

Illawarra – South East Aboriginal Government Employees Network (AGEN) and the I-SE Regional Managers Network

Terms of Reference for AGEN 2010-15

The Illawarra-South East Regional Managers Network (RMN)

The Regional Managers Network (RMN) refers to the collective of regional managers of NSW Government agencies in the Illawarra and South East Regions of NSW. It includes the Regional Manager Clusters (RMCs) known as the Justice and Human Services Regional Managers Cluster and the Economic Development and Environment Regional Managers Cluster

The Illawarra-South East Aboriginal Government Employees Network (AGEN)

The AGEN was established in 2004 by the Illawarra-South East Regional Managers Network as part of its cross cultural commitment to enhance service delivery and community outcomes for Aboriginal people. AGEN brings together Aboriginal employees of NSW Government in the Illawarra and South East Regions in a multi-agency partnership.

About this document

In 2009 the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) conducted an evaluation of the AGEN in consultation with the network members and regional managers. At the conclusion of the evaluation, the RMN and AGEN agreed to jointly develop new Terms of Reference to help guide and grow the partnership initiative into the future. The draft Terms of Reference has been prepared by a working group of AGEN and RMN representatives and will be jointly approved by the AGEN Gathering and the RMN.

Context

The Aboriginal Government Employees Network (AGEN) was initiated in recognition of the significant role that Aboriginal employees play in delivering services to the community and the need to link the skills and knowledge of this group directly with the I-SE RMN.

AGEN was established under the umbrella of the NSW Government's Aboriginal Affairs Plan 2003 -2012, entitled the *Two Ways Together*, which aims to positively improve the lives of Aboriginal people in seven key areas: health, education, culture and heritage, housing and infrastructure, families and young people, economic development, and justice.

AGEN also aligns closely with the objectives of the NSW Government's *Making It Our Business Policy Statement – Improving Aboriginal Employment in the NSW Public Sector*.

AGEN is directly relevant to two key strategies identified in *The Making it Our Business Action Plan 2009-2012*. AGEN has a role in 'valuing and keeping our employees' through providing Aboriginal employees with a pathway to bring cultural knowledge and issues directly to management. AGEN helps 'build careers in the public sector' through supporting Aboriginal employees and opening opportunities to broaden employees' experience of government across the full range of agencies. *'Making it Our Business'* mandates the establishment of "strategic forums for Aboriginal staff to explore career development issues and to network with other employees".

In 2010 the I-SE RMN adopted the *Aboriginal Culture and Heritage Framework* – a document jointly developed by AGEN and the RMN. The Framework establishes a common platform of understanding and commitment by NSW Government agencies in the Illawarra and South East Regions. It includes a commitment by the RMN to partner with AGEN to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

Statement of Commitment

The I-SE RMN acknowledges and values the cultural skills and knowledge of AGEN members and recognises that Aboriginal Government Employees are also members of their own Aboriginal communities.

The I-SE RMN commits to

- recognising that the cross agency work that is carried out by AGEN has a valuable role in the strengthening of service delivery to Aboriginal communities and is therefore core business for all agencies
- involving AGEN members, as appropriate, in the planning, consultation and service delivery design that will impact on Aboriginal communities

- implementing plans, protocols and practices that have been jointly developed and agreed to by the AGEN and the RMN and monitoring progress with the implementation of these initiatives
- providing regular feedback to AGEN on the progress of implementation
- ensuring that mechanisms exist to promote active two way communication between AGEN and the RMN
- promoting Aboriginal cultural respect at all levels of all agencies through training and other awareness raising strategies

The AGEN commits to

- working to strengthen the networks that connect Aboriginal employees and improve cross-agency service delivery outcomes
- providing information and advice as appropriate that is based on deep knowledge of Aboriginal culture, practices and protocols
- responding to priorities that may be identified by the RMN
- actively communicating information and issues relevant to Aboriginal people through the two- way communication mechanisms established by the RMN.

AGEN Objectives

The objectives of the AGEN are to:

- *increase support, networking and opportunities for collaboration for Aboriginal employees in NSW Government Agencies*
- *identify and provide professional development opportunities for Aboriginal employees across agencies*
- *encourage, and provide opportunities for, Aboriginal employees across agencies to work better, together*
- *establish opportunities for Aboriginal employees to identify shared concerns*
- *provide information and advice to the I-SE RMN that is based on cultural knowledge, and that will support the achievement of improved outcomes for Aboriginal communities*

The I-SE RMN understands that Aboriginal employees are a critical link with Aboriginal communities in the region. Strengthening the support given to Aboriginal employees will help I-SE RMN agencies to achieve improved service delivery outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

AGEN provides a mechanism to support NSW Government agencies in the Illawarra-South East to help give effect to *State Plan Priority: Strengthening Aboriginal Communities* and in the implementation of initiatives flowing from the National Partnership Agreement, *Closing the Gap*.

Relationship to RMN

The AGEN has been established by the I-SE RMN as an advisory and consultative structure linked to the RMN.

The broader membership of AGEN is represented by a Cross Agency Working Party (CAWP). Members of this group are appointed at the annual AGEN Gathering, and members of the CAWP are delegated to represent AGEN at meetings of the RMN and also at both of the RMN Cluster Groups.

CAWP members will report the outcomes of the Annual AGEN Gathering at the first meeting of the RMN held after each AGEN Gathering.

At this meeting each year, the RMN appoints a member of the RMN to participate on the CAWP. This appointment is for one year, renewable for a second year.

The RMN reports annually to the AGEN Gathering on the implementation of any plans, protocols or practices that have been jointly developed and agreed by AGEN and the RMN.

The RMN and CAWP may establish joint working parties to carry out business on behalf of the RMN and AGEN.

Membership of AGEN

Membership is open to all Aboriginal employees who work for NSW Government agencies and who have work accountabilities for the delivery of services in the Illawarra and South East Regions of NSW. This includes, but is not limited to, Aboriginal identified positions.

Membership is established through contacting the responsible project manager in the DPC and is confirmed through an email. DPC will maintain a register of AGEN members, and circulate this on an annual basis to all AGEN members.

AGEN Gatherings are open to all AGEN members to attend, however attendance is not compulsory.

Cross Agency Working Party (CAWP)

The Cross Agency Working Party is responsible for providing the ongoing support needed to maintain, develop and promote the AGEN.

The roles of the Cross Agency Working Party are to:

- Represent AGEN members at meetings of the RMN, the RMN Cluster Groups, and any other working groups or organisations as required
- Provide information and advice to RMN agencies on behalf of AGEN, with the aim of improving planning, consultation and /or service delivery for Aboriginal people
- Work with Department of Premier and Cabinet to plan and implement annual AGEN Gatherings
- Attend and provide 'hands on' operational support for AGEN Gatherings
- Develop an AGEN action plan based on recommendations arising from annual AGEN Gatherings
- Report back to the RMN on the outcomes of each AGEN Gathering and present the proposed AGEN action plan
- Following endorsement by the RMN, lead the implementation of tasks identified in AGEN action plan
- Monitor the implementation of plans, protocols and practices that have been jointly agreed and established by the RMN and AGEN
- Report back to AGEN gatherings on progress achieved

Membership of CAWP: All AGEN members are eligible to nominate to be a CAWP member. CAWP members need to be willing to carry out the work that the AGEN Gathering has identified and that has subsequently been endorsed by the RMN.

Membership of CAWP is usually a 2 year commitment; however in special circumstances a longer involvement may be necessary. For example, a longer commitment may be needed to bring a particularly complex AGEN project to completion.

CAWP Meetings: The CAWP will meet on as needed basis. There will be approximately nine meetings each year – one per month. Meeting venues are negotiated in advance each year with the aim of equitably sharing the time commitment involved in travelling to meetings.

Appointment to CAWP: One half of CAWP members are appointed each year at the AGEN Gathering. The other half of the CAWP membership continues into their second year. These second year members provide mentoring and support to new CAWP members, and ensure continuity in the progression of projects.

RMN Support: As part of their commitment to AGEN, all RMN managers will endeavour to support their Aboriginal employees to participate in CAWP by deeming this work to be part of the core responsibilities of these employees and facilitating the provision of any logistical support such as travel and accommodation. Managers will provide confirmation of this support in writing to the relevant CAWP member.

CAWP Chairperson: A Chairperson will be appointed at the first CAWP meeting after each AGEN Gathering. The appointment as Chairperson is for a one year term but can be renewed for a second year. The Chairperson is the key contact person between the RMN, the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet and CAWP.

Secretarial Support for CAWP: Secretarial support for CAWP (agendas, minutes, venue bookings etc) will be provided by the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Benefits from participating in CAWP: CAWP members benefit by having the opportunity for career and professional development through networking; through being able to work more closely with their colleagues from other agencies; and also working with the RMN.

RMN agencies benefit from CAWP as this group provides a contact point for engaging Aboriginal employees in consultations and planning that can lead to improved outcomes for service delivery. Further, CAWP ensures that the AGEN operates effectively as a support and development mechanism for NSW Government Aboriginal employees.

Annual AGEN Gathering

The AGEN Annual Gathering will be held each year in September.

Attendance at the Gathering: All Aboriginal employees of NSW Government who have work accountabilities for service delivery in the Illawarra and South East regions are eligible to attend.

The I-SE RMN encourages all Agencies to support Aboriginal employees wishing to attend, to do so.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal RMN managers are also encouraged to attend the AGEN Gathering in order to strengthen mutual understanding between management and Aboriginal employees.

Other Aboriginal government employees (from local or Federal governments) may also be invited to attend as guests, at the discretion of the CAWP and provided that NSW Government employees are given first priority to attend.

Gathering Agenda: The Agenda for the Annual Gathering will be planned and implemented by CAWP in consultation with the RMN, and supported by DPC.

At each Gathering there will be a report back to AGEN from each of the two RMN Cluster Groups –the Justice and Human Services Cluster and the Economic Development and Environment Cluster. These reports will document progress that has been achieved in relation to any plans, protocols and practices that have been jointly developed by AGEN and the RMN.

There will also be a similar report to AGEN from the CAWP.

Recommendations from the Gathering: The AGEN Gathering may develop recommendations that further the objectives of AGEN. Recommendations developed by the Gathering will be presented to the next RMN meeting by the incoming CAWP, for consideration by the RMN.

Financial arrangements: The AGEN Gathering will operate on a self funding, cost recovery and non- profit basis. The costs of holding the Gathering will be met each year through the registration charges paid for each attendee.

Resourcing and Support for AGEN

AGEN is currently supported by DPC. The current model is sustainable within existing resources.

Further development of AGEN as a cross-agency mechanism to support service delivery improvement in line with *Two Ways Together* and Aboriginal employment outcomes consistent with *Making it Our Business* is possible, however will require additional resources to be identified and dedicated to these purposes.

The RMN is aware that service delivery for Aboriginal communities is arguably more complex than mainstream service delivery. NSW Government agencies are each engaging with the same communities to overcome the relative disadvantage carried by Aboriginal people. The national agenda - '*Closing the Gap*' - for Aboriginal people necessitates a more thoughtfully tailored approach to achieve the mandated changes in community outcomes. It is in this environment that cross- agency mechanisms, such as those provided by RMN and by AGEN, are appropriate.

The RMN supports in principle the aspirations of AGEN to be able to employ a project manager whose primary responsibility would be the support and development of AGEN, but who could also carry out other cross agency works. Ideally this would be an identified position located in Aboriginal Affairs NSW. Such a position could carry out an expanded role in supporting NSW Government agencies in the development of regional Aboriginal employment and recruitment plans; develop regional inter-agency networking tools such as newsletters, website and databases; liaison with and mapping of Aboriginal controlled organisations; linking diverse Aboriginal service delivery plans; and improved cultural respect education programs.

Until an alternative way of resourcing a dedicated AGEN Project manager position can be secured the Department of Premier and Cabinet will continue to provide support for AGEN under current arrangements.