

For the many of us who have been involved in rural and remote delivery of vocational education and training to Indigenous people over the years I am sure we share the same frustrations. While there are many examples of innovative programs that have delivered excellent outcomes aligned to economic, employment or community aspirations there are often periods when we have been unable to provide a consistent service and meet the expectations of our clients, funding providers or other stakeholders. There is also that feeling that the training we are delivering may not be contributing as well as we would like in assisting Indigenous people in regional and remote locations overcome long term disadvantage.

Most of this can be attributed to the many challenges associated with delivery in the less populated regions of Australia. These include the difficulty in achieving viable class sizes, student literacy and numeracy, self esteem and work readiness issues, the availability of accommodation, recruiting lecturers, the wear and tear on travelling lecturers, supporting lecturers who are delivering remotely and maintaining 'learning momentum' between lecturer visits. This is only the beginning as there are often problems finding funding to provide for the materials for action leaning projects, with student attendance, understanding the wide range of additional funding programs that are theoretically available, continual changes in management staff in key local support organisations and the understanding by funding bodies of the difficulties associated with delivery. I could go on.

However, with recent changes to the CDEP program made by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) now might be an opportune time to revisit your relationship with the CDEP organisations within your region. These changes provide a measure of support for training that has never been there before to assist TAFE and other training providers to make an even more substantial contribution to closing the gap for Indigenous people.

By way of background in December 2008, the Australian Government announced significant reforms to the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program. Operating in mainly remote areas, the CDEP program aims to help Indigenous job seekers find and maintain employment.

Under the CDEP program, there are two main ways ('streams') that CDEP providers assist Indigenous job seekers. These streams are called 'Work Readiness' and 'Community Development'.

- Work Readiness Services—helps job seekers to develop their skills, improve their chances of getting a job, and move to work outside of the CDEP program.
- Community Development—focuses on supporting and developing Indigenous communities and organisations.

The CDEP Work readiness stream is designed to help participants develop the skills they need to take on paid work through training and/or work experience. Training can include accredited and non-accredited, pre-vocational and vocational training based on an individual participant's needs to increase their work skills. If possible, training should match employment opportunities and skills' shortages in the community or region. CDEP providers are required to arrange training services to help participants develop the skills they need to take on paid work.

CDEP providers also manage Community Development Projects, which are designed to ensure community work is consistent with local job opportunities, build skills through practical experience and meet community and individual local priority needs.

Depending on their business plans CDEPs may now have resources to employ mentors, training coordinators, community development officers and trainers and capital funding for training facilities and accommodation. So as an RTO you could expect a training plan aligned to community aspirations to assist with your planning and on the ground support for your lecturers on matters such as attendance and the ongoing mentoring of students during and between training to assist with the learning journey. There may also be the opportunity to support delivery undertaken by local trainers placing less demand on your own scarce resources or to provide additional training options to complement those CDEPs that are RTOs themselves.

I firmly believe that TAFE has made a strong contribution to the empowerment of Indigenous people over many years, on many occasions allocating resources well above those that it receives. However, a strong relationship with CDEPs has never made more sense as we all strive to improve the outcomes from training delivered, assist Indigenous people achieve their aspirations and to build a fairer Australia.

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