utilising internal communication platforms is another effective tool. Regular updates on RAP progress, celebrating achievements and sharing best practices can keep the RAP initiatives visible and top of mind for all employees, encouraging ongoing engagement and organisational-wide support for reconciliation efforts. By making the RAP journey an open, transparent and integral part of the organisation's culture, organisations can demonstrate genuine commitment and drive meaningful progress toward reconciliation.

Case study: SYSTRA

SYSTRA maintains a dedicated Reconciliation Action Plan page²⁹ on its website, which highlights its ongoing efforts, commitments and progress towards reconciliation. It includes information on key initiatives and partnerships delivered as part of its RAP commitments.

For the ARA

To enhance the visibility and advocacy of its RAP and engagement with First Nations communities, the ARA should consider creating a dedicated First Nations webpage. This webpage would serve as a central platform to highlight the ARA's ongoing efforts in reconciliation, sharing key milestones, partnerships with First Nations organisations, and tangible outcomes related to employment, training and procurement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

By regularly updating this webpage with progress reports, success stories and insights from collaborations with First Nations communities, the ARA would not only promote transparency but also position itself as a visible leader in the rail industry's reconciliation efforts. This would encourage other rail organisations to follow the ARA's example and embark on their own RAP journeys.

Additionally, the ARA can leverage social media platforms and industry publications to amplify the impact of its RAP journey. Sharing stories of partnerships, cultural awareness initiatives, and employment successes across these channels would inspire the rail sector to take meaningful steps toward reconciliation. Regular public reporting and storytelling would demonstrate the ARA's commitment to reconciliation and showcase the benefits of engaging with First Nations communities.

Demonstrating leadership in cultural knowledge

Recommendation six: Employ dedicated individuals to provide cultural knowledge, linkages and advice, such as incorporating an Elder in Residence, to provide culturally appropriate advice and guidance, and to act as a soft authority.

2. Stronger, more equitable partnerships



For industry

The cultural load experienced by First Nations employees requires key cultural roles within organisations. These could include Elder in Residence positions or identified cultural oversight roles that advise on culture, link to community and guide on matters of respect and reconciliation.

29 SYSTRA, "Reconciliation Action Plan," <https://www.systra.com/australia/who-we-are/about-us/reconciliation-action-plan/>

Monash University's Elder-in-Residence Program³⁰ demonstrates this approach. Aunty Diane Singh, a Yorta-Yorta/Wemba-Wemba elder, provides cultural advice to students, staff and the wider university community. She promotes First Nations culture, delivers Acknowledgements of Country at key events and offers cultural guidance, fostering a culturally safe and inclusive environment across Monash.

Smaller organisations can collaborate with external First Nations organisations or cultural advisors on a consultancy basis to provide the necessary cultural guidance and advice as needed.

Beyond individual organisations, engagement with an industry-wide reference or leadership group, such as the First Nations-led consultation group described under recommendation seven, below, can ensure ongoing dialogue and accountability.

"... theoretically, a lot of the heavy lifting on work should sit with [non-Indigenous people]. But what we see at play is, it's actually mob within workplaces that are doing all the Reconciliation Week stuff, doing all the events, planning all this stuff, organising cultural awareness training. You know, that burden shouldn't be sitting with us. You know, we're happy to help and guide and push in the right direction, but it should be sitting with the majority of other Australians to really take up this fight and this work. Which kind of hasn't happened and I guess that's why, at least in [state], a lot of the conversation and narrative is now turning towards self-determination. It's saying, you know, reconciliation potentially hasn't achieved what it was supposed to when the, you know, the coin was turned 20 years ago and all the government plans started coming out."

Recommendation seven: The ARA lead in promoting cultural respect and inclusion for First Nations Peoples including a First Nations-led consultation group



For the ARA

To achieve meaningful progress, the ARA could champion initiatives that embed cultural respect and genuine support for First Nations communities within the rail industry.

A significant step in this direction would be supporting the creation of a First Nations-led consultation group to provide guidance on First Nations issues relevant to the rail industry. This group would empower First Nations leaders with a platform to actively shape decision-making processes related to employment, procurement and cultural inclusion. By advocating and contributing to the establishment of such a group, the ARA can ensure that First Nations voices are at the forefront of key discussions, ensuring that the industry's initiatives are in line with the needs and aspirations of First Nations communities.

Additionally, the ARA can support its members by promoting workshops and webinars that offer practical insights and best practices for engaging effectively with First Nations communities. These events would equip organisations with the knowledge and tools needed to build meaningful relationships with First Nations communities, ensuring their actions are culturally respectful and impactful.

Supporting long-term, sustainable employment

The survey data highlighted a range of tenure lengths for First Nations employees within the responding organisations. Most organisations are employing First Nations people across varying lengths of time, with the highest number of employees in the category of over three years' tenure, at 450 employees across 14 organisations.

30 Elder in Residence, <https://www.monash.edu/indigenous-australians/about-us/our-people/elder-in-residence>

Employment length	Total number of employees	Count of respondents
0-6 month	156	10
6-12 months	109	9
1 year – 3 years	264	20
Over 3 years	450	14
Total	979	23

Of the total 42 survey responses, 19 did not provide tenure data. Seven of these organisations specified they have no First Nations employees, while the remainder indicated they either do not collect this data or were unsure.

First Nations employees are most represented by entry level roles, with 786 employees across 18 organisations, while roles with higher levels of responsibility see much lower representation.

A total of 15 organisations out of the 42 did not provide data, with eight confirming they have no First Nations employees and the remaining seven indicating uncertainty or lack of data collection.

Employment level of responsibility	Total number of employees	Count of respondents
C-suite	1	1
Executive level	5	4
Management	70	12
Senior staff	114	15
Entry level	786	18
Total	976	27

This data indicates that while responding organisations are providing potential long-term careers in rail for First Nations individuals, more can be done to ensure promotion opportunities and representation at all levels across organisations.

Employment pathways

Recommendation eight: Establish employment pathways for First Nations peoples



For industry

In addition to First Nations employment goals and prioritising culturally safe workplaces, organisations can focus on structured opportunities such as apprenticeships, traineeships and pre-employment initiatives. This approach provides First Nations employees with the skills, support and guidance they need to thrive. Additionally, partnerships with external organisations can help overcome capacity limitations, ensuring that businesses of all sizes can contribute to First Nations employment.

It is necessary to embed employment programs that support First Nations peoples to access long-term career growth opportunities. By developing tailored initiatives, organisations can bridge this gap, offering targeted support to help individuals build meaningful careers.

Sydney Metro's Pre-Employment Program³¹ offers tailored training and employment support, bridging the gap between education and long-term employment. The program supports individuals who face barriers to entering the workforce, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, providing them with accredited training, employability skills and hands-on experience through worksite visits and practical workshops.

³¹ Sydney Metro, Pre-Employment Program, <https://www.sydneymetro.info/sydney-metro-pre-employment-program>.

This structured approach not only equips participants with the necessary skills for careers in the rail and construction sectors but also offers support throughout their employment journey, ensuring a smoother transition into long-term employment. Sydney Metro recently reported³² "to date 365 people have completed the Sydney Metro pre-employment program with 35 per cent Aboriginal participation, 95 per cent successful completion and 86 per cent job outcomes".

For organisations with limited internal capacity, collaborating with external partners can be an effective strategy for fostering First Nations employment pathways. Partnerships with community organisations and training providers allow businesses to offer employment opportunities without the need to build extensive internal resources. These collaborations provide access to mentorship, training and job placement services that can directly benefit First Nations candidates.

Working with First Nations organisations like CareerTrackers and Indigenous Employment Australia (IEA) helps reach qualified candidates who might otherwise be overlooked. By partnering with First Nation job networks and community-based employment services businesses can better connect with First Nations candidates and ensure that opportunities are accessible to First Nations communities.

These collaborations create meaningful pathways for First Nations employees, enabling businesses to contribute to long-term career growth and community engagement without the need for extensive internal infrastructure. Interview participants shared:

"Talk to our people about employment. We're going to do something. I don't care what it is, but we need to go there and start promoting jobs here, an Indigenous pathway program, so we can get our mob through – young fellas and young girls, get them through. It would be big for their careers, and for their families."

"Railway has traditionally always been a really good employer of Aboriginal people. Over the years the railway has been a very good opportunity for Aboriginal people."

"... there needs to be more external promotion to attract First Nations people who wanna come to rail and work in rail. But we need to make sure that it is also reflected internally with support, programmes, education, leadership opportunities, for Mob to flourish. It can be a struggle."

Recommendation nine: Review recruitment processes to identify and remove barriers for First Nations peoples



For industry

Creating meaningful employment pathways for First Nations peoples begins with a review of organisational recruitment processes to identify and address any systemic and cultural barriers. As highlighted in the Australian Indigenous Employment Index 2022 National Report³³:

"For years, significant effort has been directed towards closing the Indigenous employment gap, yet it remains stubbornly persistent."

These barriers can manifest at various stages of recruitment, from job advertisements and application processes to interviews and onboarding. Identifying and removing these barriers is essential to ensuring that First Nations candidates have equitable access to employment opportunities.

32 Sydney Metro. Sydney Metro Pre-Employment Program: Case Study. Sydney Metro, 2021. Available at: <https://www.sydneymetro.info/sites/default/files/2021-10/SM-Pre-employment-Program-Case-Study.pdf>.

33 Minderoo Foundation. Woort Koorliny: Australian Indigenous Employment Index 2022. Minderoo Foundation, 2022. Available at: <https://cdn.minderoo.org/content/uploads/2022/05/22105150/Woort-Koorliny-Australian-Indigenous-Employment-Index-2022.pdf>.

Transport for NSW offers a strong example of supporting First Nations employment through inclusive recruitment practices. As outlined in their Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2022-2025³⁴ and the Supporting Aboriginal People at Transport³⁵ careers page, their Aboriginal Employment Unit (AEU) provides comprehensive support for both current employees and prospective candidates. The AEU assists with job searches, application processes, drop-in sessions for learning about employment opportunities and ongoing professional development, ensuring that Aboriginal employees have the resources and support needed for long-term success.

Job ads can include a clear statement of the company's commitment to reconciliation, such as outlining its RAP and values around diversity and inclusion. This signals that the organisation is serious about fostering a culturally safe workplace. Additionally, providing contact points for any questions about the role helps ensure First Nations candidates feel supported throughout the application process.

Organisations can also directly encourage First Nations peoples to apply by highlighting opportunities and support for First Nations employees within their job advertisements, promoting a more inclusive and accessible workforce.

"I think we need HR on board to offer assistance, especially with Aboriginal people, with resumes and assistance with the process to join the [company]."

Set and track representation targets

Recommendation 10: Implement targeted strategies to support career growth for First Nations employees



For industry

To support the long-term success of First Nations employees, organisations must implement targeted strategies that focus on career growth and advancement. Once recruitment barriers are addressed, the next step is to ensure that First Nations employees have clear pathways for professional development and leadership opportunities. These strategies must go beyond hiring initiatives to actively foster career growth through structured programs and support systems within the organisation.

One of the key approaches is establishing mentorship and sponsorship programs. By connecting First Nations employees with senior leaders or experienced professionals, these programs provide essential guidance, career advice and advocacy.

Mentorships can help employees build skills and confidence, while sponsorships can create new career opportunities within the organisation. Both mentors and sponsors should undergo cultural sensitivity training to ensure these relationships are not only effective but also supportive of the unique experiences of First Nations employees.

It is equally important to provide First Nations employees with meaningful opportunities to influence organisational decisions and shape key initiatives. Organisations should actively involve First Nations employees in decision-making processes that affect both their professional development and the broader organisational culture. This includes creating safe and actionable avenues for them to contribute their perspectives on policies, practices, and programs that impact their experiences in the workplace.

Support networks, employee resource groups (ERGs), and formal advisory bodies offer valuable platforms for First Nations employees to advocate for cultural change, share lived experiences, and advise on strategic priorities. These groups can serve as trusted spaces where First Nations employees feel empowered to voice their concerns, suggest improvements, and collaborate on solutions that enhance workplace inclusion.

³⁴ Transport for NSW, Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2022-2025, <https://future.transport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/aboriginal-employment-strategy.pdf>

³⁵ Transport for NSW, Supporting Aboriginal People at Transport, <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/about-us/careers/supporting-aboriginal-people-at-transport>

By establishing these platforms and ensuring their voices are heard, organisations not only demonstrate a commitment to genuine engagement but also benefit from the rich knowledge and insights that First Nations employees bring. This involvement helps create an environment where cultural safety is prioritised, and organisational policies are shaped by those directly impacted.

Ventia's TRECCA demonstrates how this can be put into practice as a core component of their Indigenous Employment Strategy, which has successfully supported over 800 First Nations People into their workforce since its inception in 2016. Ventia's approach, which earned recognition through the First Nations Excellence Award at the Asuria Employer Awards, highlights the importance of combining recruitment with long-term career development to truly support First Nations employees.

Recommendation 11: Establish measurable targets for First Nations representation at all levels



For industry

Organisations should consider establishing measurable targets for increasing First Nations representation at all levels, including senior management. These targets are important for creating accountability and ensuring long-term progress in First Nations employment. Tracking these goals through regular reporting and integrating them within an organisation's RAP journey is key in maintaining transparency and fostering continuous improvement.

Setting and monitoring diversity and inclusion goals that specifically include First Nations employment targets ensures that organisations are not only focusing on recruitment but also on retention, promotion and representation of First Nations employees throughout the organisation. Regular progress reports and audits can help organisations assess how well they are meeting these targets and allow for adjustments to ensure sustainable outcomes.

In their Innovate RAP³⁶, Queensland Rail committed to developing a First Nations employment strategy that focuses on recruitment, retention and professional development, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees have the support and opportunities to thrive within the organisation. Currently, 3.7 per cent of Queensland Rail's workforce identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and regular analysis of applicant data enables conversations about potential barriers Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander candidates may experience when applying for positions with Queensland Rail.

Building capacity through partnerships and Indigenous procurement

Employment survey respondents were asked to provide information on whether organisations partner with or utilise First Nations contractors or labour hires. The results, below, suggest that while some organisations are making efforts to engage First Nations suppliers, nearly half have yet to do so. These figures highlight opportunities for further growth and engagement within the industry to support First Nations participation and economic inclusion.

Rail organisations who engage First Nations' businesses

Response	Count	Percentage
Yes, regularly	16	38.1%
Yes, occasionally	6	14.3%
No, not currently	20	47.6%
Total	42	

Where First Nations contractors are engaged, they can provide a diverse range of services including cultural awareness training, labour hire, cultural heritage work, construction and administrative support such as office

36 Queensland Rail. Reconciliation Action Plan 2022-2025. Queensland Rail. Available at: https://www.queenslandrail.com.au/about%20us/Documents/Queensland%20Rail_Reconciliation_Action_Plan.pdf

supplies and printing. This underscores the breadth of capability among First Nations businesses and their contribution across multiple areas of rail operations.

To better understand the business perspective, the First Nations business survey explored what supports access to procurement opportunities. The most cited response was strong relationships with rail organisations (47 per cent). Businesses also pointed to contract terms aligned to capability (30 per cent) and clear procurement processes (20 per cent) as enablers.

Factors that support access to procurement opportunities

Option	%
Strong relationships with rail organisations	46.7%
Contract terms and sizes that align with my business' capability	30.0%
Not applicable	23.3%
Clear procurement processes	20.0%
Other	13.3%
Clear visibility of upcoming work to support my planning	10.0%
Easy access to tender requirements	6.7%

However, the most common barriers reported by First Nations businesses were:

- Lack of relationships with key decision-makers
- Lack of awareness of tender opportunities Frequent lost tenders without clear feedback

These findings highlight the critical role rail organisations can play in creating the conditions for successful First Nations business engagement.

To strengthen outcomes, rail organisations should prioritise building direct relationships with suppliers, clearly communicating upcoming opportunities and providing constructive post-tender feedback. Addressing these barriers will help create a more transparent, inclusive and effective procurement environment that fosters long-term partnerships with First Nations businesses.

Barriers to accessing procurement opportunities

Option	%
Lack of relationships with key decision-makers	50.0%
Lack of awareness of tender opportunities	46.7%
Frequent lost tenders without clear feedback	23.3%
Challenges with meeting contract size or capacity requirements	10.0%
Other	10.0%
Complex procurement processes	10.0%
Financial barriers (e.g., cash flow, insurance requirements)	6.7%
Not applicable	6.7%

**Respondents could select up two of their biggest challenges*

When asked what improvements they would like to see in how the rail industry engages with First Nations businesses, respondents emphasised the need for more proactive outreach and engagement and dedicated targets for engaging First Nations suppliers. Other key priorities included support to scale for larger contracts, greater transparency in contract awarding and better feedback on unsuccessful bids. These findings highlight the importance of creating more structured, transparent and inclusive procurement processes that actively support First Nations business participation and growth.

Preferred improvements to procurement processes

Option	%
More proactive outreach and engagement	63.3%
Dedicated targets for engaging First Nations suppliers	50.0%
Increased transparency in contract awarding	46.7%
More support for small businesses to scale up for larger contracts	43.3%
Better feedback mechanisms for unsuccessful bids	40.0%
Simplified procurement and tendering processes	40.0%
Other	6.7%

**Respondents could select all answers that apply.*

In addition to improving procurement processes, First Nations businesses emphasised the need for stronger relationships and long-term engagement. Many highlighted the importance of creating long-term partnership opportunities with the rail industry, establishing pre-tender engagement sessions and partnering with First Nations intermediaries and business networks such as Supply Nation and a State Indigenous Chambers of Commerce. These approaches were seen as key to bridging gaps and fostering culturally informed collaboration across the sector.

Support and opportunities for engagement

Option	%
Creating long-term partnership opportunities	90.0%
Partnering with First Nations business networks and intermediaries (e.g. Supply Nation, Indigenous Chambers of Commerce)	30.0%
Offering pre-tender engagement sessions	30.0%
Embedding cultural competency training for procurement and project teams	16.7%
Providing mentoring, training, or capacity-building support for First Nations businesses	13.3%
Increasing Indigenous employment pathways within rail organisations	10.0%

**Respondents could select up two responses*

These findings reinforce the need for more deliberate and inclusive procurement practices. Strong relationships, clearer processes and targeted outreach are key enablers. The recommendations in this section outline how the rail industry can better support and engage First Nations businesses.

When engaging with First Nations businesses, it is important to be aware of the risks of black cladding, where non-Indigenous businesses or individuals try to take advantage of Indigenous procurement policies by purporting to be First Nations businesses, without demonstrating equitable partnership or benefit³⁷. Engaging with businesses verified through third parties, such as Supply Nation or a State Indigenous Chamber of Commerce, can help mitigate this risk.

Current targets and practices

There are a range of policies and strategies related to reconciliation and First Nations engagement at both the Commonwealth and state/territory levels. These strategies varied significantly between states.

Several jurisdictions have procurement policies in place which apply to government (Commonwealth and state) projects, and in some cases to the wider supply chain. These policies set targets for the percentage of First Nations employees engaged on a specific project, as well as procurement spend and engagement with First Nations-owned businesses contracted for the project. Generally, these requirements apply only to projects above a certain size threshold and for certain industries, although this varies between states.

Not all rail organisations are bound by these targets, however they do impact some construction projects in particular.

³⁷ <https://supplynation.org.au/about-us/black-cladding/>

A selection of government procurement policies is outlined below:

Policy	Requirements
<p>Commonwealth Indigenous Procurement Policy</p> <p>Aims to stimulate Indigenous entrepreneurship, business and economic development, and provide Indigenous Australians with more opportunities to participate in the economy.</p> <p>View details</p>	<p>Annual targets for the value and volume of contracts to be awarded to Indigenous enterprises. Targets are progressively increasing to three per cent of eligible procurements for both measures by 2027-28.</p> <p>Mandatory minimum requirements for Indigenous participation, of four per cent employment.</p>
<p>NSW Aboriginal Procurement Policy</p> <p>Aims to support employment opportunities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as the sustainable growth of Aboriginal businesses.</p> <p>View details</p>	<p>Targets one per cent of addressable spend and three per cent of goods and services contracts to Aboriginal businesses.</p> <p>Targets 3000 Aboriginal FTE employment opportunities.</p>
<p>Queensland Indigenous Procurement Policy</p> <p>Seeks to increase the capability and capacity for Indigenous businesses to successfully tender for Queensland Government contracts, support the sustainable growth of Indigenous businesses and improve employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</p> <p>View details</p>	<p>Targets three per cent addressable spend to Indigenous businesses.</p>
<p>Victorian Aboriginal Business Strategy</p> <p>Aims to help advance the economic position of Aboriginal Victorians.</p> <p>View details</p>	<p>Targets one per cent of government procurement for Aboriginal businesses.</p>
<p>WA Aboriginal Procurement Policy</p> <p>Seeks to support business and employment opportunities for the Aboriginal community.</p> <p>View details</p>	<p>Targets four per cent of total contracts to Aboriginal businesses by 2024-25.</p> <p>Sets Aboriginal employment targets ranging from two to 10 per cent depending on location within the state.</p>
<p>SA Industry Participation Policy</p> <p>Aims to ensure government expenditure supports the economic development of SA and provides capable businesses the opportunity to tender and participate in government contracts.</p> <p>View details</p>	<p>Does not specify targets, but provides weighing on tenders where opportunities for Aboriginal economic participation exists.</p>
<p>NT Aboriginal Procurement Policy</p> <p>Aims to provide Aboriginal Business Enterprises with the maximum opportunity to do business with government.</p> <p>View details</p>	<p>Targets five per cent of the annual number and total of contracts to Aboriginal Business Enterprises. Requires the development of an Indigenous Development Plan to maximise participation.</p>

Procurement targets and partnerships

Recommendation 12: Raise awareness of Indigenous procurement and its impact across the rail industry



For the ARA

The ARA can play a pivotal role in promoting Indigenous procurement as a strategic priority across the rail industry.

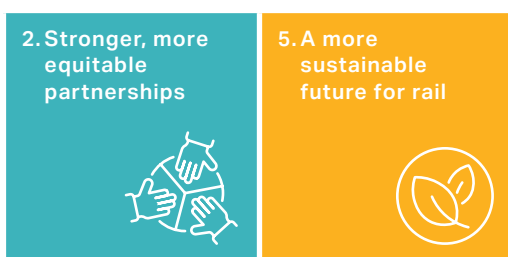
More proactive outreach and engagement was the most common answer in the supplier survey when First Nations businesses were asked how the rail industry can improve its engagement with them.

Through awareness-raising webinars and training sessions, the ARA can highlight the value of adopting Indigenous procurement, not merely as a compliance measure but as a key driver of economic empowerment and community impact for First Nations communities. It can also provide a platform for providing Indigenous businesses with visibility of key decision makers within rail industry organisations, and provide guidance on how to access information about procurement opportunities.

A critical component of these efforts is sharing success stories from both within and beyond the rail industry, where companies have successfully integrated Indigenous procurement practices. These examples illustrate how organisations have contributed to economic growth, job creation and the empowerment of First Nations communities.

By highlighting these success stories, the ARA can demonstrate the tangible benefits Indigenous procurement can bring, such as increased employment for First Nations peoples, strengthening First Nations-owned businesses and fostering community resilience. By showcasing real-world examples, like those of First Nations business summits or “meet the suppliers” events, the ARA can inspire rail organisations to view Indigenous procurement not merely as a regulatory obligation but as a strategic opportunity to create long-term value for both communities and the industry.

Recommendation 13: Integrate Indigenous procurement strategies into core business strategy



For industry

Adopting Indigenous procurement as a key organisational strategy can drive significant impact by fostering economic empowerment within First Nations communities and creating employment opportunities for First Nations peoples. Instead of merely focusing on compliance with government policies, Indigenous procurement should be integrated into the core business strategy, embedding it as a long-term, purposeful initiative.

By sourcing goods and services from First Nations businesses, organisations not only meet procurement needs and policy requirements but also contribute to sustainable economic development for First Nations communities. This approach ensures that procurement aligns with broader social responsibility goals, addressing issues such as employment, skills development and community growth.

One strategy to consider is adopting organisational Indigenous procurement targets.

By setting specific goals for the inclusion of First Nations businesses within their supply chains, organisations can demonstrate their genuine commitment to supporting First Nations economic empowerment and fostering stronger relationships with First Nation suppliers.

Queensland Rail has set a specific target in its RAP³⁸ to allocate 1.5 per cent of its addressable procurement spend to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned businesses. Regular monitoring of this target ensures accountability and continuous progress in integrating Indigenous procurement into their operations.

These targets not only drive internal focus and accountability but also serve as a key tool for promoting inclusion, diversity and reconciliation within the broader corporate strategy. Having dedicated targets for First Nations business engagement was the second-most popular response in the supplier survey, when asked how the rail industry can better engage with First Nations businesses.

As reported in Supply Nation's Indigenous Business Growth report³⁹, Indigenous businesses are over 100 times more likely to hire Indigenous workers compared to non-Indigenous businesses, which significantly boosts employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians. Additionally, many Indigenous businesses make notable contributions to their communities by providing pro-bono advice, sponsoring local sports teams and supporting cultural events, further enhancing their social impact.

To successfully embed Indigenous procurement within an organisation's procurement practices and supply chains, procurement teams need comprehensive training. This training should start with the fundamentals of Indigenous procurement, explaining its benefits and cover best practices, such as setting measurable targets for engaging First Nations suppliers. Training should also include strategies for managing changes to existing procurement processes and procedures.

In addition, it's crucial for procurement professionals to understand how First Nations businesses can meet standard procurement requirements while delivering additional value to First Nations communities. This includes acknowledging the wider value for money that goes beyond price and quality. The training should focus on how to identify, evaluate and effectively integrate First Nations businesses into the organisation's supply chain. This ensures procurement teams are equipped with the knowledge and tools to integrate sustainable longer-term approaches to Indigenous procurement.

Case study: Queensland Rail's Bogantungan site burn

As part of works at the Bogantungan railway siding near Emerald, Queensland Rail staff partnered with rangers from the Western Kangoulu People, the local Traditional Owner group, to conduct a site burn to clear the ground for a Cultural Heritage survey. Their local knowledge and experience helped Queensland Rail plan and manage the burn and provide educational opportunities for all.

Prior to the burn, Queensland Rail engaged the expertise of Woongal Environmental Services, an Aboriginal-owned business, to make sure that any animals within the site of the proposed fire were detected and relocated immediately prior to the burn activity commencing. Woongal Environmental Services are one of the business capabilities that the Western Kangoulu People can provide to organisations working on their Country.

The burn was a very effective way to clear vegetation and facilitate the cultural heritage archaeological survey which allowed Western Kangoulu People and Queensland Rail teams on the ground visibility, which in turn lead to the identification of a number of significant cultural heritage artefacts and places at the site. This collaborative effort between Queensland Rail and local Aboriginal parties not only enabled the critical rail safety upgrade works to begin but was an opportunity to partner and engage local Aboriginal parties to incorporate traditional burning practices for effective vegetation management.

38 Queensland Rail. Reconciliation Action Plan 2021–2023. Retrieved from https://www.queenslandrail.com.au/about%20us/Documents/Queensland%20Rail_Reconciliation_Action_Plan.pdf.

39 Supply Nation, Building Indigenous Growth Report, <https://supplynation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Building-Indigenous-Growth-Report.pdf>.

Recommendation 14: Collaborate with Indigenous procurement intermediaries

2. Stronger, more equitable partnerships



For industry

Partnering with Indigenous procurement intermediaries such as Supply Nation, Kinaway Chamber of Commerce or the New South Wales Indigenous Chamber of Commerce provides organisations with valuable support when adopting Indigenous procurement strategies. These intermediaries assist procurement teams in identifying and connecting with Indigenous businesses, support in accurate reporting of Indigenous procurement spend while offering comprehensive training to build procurement capabilities and establish robust frameworks.

Intermediaries also help mitigate risks by ensuring that Indigenous businesses are certified and meet procurement requirements. Supply Nation's certification ensures that businesses meet Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ownership standards⁴⁰ giving organisations confidence that their suppliers align with Indigenous procurement goals and reducing the risk of black cladding⁴¹.

Case study: Metro Trains Melbourne and Kinaway First Nations business engagement

As part of its growing commitment to social procurement, Metro Trains Melbourne (MTM) partnered with Kinaway, the Victorian Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce, to deepen its engagement with First Nations businesses. Recognising Kinaway's deep knowledge, networks and sector expertise, MTM worked closely with the organisation to build internal capability and create opportunities for meaningful engagement.

In March 2024, MTM and Kinaway co-hosted an event aligned with International Women's Day, bringing together key Metro decision-makers and First Nations women in business. The session featured a panel of Kinaway members and MTM procurement staff, discussing barriers, opportunities and practical steps for collaboration. The event aimed to both educate internal stakeholders and create space for First Nations suppliers to connect directly with the organisation.

Key outcomes included:

- A 275 per cent increase in spend with First Nations businesses compared to the previous financial year
- 97 per cent growth in spend between March – July 2024
- Engagement of new suppliers, including NLA Logistics a registered Aboriginal female owned business for track renewal work following connections made at the event
- 100 per cent of Metro participants indicated they were more likely to engage First Nations suppliers as a result

Following the success of the event, MTM introduced its first social procurement target, with a strong focus on First Nations businesses. It also established a Social Procurement Working Group to continue removing internal barriers and championing inclusive procurement across the business.

By engaging Kinaway as a trusted intermediary, Metro

⁴⁰ Supply Nation. Supplier Benefits: Gain Access to Procurement Opportunities. Supply Nation. Available at: <https://supplynation.org.au/benefits/supplier/>.

⁴¹ Supply Nation. Black Cladding: Protecting the Integrity of Indigenous Business Certification. Supply Nation. Available at: <https://supplynation.org.au/about-us/black-cladding/>.

For the ARA

To strengthen the Indigenous procurement landscape within the rail industry, the ARA should also establish strategic partnerships with key Indigenous procurement intermediaries to:

- Raise awareness of the opportunities and advantages associated with Indigenous procurement across the rail industry
- Provide rail organisations with the tools and networks needed to enhance their Indigenous procurement capabilities, including access to industry-specific procurement guidelines, training and strategies for integrating Indigenous procurement into their existing frameworks
- Facilitate access to Indigenous suppliers. Intermediaries such as Supply Nation maintain extensive databases of certified Indigenous businesses, enabling rail organisations to easily identify and engage with First Nations suppliers
- Drive long-term community impacts through sustained partnerships with Indigenous procurement intermediaries, fostering long-term, impactful relationships between the rail industry and First Nations businesses

These intermediaries understand the landscape of First Nations suppliers and can identify specific areas within the industry and service sectors to focus on, helping to support the capability and capacity building of those First Nations businesses. This ensures that the rail industry is providing holistic support for the growth and sustainability of First Nations businesses, creating lasting benefits for communities and the industry alike.

In partnership with procurement intermediaries, the ARA could provide practical guidance specifically tailored for rail organisations, with a focus on:

- Defining Indigenous procurement and its importance
- Steps to implement Indigenous procurement
- Strategies for effective procurement
- Reporting frameworks
- Identifying resources and support

The ARA can drive consistency in how Indigenous procurement practices are implemented and measured, ensuring that organisations, regardless of their size or resources, have access to clear strategies and reporting frameworks.

Recommendation 15: Build capacity and capability through strategic Indigenous procurement



"Providing gateways to enter into the rail industry as it seems without prior experience, we are overlooked despite having some resources which could be carried over. Everyone has to start somewhere; it just takes one company to "give us a go" to gain that first bit of experience."

For industry

Supporting the capacity and capability of First Nations suppliers is important to the long-term success of indigenous procurement strategies. Organisations that align their procurement planning with the goal of fostering Indigenous business growth contribute to sustainable economic empowerment and community development. This goes beyond merely identifying Indigenous suppliers, it involves ensuring they have the infrastructure and resources to scale up and meet demand effectively.

One of the key benefits for supporting First Nations businesses' capacity is the creation of long-term, mutually beneficial relationships. When an organisation invests in helping First Nations suppliers grow, these

suppliers are better equipped to deliver quality goods and services over time. This builds trust and allows the procurement process to evolve from transactional to collaborative. By nurturing these partnerships, organisations ensure that their supply chains are not only diverse but also resilient, adaptable, and aligned with business and Indigenous engagement and procurement goals.

For example, First Nations businesses that receive ongoing support can scale up and participate in larger contracts, ensuring consistent delivery of services and contributing to their economic empowerment. As they grow alongside the organisation, they can take on more complex projects and meet increasing demands, fostering a sustainable supply chain.

One of the key barriers identified by the supplier survey was lack of clear feedback and support following an unsuccessful tender. By providing transparent, constructive feedback to unsuccessful tenderers, project deliverers can support Indigenous businesses to improve tenders to ensure alignment with key selection criteria.

Case study: Tender capabilities with John Holland Group and NLA Trucking

NLA Trucking is a proud 100 per cent Aboriginal female owned plant hire business in Victoria offering a diverse range of plant and equipment services, specialising in tippers and live bottom trucks.

John Holland first partnered with NLA on the North Western Program Alliance (NWPAs). Being new to tendering requirements for major projects and tier one contractors, NWPAs's Social Procurement Lead supported NLA, ensuring accurate and complete tender documents. This assistance led to NLA securing the contract and subsequently bidding for larger projects like the Maidstone tram maintenance and stabling facility.

With NWPAs's guidance, NLA enhanced their tendering capabilities, leading to further growth, including the addition of two trucks and the establishment of a factory in Epping. This expansion created employment opportunities, notably for First Nations individuals in Melbourne's north.

In 2024, NLA's owner presented at John Holland's Social Procurement Roadshow, crediting the North West Program Alliance team and Social Procurement Lead for instigating the relationship and successful partnership with NLA.

For organisations, this approach ensures access to a reliable and scalable pool of First Nations suppliers capable of meeting all levels of procurement needs without compromising on quality or efficiency. By supporting the growth of Indigenous businesses, organisations contribute to the broader goal of economic inclusivity, helping to create jobs and strengthen Indigenous communities.

CPB Contractors demonstrates a best practice approach in embedding Indigenous and social enterprises into its supply chain through its recently launched Aboriginal Business and Social Enterprise (ABSE) Playbook⁴² and internal database. These tools are designed to empower and engage with more Indigenous businesses and social enterprises, reinforcing CPB's commitment to reconciliation and inclusion.

The ABSE Playbook serves as a comprehensive guide for Indigenous businesses and social enterprises, especially those that may not have experience working with large-scale contractors. It outlines CPB's procurement and tendering processes, making it easier for smaller enterprises to understand the requirements and successfully navigate each stage.

Complementing the playbook, CPB Contractors' ABSE internal database consolidates over 500 accredited Indigenous businesses into an integrated online system⁴³, streamlining access for project teams across the company. This initiative helps CPB effectively include more First Nations and social enterprises in its projects, ensuring that procurement decisions support sustainable economic growth within these communities.

42 CPB Contractors. Aboriginal and Social Enterprise External Procurement Guide (ABSE Playbook). CPB Contractors, 2024. Available at: https://edge.sitecorecloud.io/cimicgroup1634d-cimicxnccloud-production-16eb/media/project/cimic/cpb/pdfs/cpb_contractors_abse-playbook.pdf.

43 CPB Contractors. CPB Contractors Launches New Tools to Empower and Engage with More Indigenous Businesses. CPB Contractors, 2024. Available at: <https://www.cpbcon.com.au/news-and-media/2024/cpb-contractors-launches-new-tools-to-empower-and-engage-with-more-indigenous-businesses>.

Case study: CPB Contractor's partnership with Borger Cranes

The family-owned and operated Borger Cranes has been in business for over 40 years, crediting its growth and success to family values, embracing opportunities and genuine hard work. Since Jon Borger embraced the chance opportunity to purchase his first crane in 1980, to the Sydney Olympics, there have been some major moments that have brought great prospects for growth and success.

Borger Cranes General Manager Shawn Borger said, "When a tier one contractor like CPB Contractors hires an Aboriginal or Indigenous-owned business like ours, we see it as an opportunity to ensure the work and money filters down to our community."

Working with CPB Contractors for over 25 years has provided a level of confidence and capacity of work, enabling the Borgers to employ more people, train more people and invest in more high-quality equipment, which all helps to ensure the ongoing growth of their business and the sustainable careers of the people they employ. While Borger Cranes has been working with leading contractors for many years, Shawn said the recent industry and government focus on procuring locally and supporting Indigenous-owned businesses has generated more business for Borger Cranes.

Benefits of the business relationship extend beyond the financial, with Shawn highlighting that working with CPB Contractors binds Borger Cranes to the high safety standards, regulations and training instilled at the major contractor. He sees this as an opportunity to train and upskill his own people and revisit the company's own processes.

A western-Sydney based business, today Borger Cranes occupies the entire Killo Crescent in Glendenning, employs over 600 people (many of them family, extended families and school friends), has a commitment to employ eight apprentices each year and recently expanded into Queensland. Having taken on more than 28 trainees over the years, the Borgers are heavily focused on employing young Indigenous people and kids looking to drop out of school, providing them an opportunity to train and learn the knowledge and skills required to have a sustainable career at Borger Cranes or more broadly in construction.

"We hope young Aboriginal people can see our hard work and flow on success at Borger Cranes giving them that extra push to enter into the workforce. Our business creates opportunities for employment and mentoring and that's the greatest win and the best outcome of the work we do.

"We know there is a huge opportunity for us to inspire the next generation to give it a go, driving growth of proudly Indigenous-owned and operated businesses. When you go into business, you generally don't have the knowledge, experience and resources required to meet the criteria to tender for work with a tier one contractor. This is something we are happy to help with, providing our own employees and community advice so they have the confidence to launch and grow their own businesses. It's been a major benefit from working with CPB Contractors."

Recommendation 16: Provide scholarships for First Nations businesses to attend the AusRAIL Conference

For the ARA

To further support First Nations businesses in the rail industry and promote Indigenous procurement, the ARA should consider offering scholarships specifically for First Nations-owned businesses to attend the AusRAIL Conference. This initiative would provide valuable opportunities for First Nations businesses to network with industry leaders, showcase their capabilities, and explore procurement opportunities within the rail industry.

Scholarships could cover the costs of conference attendance and promotional opportunities, enabling First Nations businesses to elevate their visibility and build relationships with key stakeholders in the industry. By facilitating their participation, the ARA would actively contribute to the growth and success of First Nations suppliers, helping them access major projects and contracts while promoting a more inclusive and diverse supply chain across the rail industry.

This initiative may also help reduce two of the key barriers to First Nations business engagement identified through the survey, which were lack of awareness of tender opportunities and lack of relationships with key figures. By participating in AusRAIL, not only will First Nations businesses benefit from improved exposure, but attendees from those business will have the opportunity to network with future project deliverers and hear about the upcoming project pipeline.

Training on engaging with First Nations businesses

Recommendation 17: Partner with First Nations-led businesses to deliver training on increasing support and spend with First Nations businesses

5. A more sustainable future for rail



For the ARA

The ARA can support its members by promoting workshops and webinars that offer practical insights and best practices for engaging effectively with First Nations communities. These events would equip organisations with the knowledge and tools needed to build meaningful relationships with First Nations communities, ensuring their actions are culturally respectful and impactful.

The ARA can play a role in advancing Indigenous procurement by offering basic training to its members. In collaboration with Indigenous procurement intermediaries, the ARA can facilitate 'one to many' training sessions that focus on building awareness around the importance of Indigenous procurement, alongside practical steps to implement it effectively.

These training sessions would serve as an introduction for member organisations, covering key aspects like:

- Understanding Indigenous procurement and how it drives economic empowerment and community growth for First Nations peoples
- Practical guidance on how to identify First Nations businesses and integrate them into existing procurement strategies, including awareness of black cladding
- Methods to develop long-term partnerships with First Nations suppliers, ensuring sustained economic and community impact

By providing industry specific Indigenous procurement training, the ARA can ensure that member organisations are equipped with the knowledge and confidence needed to incorporate Indigenous procurement into their business operations. This foundational understanding will help organisations take immediate steps toward adopting Indigenous procurement practices, aligning with both compliance requirements and First Nation engagement goals.

Transparent reporting

Recommendation 18: Introduce a transparent reporting system

5. A more sustainable future for rail



For industry

When approaching Indigenous procurement and having oversight over First Nations business procurement spend, organisations should consider implementing an Indigenous procurement reporting system either internally or as provided by partnering with Indigenous procurement intermediaries.

Reporting can be tracked and shared internally, but public reporting through RAPs or annual reports demonstrates a commitment to transparency and external accountability. Regularly sharing progress reinforces the organisation's dedication to driving social impact through procurement strategies.

By establishing clear KPIs, integrating procurement systems, and engaging in both internal and public reporting, organisations can demonstrate their commitment to Indigenous economic empowerment. Regular reporting not only builds trust but also drives continuous improvement, helping organisations maximise their Indigenous procurement efforts and contribute to sustainable community development.

Case study: Sydney Metro, supply chain diversity

Sydney Metro is committed to broadening opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on Sydney Metro projects and acknowledges the significant opportunity present to positively impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, businesses, and communities.

Sydney Metro established a collaborative model working with industry and government to ensure the Sydney Metro Workforce Development, Aboriginal and Industry Participation plans were developed and implemented. Their approach to increasing Aboriginal employment and business participation is informed by wider government policies including the NSW Aboriginal Procurement Policy and is underpinned by their experience successfully implementing programs and initiatives to deliver outcomes for Aboriginal peoples.

Sydney Metro regularly reports on their priority areas and progress against their minimum targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and procurement. These reports are made available to the public on the Sydney Metro webpage, offering transparency and accountability as they progress against their goals.

<https://www.sydneymetro.info/media/document/44381>

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation	Industry	ARA
Foster safe and inclusive work environments		
1. Provide comprehensive training for staff, especially those in management positions, on anti-racism, cultural sensitivity, unconscious bias and respect at work	✓	✓
2. Foster a safe and inclusive work environment that celebrates First Nations peoples and culture		
• Ensure robust anti-discrimination strategies and systems are in place, supported by continuous training and awareness	✓	
• Create support teams or inclusion communities to support career advancement for First Nations people	✓	
• Include an Acknowledgement of Country on the company website	✓	
• Display appropriate Indigenous artwork on websites or in office locations	✓	
Reconciliation and leadership		
3. Engage with First Nations stakeholders and drive RAPs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plans or Self Determination Plans through organisational leadership		
• Develop and implement organisational RAP, supported by executive leadership	✓	✓
• Provide resources and expertise from key organisations to support industry organisations developing and implementing their RAP		✓
4. Ensure long-term financial and structural support for RAP development and implementation		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate resources and provide consistent support for the implementation of RAP initiatives • Ensure executive sponsorship for the ARA's RAP 	✓	✓
<p>5. Foster transparency and awareness in the RAP journey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure and report on progress of RAP initiatives • Provide education and awareness on RAP objectives, First Nations cultures and the journey towards reconciliation to build internal capability • Create a dedicated First Nations webpage to highlight ongoing reconciliation efforts 	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
<p>6. Employ dedicated individuals to provide cultural knowledge, linkages, and advice, such as incorporating an Elder in Residence, to provide culturally appropriate advice and guidance, and to act as a soft authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create Elder in Residence or cultural oversight roles to guide on culture, linkages to community, respect and reconciliation 	✓	
<p>7. Provide leadership in promoting cultural respect and inclusion for First Nations Peoples including the development of a First Nations-led consultation group</p>		✓
Supporting long-term, sustainable employment		
<p>8. Establish employment pathways for First Nations peoples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide structured employment opportunities such as apprenticeships, traineeships and pre-employment initiatives for First Nations peoples 	✓	
<p>9. Review recruitment processes to identify and remove barriers for First Nations peoples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review organisational recruitment processes to identify and address systemic and cultural barriers • Directly encourage First Nations peoples to apply by highlighting opportunities and support for First Nations employees 	✓ ✓	
<p>10. Implement targeted strategies to support career growth for First Nations employees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish mentorship and sponsorship programs • Actively involve First Nations employees in decision-making processes that affect their professional development and the broader organisational culture • Provide access to support networks, employee resource groups or formal advisory bodies to enable First Nations employees to advocate for cultural change, share lived experiences, and advise on strategic priorities 	✓ ✓ ✓	
<p>11. Establish measurable targets for First Nations representation at all levels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting and monitoring diversity and inclusion goals that specifically include First Nations employment targets • Ensure targets include a focus on including First Nations participation at all levels, including senior management 	✓ ✓	

Building capacity through partnerships and outcomes-driven procurement		
<p>12. Raise awareness of Indigenous procurement and its impact across the rail industry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide webinars and training to highlight the value of Indigenous procurement as a key driver of economic empowerment and community impact for First Nations communities • Share success stories from both within and beyond the rail industry 		<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>
<p>13. Integrate Indigenous procurement strategies into core business strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed Indigenous procurement strategies as an integrated part of core business • Set internal Indigenous procurement targets 	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p>	
<p>14. Collaborate with Indigenous procurement intermediaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with intermediaries to support Indigenous procurement strategies • Provide guidance for industry in partnership with key intermediaries 	<p>✓</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>15. Build capacity and capability through strategic Indigenous procurement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster long term relationships with First Nations businesses to support capacity development and scale 	<p>✓</p>	
<p>16. Provide scholarships for First Nations businesses to attend the AusRAIL Conference</p>		<p>✓</p>
<p>17. Partner with First Nations-led businesses to deliver training on increasing support and spend with First Nations businesses</p>		<p>✓</p>
<p>18. Introduce a transparent reporting system</p>	<p>✓</p>	

Conclusion

The findings of this report highlight both the opportunities and current challenges in enhancing First Nations participation in the rail industry.

While progress has been made in some areas, there is a clear need for more structured, long-term approaches to ensure that reconciliation and inclusion are fully embedded within the industry. This shift must move beyond compliance and box-ticking to achieve genuine, impactful engagement with First Nations communities.

The interviews, surveys and impact modelling workshop identified a series of short-term outcomes, which can act as progress indicators towards the longer term strategic (impact) goals. These are outcomes which are believed would occur if key initiatives (as per the recommendations of this report) were enacted to improve First Nations participation and employment in the industry.

The short-term outcomes include:

- Better representation of First Nations people at all levels of the workforce
- Culturally safe workspaces where First Nations people can bring their full selves to work
- Greater understanding and appreciation of First Nations culture and talents
- Increased opportunities for First Nations businesses, with support and transparency around the procurement process
- Reduced barriers for First Nations people entering and advancing in the workforce
- Deep and meaningful connections between the rail industry and First Nations businesses
- Rail leadership equipped to address systemic issues and accountable for driving action
- Progress towards reconciliation and self-determination by progressing with the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) process

The ARA is ideally positioned to lead the rail industry through this transformation. By advocating for best practices, fostering a stronger commitment to cultural safety and promoting inclusive approaches to Indigenous procurement, the ARA can help shape an industry that is not only culturally respectful but also economically empowering for First Nations peoples.

A key output from the impact modelling workshops was an agreed list of potential long-term impacts that could be realised if the rail industry fully embraces the recommendations outlined in this report. These impacts include:

- 1. Strong and resilient First Nations communities:** Through economic empowerment, sustainable employment, and business opportunities created via Indigenous procurement and inclusive employment strategies, the rail industry can help build thriving First Nations communities
- 2. Stronger, more equitable partnerships:** By establishing genuine partnerships with First Nations businesses, organisations can foster long-term relationships based on mutual respect and shared growth
- 3. Justice and equity for First Nations people:** The rail industry has the potential to play a pivotal role in advancing justice and equity by addressing systemic barriers and promoting employment opportunities and business engagement for First Nations peoples
- 4. An inclusive and respectful rail industry:** By implementing RAPs, advocating for cultural competency training and ensuring First Nations consultation at all levels, the sector can create a more inclusive environment where First Nations peoples feel valued and respected
- 5. A more sustainable future for rail:** The inclusion of First Nations voices, perspectives and values in decision-making processes can contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future for the rail industry, aligning the industry's growth with broader community and environmental goals

By committing to these long-term goals, the ARA and its members have the opportunity to create meaningful change and positively impact the lives of First Nations peoples.

The recommendations presented here are only the beginning. Ongoing efforts to implement evidence-based strategies and adopt best practices will be crucial for building a rail industry that not only contributes to reconciliation but also leads the way in creating justice, equity, and sustainability for all Australians.

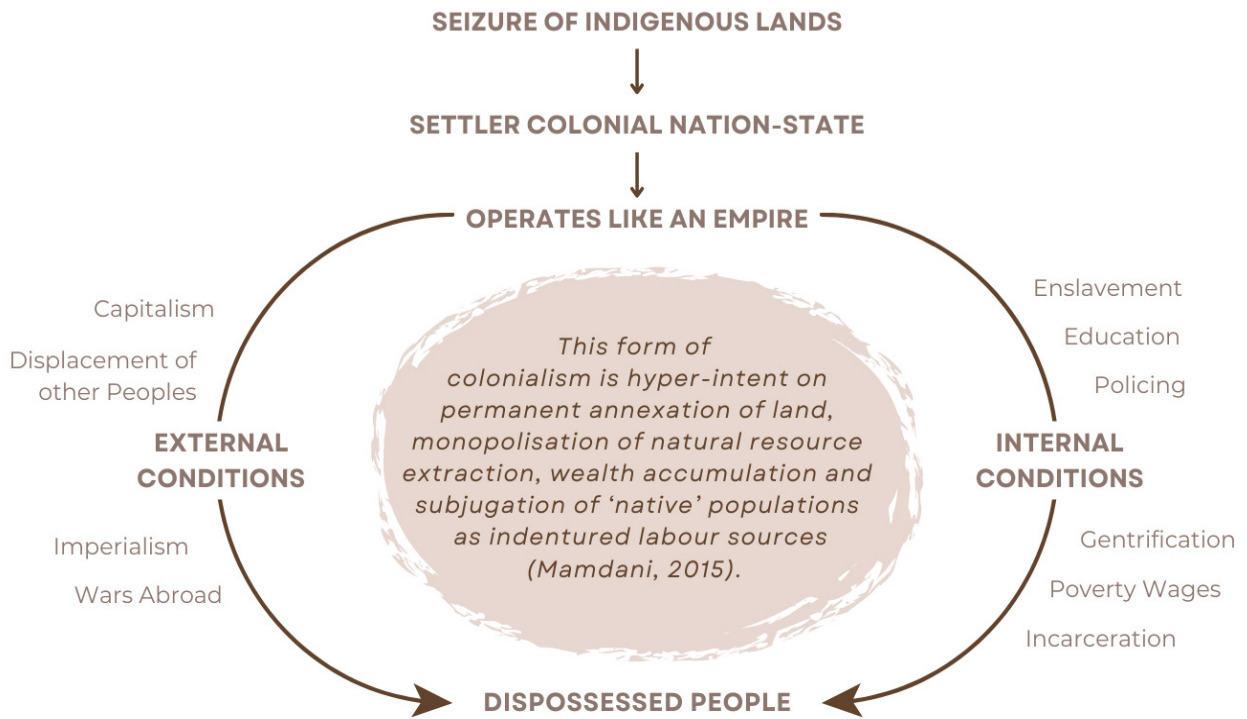
"I'm convinced the answer to keep this [reconciliation] work in the spotlight has to rest with the courage and strength of a board and executive leadership team to make it happen, and it's got to be relentless."

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Appendix

SETTLER COLONIALISM IS A STRUCTURE, NOT AN EVENT



Adapted from image by Decolonize This Place

Appendix 1- Settler Colonialism Figure

Impact Narrative

Because

Colonial perspectives, structures, and behaviours in the rail sector continue to marginalise First Nations people and communities.

First Nations people in the rail sector felt their work environments were culturally unsafe and that they were not able to bring their full selves to work. This undermines achieving a sense of belonging and creates stress, exhaustion and a lack of job satisfaction.

The long term sustainability of the workforce is at risk if these cultural conditions persist.

The ARA*

Collaborates with members, industry, and government to drive affirmative action for First Nations people in the rail sector and address systemic racism.

As a trusted voice, the ARA shares inspiring stories and best practices across its network, accelerating action towards positive outcomes for First Nations employees and their families.

The ARA also uses its platform to advocate to policy makers at state and federal level - helping to shape progressive policy and create accountability for meaningful action at organisational level.

Which leads to

Better representation of First Nations people at all levels of the workforce, and creates culturally safe workspaces where First Nations people can bring their full selves to work.

Greater understanding and appreciation of First Nations culture and talents

Greater opportunities for First Nations businesses

Reduced barriers for First Nations people entering the workforce and looking to progress their careers

Rail leadership who are equipped to deal with systemic issues and are accountable for driving action

And contributes towards

Strong and resilient First Nations communities

Stronger, more equitable partnerships

Justice and equity for First Nations peoples

A more inclusive, respectful, and sustainable rail sector

Wilay Designs





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